

Discover Helen, North Georgia's Alpine gem

By Apryl Chapman Thomas - For the AJC



The Alpine-style town of Helen continues raising its glass each year to Oktoberfest.

Posted: 10:14 a.m. Wednesday, Nov. 2, 2016

It isn't too often you come across a destination that appeals to a broad base of travelers and their interests.

Helen, located northwest of Atlanta in the Blue Ridge Mountains and situated along the Chattahoochee River, is a place that has something for everyone. Families, as well as outdoor enthusiasts, will find plenty to keep them happily occupied. Both couples, along with girlfriends on a "girls-only" weekend, will also find something special about the town. Those traveling with their four-legged buddies will find a warm welcome, too, at select restaurants and accommodations.

The year-around destination tends to shine brightly during the fall. The mix of colorful leaves, crisp air, activities and events draws everyone in for either for an overnight or a weekend stay.

Whether it's your first time visiting Helen, or you haven't been in a few years, there are a few things that should be on your itinerary.

Explore Main Street. About four decades ago, Helen, in a way to attract visitors, was transformed into a replica of a small Alpine Village town. Familiarize yourself with surroundings by taking a horse-drawn carriage ride. Afterward, explore the various shops, boutiques and eateries that line both sides of the street.

You won't have any problem finding that "must-have" piece or two. An Alpine Helen shopping visit isn't complete without a stop in The Christmas Shoppe (8749 N. Main St., Helen. 706-878-1012, helenchristmasshoppe.com).

In the mood for a snack? Grab some chocolates for now (or later) at Hansel & Gretel (8651 N. Main St., Helen. 800-524-3008, hanselandgretelcandykitchen.com) or a couple of sweet treats from Hofer's Bakery (8758 N. Main St., Helen. 706-878-8200, hofers.com). Venture off Main Street to get some peanuts from Fred's Famous Peanuts (17 Clayton Road, Helen. 706-878-3124, fredsfamouspeanuts.com)

When it comes to dining, Helen doesn't disappoint with its options. If weather permits, sit outside and enjoy the view at Troll Tavern (8590 N. Main St., Helen. 706-878-3117, trolltavern.com). Sample German cuisine either the Hofbrauhaus Restaurant and G.I. Germany Pub (9001 N. Main St., Helen. 706-878-2248, www.hofbrauhaus Helen.co)

If you're staying in a cabin or need a variety of snacks for the room, head straight to Betty's Country Store (18 Yonah St., Helen. 706-878-2617, bettysinhelen.com) for all your needs.

Enjoy the outdoors. The great thing about Helen is you can have a little or a lot of the outdoors. Keep it simple with a round of mini golf at Alpine Golf Village (7914 S. Main St., Helen. 706-878-3328, helenminigolf.com). Go hiking at Smithgall Woods State Park (61 Tsalaki Trail, Helen. 706-878-3087, gastateparks.org/SmithgallWoods) or try zip lining at American Adventure Park in Unicoi State Park (1788 Ga. 356, Helen. 706-878-2201, unicoizipline.com). View the waterfalls at Anna Ruby Falls. Go horseback riding with Chattahoochee Stables (2180 Ga. 17, Sautee. 706-878-7000, chattahoocheestables.com).

For a different type of experience, consider renting a mountain bike from Woody's Mountain Bikes and riding one of the many trails.

Experience. Historic Nacoochee Village and Village of Sautee. About one-half mile south of Alpine Helen is historic Nacoochee Village. It's here you can sample the wines at Habersham Winery (7025 S. Main St., Helen. 706-878-9463, www.habershamvineyards.com/)

Located less than five miles south from Helen is the Village of Sautee. This eclectic community is rich in arts and history. Start your journey with a stop to photograph the gazebo-topped Indian mound across from the 173-acre Hardman Farm Historic Site (143 Ga. 17, Sautee Nacoochee. gastateparks.org/HardmanFarm). Drive a little farther to discover the Sautee Nacoochee Center (283 Ga. 255 N., Sautee Nacoochee. 706-878-3300, snca.org) that offers classes, gallery exhibits and events. Also located on its campus are a collection of three museums: The Folk Pottery Museum of Northeast Georgia, SNC History Museum and the African American Heritage Site.

If you are into unusual museums, you are in luck. You don't want to miss the Gourd Place Museum (2319 Duncan Bridge Road, Sautee. 706-865-4048, gourdplace.com) that features everything gourds. Scarlett's Secret (1902 Ga. 17, Sautee. 706-878-1028, scarlettsecret.com) is one of those places you'll only find in

Georgia. Not only is it furnished in the period of *Gone With the Wind*, but also displays memorabilia related to the movie and the Civil War. Even if you just have a passing interest in the movie or the war, it's worth a stop.

Shoppers can meander through the quaint shops and of course, a visit to the Old Sautee Store (2315 Ga. 17, Sautee Nacoochee. 706-878-2281, sauteestore.com).

End the day (or trip) at the tasting room or wine bar at Sylvan Valley Lodge and Winery (747 Duncan Bridge Road, Sautee Nacoochee. 706-865-7371, sylvanvalleylodge.com).

Accommodations in Helen vary, and there is something for every budget and need. You'll find everything from chain hotels to bed and breakfasts to cabins and vacation rentals. Both state parks offer accommodations as well. Limited lodging is available in Sautee Nacoochee.