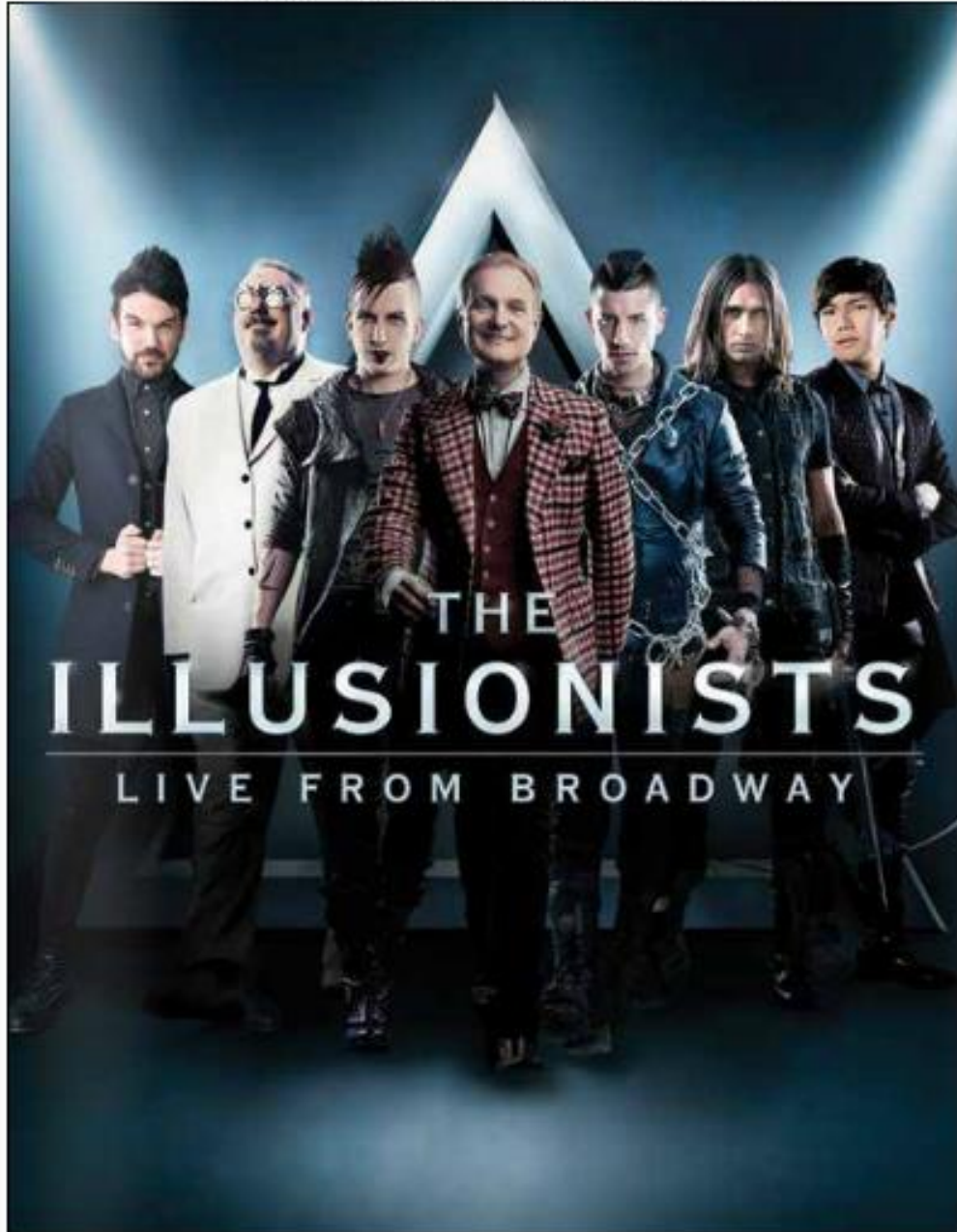
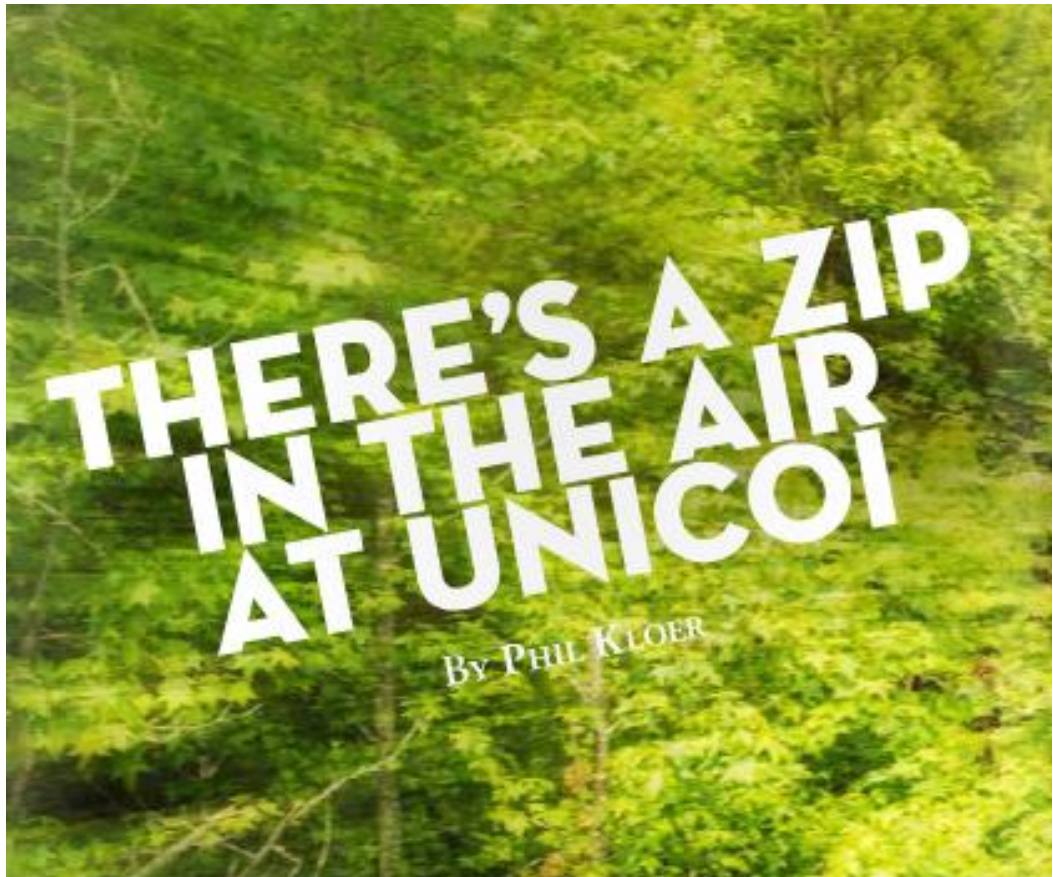


