

# 8 Mountain Lakes Worth the Hike

September 10, 2021

*We know there are questions around travel amid the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. Read our note [here](#).*

Most avid hikers are happy to hit the trail just about anywhere with the simple goal of outdoor enjoyment, exercise, and a break from the daily hustle. However, a gorgeous lake at a hike's culmination can serve as powerful motivation to endure the rigorous ascent up a mountain. We found eight moderately challenging hikes that reward your efforts with dazzling lake views. Some trails are familiar to many — but not all, which means you'll share these trails with fewer hikers for a more serene, off-the-beaten-path experience.



DAILY QUESTION

*Test your knowledge!*

**Where is this mountainous desert?**



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**A Few Tips Before You Head Out**

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If you don't have a handheld GPS device (mobile phone mapping apps aren't always reliable in the wilderness), you can find maps and detailed trail descriptions from sites such as [AllTrails.com](https://www.alltrails.com) or [print detailed topographic maps from the United States Geological Survey \(USGS\)](https://www.usgs.gov). Trekking poles will also come in handy as many of these hikes involve relatively steep ascents and descents. Bugs can be relentless even in cooler high alpine areas, so bring insect repellent, as well as sunscreen to protect against those UV rays. And lastly, some of these hikes are busy and parking can be a challenge, so it's best to arrive at the trailhead early in the morning or late in the afternoon.

## **Lower, Middle, and Upper Blue Lakes (Mount Sneffels Wilderness Area, Colorado)**

Credit: [Captain Colorado](#)/ Shutterstock

Hikers trekking the entire 8.2-mile [Blue Lakes Trail](#) in the [Mount Sneffels Wilderness Area](#) near Ridgeway, Colorado, will be rewarded with vistas of not just one sparkling lake, but three! You'll have plenty of shade through the first forested section, with occasional stunning views of the surrounding peaks. During summer, a plethora of pretty wildflowers adds to the trail's splendor. Shortly before you reach Lower Blue Lake, you'll pass a lovely gushing waterfall.

As soon as you see Lower Blue Lake, you might think someone filled it with electric-blue Gatorade — it's really that blue! Once you've marveled at the lake, take in the surrounding peaks, like Dallas Peak (13,809 feet tall) and Mount Sneffels (14,156 feet tall). At this point, you've hiked about 3.2 miles. You can turn around or continue up a steep section to reach Middle Blue Lake and then Upper Blue Lake.

## **Iceberg Lake (Glacier National Park, Montana)**

Credit: [Hugo Brizard - YouGoPhoto](#)/ Shutterstock

Any hike in [Glacier National Park](#) is rewarding, but the 9.7-mile [Iceberg Lake Trail](#) may be one of the most stunning treks. In addition to taking in the spectacular alpine scenery, visitors are also likely to spot moose, grizzly bears, coyotes, mountain goats, and other wildlife, especially during the off-season. Most of the trail traverses open meadows and thick forest. Hikers will also pass the gushing Ptarmigan Falls and the 1,500-foot-tall Ptarmigan Wall, a narrow ridge with sheer cliffs on each side.

At about 4.5 miles in, you'll cross a footbridge over Iceberg Creek and enter a beautiful alpine meadow dotted with wildflowers. After a short climb, the splendid azure Iceberg Lake awaits — and you might even see icebergs floating in the water! Many hikers brave the frigid waters and take a dip. If you want to avoid the park's crowds, consider hiking the 6.2-mile [Birch Lake Trail](#) located about a 90-minute drive from Glacier National Park's west entrance.

## **Colchuk Lake (Alpine Lakes Wilderness Area, Washington)**

Credit: [july7th/](#) iStock

Brilliant aquamarine [Colchuk Lake](#) lies in the [Alpine Lakes Wilderness Area](#) near Leavenworth in the Cascades Mountains. The hike starts on [Stuart Lake Trailhead #1599](#) as an easy, 1.5-mile walk through lush forest alongside a creek. Once you cross a bridge over the creek, the incline begins with a series of rocky switchbacks until you reach the turnoff for [Colchuk Creek Trail](#) at about 2.2 miles. The trail climbs what seems like an endless series of challenging switchbacks and more bridges, but the journey is well worth the effort once you arrive at the magnificent lake. Looming 3,000 feet over the lake are Dragontail Peak and Colchuk Peak.

Take a dip in the lake if you're up for it! The round-trip distance from the trailhead to the lake is about nine miles. Fall is a fantastic time to

make this hike because the alpine larches (also known as tamarack trees) turn a gorgeous golden-yellow against a backdrop of evergreens.

## **Rowe Lakes (Waterton Lakes National Park, Alberta, Canada)**

Credit: [Carol Stanislawski](#)/ Shutterstock

[Waterton Lakes National Park](#) in Alberta, Canada, is Glacier National Park's northern section, so you can expect equally breathtaking scenery. The eight-mile [Rowe Lakes Trail](#) starts along Rowe Creek and enters a beautiful forest. (A recent wildfire scorched the first half mile, but the trail is still accessible.) The elevation increases gradually, and the forested trail offers spectacular glimpses of Mount Rowe and Mount Lineham. At 2.4 miles in, a short trail branches off to Lower Rowe Lake.

