

Serrano Creek Park & Trails in Lake Forest

Hike along a hidden creek to hear the sound of water



Location: Serrano Creek Park trails + the start of Serrano Creek Trail in Lake Forest

Before You Go

Trailhead Parking: Park along the street on Serrano Road above Serrano Creek Park playground. The park address is 25101 Serrano Road, Lake Forest. You may have taken this tiny hike before when visiting the park?

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How Long Is This Hike?

It can be about 20-30 minutes if you stick to the sidewalk or do a loop through the eucalyptus grove. Or you can make it a little over an hour if you do a BIG loop on both sides of the creek. Extend to go as slow as you want!

Best Time of Day: Any time of day works here, because the trees will shade you a lot of the way. I just wouldn't go on an especially hot, windy, or stormy day.

Trail Surface: Mostly sidewalk which changes to a dirt trail if you want to make it a longer walk.

Restrooms/Drinking Fountains: Restrooms and drinking fountain near the playground.

Stroller-Friendly / Modifications:

Strollers will work for you on the sidewalk. You might not want to take a stroller on the dirt trail because it's not wide in all the spots and there is a small bridge which I might not trust with a stroller.





Be Aware: Since the park and walking trail is sunken from the road – and the trails even more so, be very aware of your surroundings and try to use the buddy system to not be in the park or on the trails alone.

In some spots the creek has No Trespassing signs and signs about habitat restoration.

You may encounter horses from the stable nearby or bikes on the trail (although we usually have the whole place to ourselves). There also may be horse droppings on the trail.

The dirt part of the trail can be hazardous where there is erosion. And the whole area is to be avoided on windy days because eucalyptus trees are known for debris coming down or falling over in the wind.

Cost: FREE

On the Trail

Your Destination: You will start at the playground and end up back at the playground. I do also like to pair this with an exploration of Heritage Hill Historical Park and a meal from Bagels & Brew which you can bring as a picnic to the hiking area.

Nature Connections: Like I've said above, the creek is the big draw for me. It brings birds as big as hawks and small as hummingbirds. There is lots of extra greenery because it is along the creek.



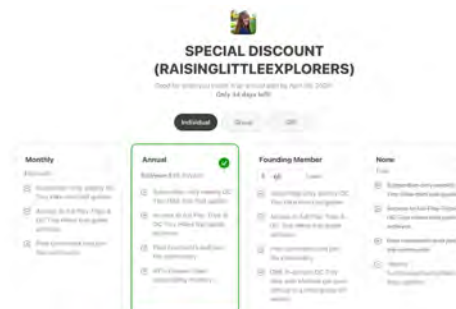
In fact, I discovered the Fuschiaflower Gooseberry here for the first time on a visit a few years back - watch out for those thorny stems!



You'll love the few old oak trees along the path. Remember to look UP to see what you can see in the tree tops and also look down because you might see some pretty interesting fungi at the base of the trees — maybe because I scouted just after some rains?

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Trail Landmarks

This is more of a wander than a set trail route. Take your time and you can let your little one lead the way. You'll eventually loop around or run out of sidewalk where you can decide if you want to go further.



The trail starts out as a simple sidewalk away from the park. There's a "high road" and a "low road" which all eventually meet up with each other. You can't really go wrong any way you go.



Looking off to your right with the playground behind you, you will see the creek from the path (and that's why I like to take the "low road" because it's closer to the creek).



Can you see it? The creek is there — and just on the other side is a neighborhood with homes.



Eventually you'll spot the eucalyptus grove. You can ask the kids to look out for it when you start this tiny hike! Then they can tell you when you get there. You can see there are picnic tables scattered throughout so you can enjoy a picnic on this outing.



You can decide if you want to turn up into the grove and walk there or do a loop on the way back.

I'm sure you can imagine all the play opportunities here!



Trail Landmarks



If you decided to go straight, you will eventually come to this spot. (See the sidewalk on the left - that's where the meandering tree walk will eventually reconnect you to the wide main sidewalk.) You can either loop back around to the playground here or continue straight on the sidewalk through that "tree tunnel." These are the oaks I was talking about!



Eventually the sidewalk will run out and you'll end up on a dirt trail that will lead you all the way to Bake Parkway. This is the part that really isn't so stroller-friendly. The trail will get even tighter than this.



I love the bridge! I talked about in the "Be Aware" section just because you might want to switch to having the kids a little closer to you at this part? There aren't railings and it can be slippery when wet – and I'm not sure how stable or safe it really is? You can see how the creek and rain have an impact on eroding the area.



After the bridge, you can see this pretty little beach (which you can't count on being here year-round). I love how it's undisturbed and it was so tranquil on the day we visited. I just wanted to sit on the trail here for a while.



Eventually, you will come out to Bake Parkway where you can safely cross the creek on the big bridge. You can turn around here and head back to the playground if you want. This view shows the way you came (on the right) and the start of the official Serrano Creek Trail (on the left). Bake Parkway was behind me when I took this photo.

The official Serrano Creek Trail on the left is dirt and it's a very wide fire road. It goes behind the houses in the neighborhood and eventually dumps out onto Trabuco Road near the Ralphs shopping center at the corner of Trabuco Road and Lake Forest Drive. When scouting this out, my sister and I walked back on the left side and then cut through the shopping center to our cars parked at Serrano Creek Park.

For **nature exploration with kids**, I prefer the park paths I covered in this trail guide rather than the official Serrano Creek Trail. If you are walking with a friend, it makes a nice leisurely loop to try the other side of the trail.



Extend the Hike: Like I mentioned above, you can connect to the Serrano Creek Trail which starts right here at Bake Parkway and actually goes really FAR all the way up to Portola Hills and all the way up to Whiting Ranch (which I don't advise doing with kids!) – and even travels to other parks along the trail, like Tamarisk Park. *(I rarely check it, but the AllTrails version of this hike is super-confusing and not very helpful in my opinion. I wanted to direct you to it for extending the hike, but it's just weird info. I'd recommend just looking at it on my map link below to see other parts you might want to do serious hiking. It will be uphill from here to Whiting Ranch. And downhill if you start up the trail and head towards Serrano. So far, I have never tried anything beyond than the loop I described above.)* I may pick out other parts in future tiny hikes after I scout it out and pick the good spots for families along the 7.4 mile trail!

Extra Resources

Nearby Restaurants:

Bagels & Brew - we like to get a dozen bagels with 2 cream cheese tubs (they customize with flavors) and then bring the leftovers home for freezing to have throughout the month! It's a local family-owned biz. And they have so much more than just bagels!

A new Wendy's is going into this shopping center near the bank. I'm not sure if it's open quite yet. Lots of other restaurants there in that center, too.

Nearby Public Libraries:

El Toro Library in Lake Forest

Foothill Ranch Library

General blog posts with links to official info & maps:

Serrano Creek Park - such a great playground if you have never been!

Pair with a visit to Heritage Hill Historical Park

Here is a map of Serrano Creek Park where you can see an aerial view to orient yourself. You can see the sidewalks inside the green space and you can see the wide "official" Serrano Creek Trail across the creek which I don't like as much as the one I picked on the playground side.



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