

Activity Guide for Rocky Mountain National Park and Estes Park

Activity options depending on availability of timed-entry passes. Activities and hikes fit for small kids.

Created by [Ryan Beck](#). Last edited June of 2023.



Guide Information

This is a list of things to do in different areas around Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP) and Estes Park. It's useful for choosing activities depending on availability of timed-entry passes to the different locations.

Listed activities are those fit for families with small children. Hikes shown are limited to those ~4 miles round trip or shorter.



Park Access Info

[Timed-entry passes](#) are needed for the Bear Lake area between 5 AM and 6 PM, and for the rest of RMNP between 9 AM and 2 PM. **See Resources section at end for more info.**

Since parking availability may be an issue anyway, the best strategy seems to me to be:

- Try Bear Lake pass for 8—10 AM slot, 10 AM to noon as backup
- If not, try 9—11 AM rest of RMNP
 - Don't stress about this, probably aiming to get there ~8:30 AM anyway



Emoji Key

- Information about where to park
- Link to Google Maps directions
- Hike round trip distance
- Hike elevation gain
- Activity is primarily a hike
- Activity is primarily a drive
- Other kind of activity
- Other ideas or stuff to see or do nearby the main activity



Bear Lake Road

For all of the below except as noted, park at the park and ride and take the shuttle to the desired trailhead.

[~30 minute drive](#)



Bear Lake

The Bear Lake (BL) trailhead has a few options. The BL loop is a short loop around BL. A separate trail heads to Nymph Lake, Dream Lake, and Emerald Lake. You can turn back at any of these lakes and get a nice hike.

- BL Loop: [0.5 miles](#), [20 ft](#)
- Emerald Lake: [3.6 miles](#), [605 ft](#)
 - If turning back at Dream Lake: [2.2 miles](#), [425 ft](#)
 - If turning back at Nymph Lake: [1.0 miles](#), [225 ft](#)



Alberta Falls

[1.6 miles](#), [160 ft](#)



Bierstadt Lake

[3.2 miles](#), [566 ft](#)



Sprague Lake

The Bear Lake shuttle does not stop here. Unsure what the best method of access is aside from trying to drive and park.

[~25 minute drive](#)

[0.5 miles](#), [10 ft](#)



Rest of RMNP



Trail Ridge to Alpine Visitor Center

1 hour drive one way on maps, but ~3 to 4 hours with all stops (see [list of stops](#)). **Pack warm jackets**, probably cold and windy at visitor center ([see weather](#)).



[map of drive with stops](#)

- (Optional) Stop at Beaver Meadows Visitor Center
 - Skip if needing to get into park before 9 AM
- Beaver ponds
 - [Walk boardwalk](#), [0.2 miles](#)
- (Optional) Many parks curve overlook
- (Optional) Rainbow curve overlook
- (Optional) Forest Canyon overlook
- (Optional) Tundra Communities Trailhead
 - [1.2 miles](#), [190 ft](#)
- (Optional) Gore Range overlook
- Check out Alpine Visitor Center
 - Have lunch
- Alpine Ridge Trail
 - [0.6 miles](#), [162 ft to 12k ft altitude](#)



Wild Basin — Calypso

Cascades

Wild Basin trailhead

[~30 minute drive](#)

[3.6 miles](#), [700 ft](#)

- Shorter alternative: Stop at Copeland Falls, [0.6 miles](#) round trip, [15 ft](#)

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Rest of RMNP (cont.)

Chasm Falls Hike

 [Endovalley picnic area](#) before [Old Fall Road](#) becomes one-way and hike up to Chasm falls. If Endovalley picnic area is full or closed, can park at Alluvial Fan.

 [~20 minutes to Endovalley picnic area](#)

 [2.8 miles](#)  [585 ft](#) (from Endovalley)

 Check out the [Alluvial Fan](#) area. Can also park on West side if need be ( [directions](#),  [4.7 miles](#)  [531 ft](#))

 Can have lunch at Endovalley after hike, or also check out [Sheep Lakes](#) ( [driving directions](#)).

Lumpy Ridge — Gem Lake Hike

Might be busy on weekends. No gate, but still in park and timed-entry pass technically still required (Rangers might check / ticket parked cars).

 Lumpy Ridge Trailhead

 [~6 minute drive](#)

 [3.4 miles](#)  [830 ft](#)

 Could check out Twin Owls on way back if not tired (adds 1.2 miles total, [see map](#))

Not in RMNP

Check out Estes Park downtown

 Estes Park Visitor's center

 [~5 minute drive](#)

Check out the shops, walk along Fall River ([walking map](#))

Feed the Ducks at Coffee on the Rocks

 [~5 minute drive](#)

Buy some corn to feed the ducks at Coffee on the Rocks, lots of ducks, kids love it.

Activities at Fun City

 [~5 minute drive](#)

[Big colorful slides, mini golf, go karts.](#)

Walk or Wade at Lake Estes

 [~5 minute drive to Marina](#)

Lake Estes is right next to the visitor center, it has a trail around it for walking. Wading is allowed near the marina.

★ Resources

- [Get timed entry passes here](#)
 - Only one reservation per person, make sure anyone who needs one has recreation.gov account!
 - Timed entry is required per vehicle, not per person
- [Timed entry permit system info](#)
- [Get park pass in advance here](#)
- Lists of best hikes:
 - [Best short hikes list](#)
 - [15 best hikes in RMNP](#)
- [Maps page](#)
 - [Overall park map](#)
 - [Summer Bear Lake trail guide](#)
 - [Fall River trail guide](#)
 - [Wild Basin trail guide](#)
- [Shuttle information](#)
- Don't forget to [go here and click "download offline map"](#). Make sure to adjust the area to cover RMNP and Estes Park.
- There could be long lines at Beaver Meadows/US Highway 36 and Fall River/US Highway 34 entrances. Construction is happening at the Fall River entrance.