

Hit the Trails

THESE DIRT TRAILS PROVIDE A RUN THAT'S CHALLENGING, BUT NOT QUITE AS BUTT-BUSTING AS A TRAIL UP A MOUNTAIN.

1. BALBOA PARK TRAIL #5

6.6 miles * DIFFICULT

Start at Sixth Avenue and Upas Street and follow the red diamond #5 trail markers.

About half the trail is dirt—some of it with steep climbs—so don't expect pristine white running kicks to stay that way. The route takes you past the park's museums and fountains, so on a weekend you can watch the wedding, engagement, and quinceañera photo shoots. It will also carry you to places in the park you may not know about, like the winding dirt trails through Florida Canyon.

2. LOS PEÑASQUITOS WATERFALL TRAIL

10 miles * DIFFICULT

Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve

Deer have been known to crash through the brush along this trail, quickly jolting a runner out of "the zone." The mostly flat path is shaded by trees and circles around a small creek, making the East County heat (slightly) more bearable. A waterfall trickles about three miles in, which is the perfect turnaround point if you only want to do a 6-mile loop (there are actually five places to cross the creek and cut your route short). Just watch out for rattlesnakes.

And deer!

3. ROSE CANYON BIKE PATH

2 miles * EASY

Between Genesee Avenue and Gilman Drive in University City.

This dirt trail rolls along a canyon, with a backdrop of cliffs and trees. Running this trail can make you feel like you're traveling through backcountry wilderness, not on a path a few minutes from business parks and shopping centers. If you want a longer run, continue along the paved bike path south of Gilman Drive, or follow Gilman north up the hill to the UC San Diego campus.