# ENCORE ATLANTA

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**T**he sound slices through the stillness: Z-z-z-z-z. Z-z-z-z-z-z-z. That's not cartoon snoring, it's the sound of a metal buckle zinging along a half-inch steel cable, supporting a wide-eyed, open-mouthed adrenaline junkie on a zip line through the trees.

Usually strung between trees high above the ground, zip lines are popular with tourists all over the world, from Nepal to Costa Rica. The newest zip-line course near metro Atlanta is the Unicoi Zipline and Aerial Adventure Park inside north Georgia's Unicoi State Park and Lodge.

The course is set in the high trees around the lodge, providing stirring views of the park's mountains. For \$59, zip-liners whiz several stories above the forest floor, along 11 cables strung from tree

to tree. Including gear-fitting and instructions, the whole experience takes about two hours.

There also are seven suspended bridges connecting the lines between trees, and some climbing is involved. With a maximum height of about seven stories and only open space below, it's not for those with acrophobia.

"You go way back in the woods. You just jump off and you're carried through the woods. It's breathtaking," says Dylan Carter, a 12-year-old from Cumming.

Before anyone gets to zip-a-dee-doo-dah, however, they must sign and initial a two-page liability waiver. Don't read too closely. Its caveats include cautions for anyone who's pregnant or has a heart condition, asthma or seizures.

UNICOI STATE PARK & LODGE





You don't have to worry about weight. The buckle mechanism can hold 6,000 pounds in one load, and the cable itself could support a school bus, says course manager Thomas Kearns.

Guides suit up customers in a helmet and multi-strap harness that attaches to the buckle and a safety belay. "If the harness is comfortable, it's not tight enough," they tell beginners, both joking and not joking.

Aerial Adventure is one phase in an ongoing expansion at Unicoi, says general manager Christopher Forbes. An Adventure Lodge, a concept rather than a physical place, was added last year. It offers paddleboarding, archery, fly fishing, a GPS scavenger hunt and a challenge course for corporate

team-building. All this happens in and around Unicoi Lodge, which has hotel-style rooms, rustic cabins and campsites.

American Adventure Park Systems, a Georgia company, built and runs this zip-line course and a zip line in the North Georgia town of Banning Mills. It's building a similar zip-line course at Amicalola Falls State Park and Lodge, and plans a more intense Phase 2 zip line at Unicoi.

With more than 1,000 acres, Unicoi also offers a 53-acre lake with a beach, mountain biking, kayaking, and hiking. The park is about two miles from Helen, the North Georgia tourist town known for its Oktoberfest, so visitors can stay in Helen and visit the park, or stay at the lodge and visit Helen. ■

## IF YOU GO

Unicoi State Park and Lodge is on Ga. 356 in Helen, less than 2 hours north-east of metro Atlanta. Parking is \$5 a day. Annual passes, with unlimited admission to any Georgia State Park or Historic Site are \$50.