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TOP 10 TRAILS IN CALIFORNIA

From the ocean shore to the backcountry, a diverse list of California’s best

The trails of California are as diverse as the landscape itself. From the bustling urban pathways to the lost-in-the-wild tracks of the backcountry, the vastly different settings and styles of trails in California makes them almost incomparable. So we thought we'd compare them.
Certain to spark furious debate from jilted trail fans, we present to you...

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy’s Top 10 Trails in California

1. Bizz Johnson National Recreation Trail

Arguably the most scenic rail-trail in California, the spectacular 25.4-mile Bizz Johnson was named to RTC’s Rail Trail Hall of Fame in 2008.

What makes it so great? The scenery. Just east of the Sierra and Cascade mountain ranges, the craggy canyons and upland forests cycle through four distinct seasons. Carving through the Susan River Canyon, the Bizz Johnson also connects to the terrific trail community of Susanville, which has put much effort into making trail visitors feel welcome.

TrailLink.com is Rails-to-Trails Conservancy’s free trail-finder website. It provides verified GIS maps, user reviews and photos of more than 24,000 miles of trails across the country.

2. Iron Horse Regional Trail

Connecting 12 cities in both Alameda and Contra Costa counties outside San Francisco, the Iron Horse Regional Trail is 24.5 miles of urban rail-trail at its very best. Its utility and popularity are set to expand even further with plans to extend the trail to 33 miles.

What makes it so great? Connectivity. The 20-foot-wide trail connects residences, shopping districts and places of employment with schools, public transportation options, parks and other trails systems. TrailLink.com reviews sometimes note who crowded the trail can get. That’s because it takes people where they want to go, a sure sign of a terrific urban pathway and an unbeatable justification for more like it.


3. Ojai Valley Trail

A favorite among rail-trail enthusiasts, the Ojai Valley Trail extends 9.5 miles through the scenic Ojai Valley. The trail also connects with the Ventura River Trail, which continues south to the shores of the Pacific Ocean.

What makes it so great? The rural serenity. And the bridge. Completed in 2012, the 480-foot bridge over San Antonio Creek, built of rust-colored steel and Brazilian hardwood, looks terrific and saves the trail from the frequent washouts that used to plague it.

4. Monterey Bay Coastal Trail

Winding 18 miles around Monterey Bay and along the Pacific coast, the Monterey Bay Coastal Trail follows a Southern Pacific Railroad line that used to transfer goods between the historic fishing town of Monterey and the rest of northern California.

What makes it so great? The ocean. In addition to its constant blue, shimmering presence, the Pacific flavors almost every attraction along the trail, too. In an area made famous by a number of John Steinbeck novels, the rejuvenated Cannery Row, scenes of its fishing past and present, a number of great seafood restaurants and the Monterey Bay Aquarium all make for a submersing trail experience.


5. Bayshore Bikeway

A long, smooth, palm-tree-lined trail with stunning views of the Pacific, San Diego Bay and the downtown skyline, the 17-mile Bayshore Bikeway also provides easy access to parks, tot play areas and chic cafes.

What makes it so great? The attractions. There's a lot going on around the Bayshore Bikeway. You've got the red-roofed Hotel del Coronado where they filmed Some Like it Hot, you've got the Ferry Landing Marketplace, the Navy SEALs workout spot, the San Diego Bay National Wildlife Refuge, and, of course, the water, to name just a few. So close to a major metropolitan center, the bikeway sure has pulling power.


6. Truckee River Bike Trail

At one end is the smallest place in the world to ever host the Winter Olympics. At the other end is the peerless Lake Tahoe. Connecting them is the 6.8-mile Truckee River Bike Trail which follows the route of a tourist train that operated in the early 1900s.
What makes it so great? Access to the outdoors. Rail-trails are ideal outdoor equalizers because of their typically flat grade and smooth surface. In a mountainous, rugged area marked by the majestic snowcapped Sierra’s, the Truckee River Bike Trail makes this stunning wilderness accessible for young families or older folks over their mountain biking days.


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7. Sacramento River Rail-Trail

The spine of a burgeoning trail system in the city of Redding, the 11-mile Sacramento River Rail-Trail follows the river north out of town to the recreational expanse of Shasta Lake.

What makes it so great? Riverfront revival. Locals say before the trail system the town was “built with its back to the river,” and little had been done to restore the waterway after years of mining and excavation. Now, the popular trails have brought renewed appreciation for the river and inspired a symbiotic movement of restoration.


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8. Pacific Electric Inland Empire Trail

Though only a few years old already the impressively-named Pacific Electric Inland Empire Trail has become a transportation staple for the booming neighborhoods in the San Bernadino Valley. Fast, flat and smooth, this 18-mile rail-trail connects residential neighborhoods with an array of parks, schools, shopping areas and commercial centers.

What makes it so great? The utility. Another fine demonstration of the great land efficiency of utilizing existing railroad corridors, within its 10-foot width the Pacific Electric provides a critical recreation and transportation avenue for the hundreds of thousands of Californians that live within the trailshed.

9. Modoc Line

Stretching 86 miles through the way-out-there wild country in the state’s north east, the Modoc Line is not one for those eager to socialize and people watch. The rough surface and isolation of the Modoc Line make it better suited to ATV’s than most bikes, however plans are in the works to improve some sections.

What makes it so great? Big sky. Through remote ranch land and high desert landscapes, the Modoc Line has the character of an ornery outsider seeking refuge from the maddening crowds. You’ll find it out here, along with wide open skies and spectacular star gazing, many miles from the nearest city.


10. Richmond Greenway

Though only a short trail at three miles long, the Richmond Greenway represents the positive transformation of a railroad corridor that sat unused in the heart of the city of Richmond for more than 25 years. The Richmond Greenway provides 32 new acres of active open space in a densely populated, underserved community with few recreational opportunities and scarce green space.

What makes it so great? The local community. A model of how community organizations can work together to invest local residents in the development of a public space, Richmond Greenway, Urban Tilth, Groundwork Richmond, Rich City Rides and Pogo Park have used free community events, working parties and other engagement strategies to make the Richmond Greenway a genuine gathering place.


Definitely worth a mention: El Dorado Trail

Along two different railroad corridors and stretching 28 miles across El Dorado County, the 28-mile El Dorado Trail showcases the unique natural surroundings and the history of the area.
What makes it so great? The views. Atop the breathtaking 100-foot-high railroad trestle that crosses Weber Creek, trail users enjoy a spectacular view of the surrounding California foothills countryside and the endless acres of national forest surrounding Lake Tahoe to the east.

Trail maps, info: [www.traillink.com/trail/el-dorado-trail-.aspx](http://www.traillink.com/trail/el-dorado-trail-.aspx)

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, a nonprofit organization with more than 100,000 members, is the nation's largest trails organization dedicated to connecting people and communities by creating a nationwide network of public trails, many from former rail lines and connecting corridors. Founded in 1986, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's national office is located in Washington, D.C., with regional offices in California, Florida, Ohio and Pennsylvania. For more information visit [www.railstotrails.org](http://www.railstotrails.org).