

# Life *in the* Valley

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The 4-mile paved bike trail winds through lush forest at Silver Falls State Park.

## SILVER FALLS ADVENTURES

State park has a playground, bike trails and a swimming hole

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Silver Falls State Park is about more than just waterfalls.

Yes, the main attraction is the 10 spectacular cascades that occupy the canyon — and no trip would be complete without viewing at least one of them — but there are many other things to do at the park as summer heats up.

Here are five great adventures that don't include a single waterfall, but all add to the fun at Oregon's largest state park.

### 'Nature Play' area

Instead of swings, slides and merry-go-rounds, the equipment at this nature-inspired playground includes hollowed-out logs, boulders, a nest and tree-climbing options.

Located at the North Falls Group Camp parking lot, a quarter-mile pathway takes children to three increasingly challenging play areas intended for different ages.

The first, Bird, is the easiest and home to a nest and tree children can climb into. The next, Bear (my daughter's favorite), has hollowed out logs and a big climbing tree. The final one, Cougar, has large boulders for climbing up and a more challenging climb up another large tree-like feature. At the top, there's a bullhorn where kids can show off their loudest "rarr!"

### Bike, stroller or dog-walking route

This hike doesn't have waterfall views, but it does provide one very important option for families.

The waterfall trails don't allow pets (even if leashed) or bikes, and they're not great for strollers.

So, if you have dogs and infants along — or want to go for a leisurely ride — it makes sense for some members of the family to hike or ride the paved bike path that begins at South Falls Day Use Area.

The pathway is a 4-mile loop — you don't have to do the entire thing — and passes some absolutely massive trees.

The route starts at the far end of the South Falls parking area and is easy to find by following little green bike pointers.

### Conference center trails

This hike begins at Silver Falls' conference center and follows 3.5 miles that highlight the gigantic trees of the park's backcountry.



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Lucy Urness plays in a nature-inspired playground at Silver Falls State Park.

From the conference center, the route follows Howard Creek Loop, Buck Mountain Loop and Cutoff Trail back to the conference center. Horses sometimes use the trail, but that's part of what makes it interesting. The trail is best in the summer when dry, as it gets fairly muddy in winter.

To get started, follow signs for the conference center and look for the trails leading out into the forest. Ask for help at the front of the office if you're confused or want a detailed map.

### Mountain biking

The backcountry of Silver Falls is becoming a mountain-biking destination.

The Catamount Trail, which begins at the 214 Trailhead, is a great option for beginner- to moderate-level mountain bikers.

The 4.5-mile cross-county trail is built for mountain bikers and has features such as turns, berms and rock features that make it more interesting than just a path in the forest. Even so, it's not too dif-

icult for your average rider.

Coming soon to the area will be a mountain bike loop designed for beginners.

### Swimming/playground

When the weather gets scorching hot during summer — and a tour behind South Falls just isn't enough to cool you down — head for the swimming area on South Fork Silver Creek.

Located upstream of South Falls — don't worry, it's blocked off so you won't float off the waterfall — is a nice designated swimming spot perfect for hot days.

The swimming area can be reached from the South Falls Day Use area, which also is home to a dog park, playground and is close to South Falls Lodge, where food and drinks can be had.

Come to think of it, who needs waterfalls when you have a swimming spot, playground, spot to let the dog run, beautiful trails and place for lunch all in one area?



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The main swimming area at Silver Falls State Park gets packed when heat hits the area. Park officials said the park is typically 5 to 10 degrees cooler than the valley.

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