Once you reach the lake, enjoy a snack break and take a dip in the lake if you want to cool off. Then, head back to the main trail and continue onward. This section is particularly enchanting, with gurgling waterfalls and cascades flowing over green mossy rocks. The path to the lake branches off to the left and then becomes quite steep for about a half-mile. Once you crest the ridge, you'll see a lovely small lake, and just past that, you'll reach Upper Rowe Lake. Mount Rowe towers over the lake's south end.

## **Orphan Lake (Lake Superior Provincial Park, Ontario, Canada)**

Credit: [David P. Lewis](#)/ Shutterstock

The roughly 4.5-mile-long, lollipop-shaped loop hike on [Orphan Lake Trail](#) has it all — forests, pebble-stone beaches, waterfalls, lakes, fall foliage, steep ascents, and spectacular views at the top. Located in [Lake Superior Provincial Park](#) outside of Wawa, Ontario, the trail

begins in a dense forest with a gradual incline, opening onto a rock ledge with a panoramic view of Orphan Lake. After a fairly steep descent, the trail meanders along the lake's southern shore, then descends further to the beautifully barren, pebble-strewn Baldhead Beach along Lake Superior's eastern shore.

After a short beach walk, you'll reach Baldhead River, where the trail follows the river upstream past a series of marvelous waterfalls called the Baldhead River Cascades. The trail ascends to the north side of Orphan Lake through some shaded, mossy ravines and then to the parking lot.

## **Duck Pass (John Muir Wilderness, California)**

Credit: [Darlene Wagner Butler](#)/ Shutterstock

The gorgeous [John Muir Wilderness Area](#) covers 650,000 square miles in the Inyo National Forest and Sierra National Forest and contains the entrances to both [Kings Canyon and Sequoia National Parks](#) — home of California's majestic giant sequoia groves.

The [Duck Pass Trail](#) takes you past several lakes if you hike the entire 9.5-mile trek. The trail begins in a forested hillside and features a series of moderately steep switchbacks. About a mile in, you'll pass Arrowhead Lake, and can either continue along the trail or make your way down to the lake for a dip.

The trail continues through picturesque meadows and forest, along a stream, and past Skeleton Lake. Stop at Skeleton or continue about 2.5 miles until you reach a scenic viewpoint above Barney Lake. To the left is a short spur to the smaller yet still peaceful Red Lake. You can head down to Barney Lake for another swim or continue hiking a series of steep switchbacks. Magnificent mountain peaks surround you, including Mammoth Mountain. At about 3.6 miles in, you'll reach the top of Duck Pass at 10,800 feet above sea level, where more fabulous views await, before continuing on to Pika Lake.

## Chimney Pond (Baxter State Park, Maine)

Credit: [YuziS](#)/ Shutterstock

The dramatically scenic, 6.6-mile [Chimney Pond Trail](#) in [Baxter State Park](#) is a more challenging hike because some sections are fairly rocky. Don't let that deter you from making the ascent — the beautiful, blue Chimney Pond and views from the top of Mount Katahdin, Maine's highest peak at 5,269 feet tall, are well worth the effort. You'll likely meet hikers on their way to summit Katahdin, which also is the ending (or starting) point of the 2,000-mile-long Appalachian Trail. The trail begins alongside burbling Roaring Brook and gradually climbs, becoming progressively rockier and steeper. Along the way, you'll come across viewing areas where you can catch glimpses of the spectacular scenery that lies ahead. About two miles in, you'll reach Basin Pond, where you can take a dip to cool off. The trail crosses gurgling creeks, past a small pond, and leads to a small field at [Chimney Pond Campground](#). Reachable only by hiking, the campground includes a few lean-tos, a bunkhouse, a small ranger station, and some outhouses. The real reward is the sparkling, emerald-green Chimney Pond surrounded by majestic ridges and Mount Katahdin. (Note: during busy summer months, you'll need a parking reservation for guaranteed access).

## Lake O'Hara (Yoho National Park, British Columbia, Canada)

Credit: [Janice Chen](#)/ Shutterstock

This stunning network of trails, hanging valleys, vistas, and pristine lakes around Lake O'Hara in [Yoho National Park](#) is a bucket-list trip in British Columbia, but it will require some advance planning. You can reach this network of trails four ways, all of which require reservations: a shuttle bus, camping, or staying at the [Elizabeth Parker Hut](#) (which sleeps 15), or the [Lake O'Hara Lodge](#).

Many hikers choose to do a clockwise, 6.6-mile loop around Lake O'Hara, which involves some ascents with a 2,900-foot elevation gain. From the top, you'll be rewarded with fabulous views of several dazzling lakes, including Lake Oesa, plus multiple mountain peaks in the Canadian Rockies. During summer, you can swim in the sapphire lakes. You can customize your route as there are seven trails within the network.

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