

10 great places to (bike) ride the rails

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In the past quarter-century, thousands of miles of rail lines have been converted to paths. They're perfect places for exploring, especially during May, which is National Bike Month, says Jennifer Kaleba of the national Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (railstotrails.org). The paths are usually easy to ride, as rail lines were engineered to avoid steep grades. Many have attracted bike rental shops and other services geared toward cyclists. Kaleba shares some favorite trails with Larry Bleiberg for USA TODAY.

Route of the Hiawatha

Idaho and Montana

This beautiful trail includes the 1.7-mile St. Paul Pass tunnel, so bring a bike light. There's also the magnificent Clear Creek trestle, a 760-foot span that stands 220 feet high. There's even a shuttle so you don't have to pedal back to the start. skilookout.com/hiawatha

Katy Trail State Park

Missouri

The nation's longest rail-trail celebrates its 20th anniversary this year. It stretches 225 miles from Clinton to St. Charles, passing through Missouri's wine country. "You can ride from vineyard to vineyard, and there are tons of bed and breakfasts geared toward the trail," Kaleba says. 800-334-6946; mostateparks.com/katytrail/index.html

George S. Mickelson Trail

South Dakota

This 110-mile trail through the [Black Hills](#) ranks as a favorite by conservancy members. "It's really a stunning ride with these amazing landscapes: evergreen forests, rocky canyons, prairie-scapes, old mining towns and Wild West heritage," Kaleba says. mickelsontrail.com

Island Line

Vermont

Running along the eastern shore of Lake Champlain, this 12.5-mile trail is short but sweet. At one point it leads out on a causeway, and a seasonal bike ferry takes riders across an inlet. Kaleba loves the trail at sunset. "The sky's ablaze with pinks and vermilions and the mountains are in the background." trailink.com/viewtrail.aspx?AcctID=6032327

Greenbrier River Trail

West Virginia

Once a Chesapeake & Ohio rail line, this trail runs 79 miles through the Greenbrier River Valley, connecting three state parks and state and national forests. "Once you're on it, you're surrounded by trees and water," Kaleba says. www.greenbrierrailtrailstatepark.com

Monterey Peninsula Recreational Trail

California

This 18-mile trail, also called the Monterey Bay Coastal Trail, takes in some of the California coast's prettiest real estate. It starts in Pacific Grove and passes Cannery Row and the Monterey Bay Aquarium, before skirting a eucalyptus forest and finally ending in Castroville. "It's kind of the quintessential California trail," Kaleba says. "You get the spray of saltwater sometimes while you're biking." 831-372-3196; mprpd.org/parks/coastaltrail.htm

Silver Comet Trail and Chief Ladiga Trail

Georgia and Alabama

Starting just outside Atlanta, the Silver Comet heads west and soon leaves the suburbs behind. It crosses a trestle and passes through a tunnel on its 61-mile route to the Alabama state line. There it becomes the Chief Ladiga and continues for another 33 miles. "It's a lovely, smoothly flowing ribbon of trail," Kaleba says. silvercometga.com

East Bay Bicycle Path

Rhode Island

In just 14 miles, this trail takes bikers from waterside views along Narragansett Bay to a city park near the [Brown University](#) campus in Providence. Although it's a busy path, Kaleba says "there are stretches where you feel very much like you're in a nature preserve." 401-253-7482; riparks.com/eastbay.htm

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Maryland and Pennsylvania

Seven trails were linked together in 2007 to form a 152-mile path reaching from McKeesport, Pa., near Pittsburgh, to Cumberland, Md. There it connects to the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal Towpath, which runs all the way to Washington, D.C. "This could be an entire vacation," Kaleba says. *888-282-2453; atatrail.org*

Paul Bunyan State Trail

Minnesota

Stretching 110 miles along a former [Burlington Northern](#) line, this path runs from the Brainerd Lakes area in the south to Walker in the north, and is one of the longest paved rail trails in the country. "It passes by lots of wetlands and streams and bridges," Kaleba says. "If this is 'The Land of 10,000 Lakes,' you've got a good number here on the Paul Bunyan." *paulbunyantrail.com*