Garden of the Gods

Shawnee Hills took millions of years to form. Rock formations and cliffs at Garden of the Gods — made of sandstone — are about 320 million years old. Long ago, parts of Illinois, Indiana and Kentucky were covered by a giant, inland sea. Then, great rivers carried sand and mud to the sea, where it settled along the shoreline. Over time, the sediments turned into layers of rock thousands of feet thick. At Garden of the Gods, that rock is more than 20,000 feet thick — about four miles deep. Eventually, a great uplift occurred that fractured the bedrock, exposing it to nature’s erosive forces. Since then, windblown sand, rain and freezing and thawing actions have worn down the layers of sediment creating beautiful rock formations at Garden of the Gods. To find out more, read on-site interpretive signs.

Observation Trail
Observation Trail is a quarter-mile-long-interpretive trail that leads to areas on top of the bluffs, which feature views of Shawnee Hills and Garden of the Gods Wilderness. You can see rock formations with names such as Camel Rock, Table Rock and Devil’s Smokestack. Observation Trail has some short, steep grades and a few steps. However, as a whole, the trail is not tiring. Caution: High cliffs in the area.

Campground and Picnic Areas
Pharaoh Campground — open year round — features 12 campsites, tables, fire grills, toilets, drinking water and trails. Nice views of the Shawnee Hills can be seen from the campground and picnic areas. Pharaoh Picnic Ground is open year round, as is the Observation Area. Overnight parking is not allowed.

Wilderness Trail System
Rocky streams, sheer cliffs, pine stands, hardwood forest, trickling streams, rock overhangs and scenic vistas are here. Spring offers wildflowers and rushing streams. Autumn offers beautiful fall colors and few insect pests. Users are encouraged to obtain detailed maps before entering the backcountry. Overnight parking is allowed at the backpacker’s parking lot. Motorized vehicles or mechanized equipment are not permitted.