

## 26 Ways to Kick up Fall a Notch at Georgia's State Parks

April Hunt  
For the AJC

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Expect to see the change of the season soon. Cloudland Canyon State Park.

State parks across the state offer everything from paddle adventures, overnight camping and even a haunted hayride to get you into the season.

**Observe these ABC's of outdoor adventures to fill your calendar with outdoor goodness this fall:**

**Appling's Mistletoe State Park:** The name echoes a different season but this park northwest of Augusta is the perfect spot to extend your summer. A fishing rodeo in late September lets youth fish in bass-stocked waters of the 7,200-acre Clarks Hill Lake.



Fall foliage at James H. Floyd State Park in Summerville.

**Black Rock Mountain State Park (Mountain City)** At an altitude of 3,640 feet, Black Rock Mountain is Georgia's highest state park. You can enjoy the 2.2-mile Tennessee Rock Trail for a moderate hike or tackle an all-day challenge with the 7.2-mile Edmonds Backcountry Trail.

**Cloudland Canyon State Park (Rising Fawn):** On the western edge of Lookout Mountain, this park straddles a deep gorge. Amazing views are an easy mile walk from the picnic area, while more rugged hiking awaits on a rim trail and series of staircases leading past two waterfalls to the canyon floor.



Black Rock is the highest state park in Georgia.

**Don Carter State Park (Gainesville):** The state's first park on Lake Lanier offers 10 miles of shoreline, a sand beach and boat ramps. Come fall, the three-mile round-trip paddle to Flat Creek Island is more comfortable and enjoyable for water lovers.

**Etowah Indian Mounds Historic Site (Cartersville).** Six earthen mounds remain from the inhabitants who once lived here. A Skills of the Past session on Oct. 1 will highlight crafts and skills used to survive in the Stone Age era.

**Fort Mountain State Park (Chatsworth):** This park is best known for a mysterious rock wall along the mountain top. For the easiest walk, take the 1.2-mile loop around the park's green lake. For a challenging, all-day hike, choose the 8-mile Gahuti Trail.

**George L. Smith State Park (Twin City):** The cypress and tupelo trees that line the mill pond turn an orange-brown color in the fall. Keep your eyes to the ground, though, for a gopher tortoise, Georgia's state reptile.

**Haunted Hills Hayride at Victoria Bryant State Park (Royston):** During the last two weekends of October, hayrides will tour the spooky hills of these parks. After the hayride, stick around for the bonfire and movie.

**Indian Springs State Park (Flovilla):** Georgia's oldest state park will offer tours on the first Saturday of the October, November and December to highlight the history of its mineral-rich spring waters.

**James H. Floyd State Park (Summerville):** Surrounded by the Chattahoochee National Forest, this park offers two lakes stocked with freshwater fish, three miles of lake loop trails and a lake boardwalk.

**Kolomoki Mounds State Park (Blakely).** One of the major settlements of coastal native tribes, several ceremonial mounds now dot the land, including the 57-foot Temple Mound believed to be the religious center for the native Creek tribe.

**Hard Labor Creek State Park (Rutledge):** The park's 22 newly renovated campsites provide the perfect spot to rest after cycling the 16 miles of mountain bike trails that wind along the park's hidden creeks.

**Moccasin Creek State Park (Clarksville):** Georgia's smallest state park sits on the shore of a gorgeous deep-green lake. Guests can choose from the 2-mile Hemlock Falls Trail or 1-mile Non-Game Trail with a wildlife observation tower.

**New Echota Historic Site (Calhoun).** Once the capital of the Cherokee nation, this site is the official start of the tragic Trail of Tears. Visitors can explore nature trails around the remains of the town, which includes the original Council House and 11 other buildings.

**Open roads to bike on at Panola Mountain State Park (Stockbridge).** The Arabia Mountain PATH winds through the park under the orange and yellow trees. Bike rentals are available for \$10 per hour from the visitor center.

**Pet-friendly cabins and a dog-walking club.** Hike seven of the Tails on Trails and earn a t-shirt for you and a bandanna for your pup.

**Quick Online Site-Specific Camping Reservations:** Four of the state parks offer site-specific reservations.

**Red Top Mountain State Park (Acworth):** While the 12,000-acre Lake Allatoona is a draw, this forested park has more than 15 miles of trails follow the lakeshore or offer lake views.

**Sweetwater Creek State Park (Lithia Springs):** Just past Six Flags over Georgia are more down-to-earth thrills of hiking trails, the 215-acre George Sparks Reservoir and namesake creek. The easy one-mile Red Trail hike leads to the ruins of the New Manchester Manufacturing Company mill.

**Tallulah Gorge State Park (Tallulah Falls):** The gorge is two miles long, nearly 1,000 feet deep and home to five waterfalls. Mountain bikers are welcome on the 10-mile Stoneplace Trail. The North and South Rim trails are open to hikers, only, and feature moderate trails with waterfall views.

**Unicoi State Park (Helen):** Skip the Oktoberfest crowds in Helen by taking an easy two-hour walk on the 2.5 mile Lake Trail. The mostly flat loop around Unicoi Lake offers water and mountain views, perfect for viewing changing leaves.

**Vogel State Park (Blairsville):** Tucked at the bottom of Blood Mountain in the Chattahoochee National Forest features, the park includes the one-mile Trahlyta Lake Loop, which crosses an earthen dam and is one of the most photographed views in North Georgia.

**Watson Mill Bridge State Park (Comer):** Bike or hike the two-mile Nature Trail and travel through the longest covered bridge in the state, spanning 229 feet across the South Fork River.

**EXtreme Whitewater Rafting at Tallulah Gorge:** During three weekends in November, watch expert kayakers plunge down the river during the bi-annual "whitewater release." Watch from the gorge's rim trails above.

**Yurts** will ease you into camping, offering electricity, bunk beds and a futon, a ceiling fan, heater and windows. Rates start at \$75 per night.

**Ziplines** are the newest way to take in the view at Amicalola Falls State Park (Dawsonville) and Unicoi State Park (Helen). For a limited time this fall, the Elevate Your View promotion lets you experience the aerial adventures while staying at park lodges.