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For that last summer vacation, go to Helen -- and back

Posted: Sunday, August 14, 2016 By: *By VINCENT HARRIS For the Index-Journal* Print Article E-mail to a Friend, Recommended (0),



Visitors to Helen, Georgia might think they made a wrong turn and wound up in Europe when they see the Alpine Village.

As the summer winds down, the temperature drops (slightly) and the kids head off to school, it's worth thinking about taking one more family trip before the season ends. And located about two hours -- 113 miles -- away is a great one-stop city that offers an array of choices for kids and adults: Helen, Georgia.

Adjacent to the Chattahoochee National Forest and the Chattahoochee River, and home to the delightful Alpine Village, there are a lot of entertainment options to choose from around

this small, scenic town with a population of about 530.

After years of being a logging powerhouse, the city saw a decline in that industry but resurrected itself as a tourist attraction. By far the most popular move the city made was becoming a replica of a Bavarian alpine town, in the Appalachians instead of the Alps.

That's right, the city was redesigned beginning in 1969 as a classic south-German style village, is present on every building, even on the local restaurants such as Huddle House and Wendy's.

In addition to that novel architecture, Helen offers one of the most expansive outdoor activity rosters in the area, including the Adventure Lodges of Georgia-Unicoi State Park, the Alpine Mini Golf Village, the Chattahoochee Stables, Cool River Tubing, Outpost Gold & Gem Panning and many more. Activities range from the low-key (horseback riding, gem mining) to the more exhilarating (zip lining, mountain biking) to the all-around family friendly (the North Georgia Zoo).

If you're planning on making a weekend of it, there are accommodations for just about every preference in Helen. The area has several intimate bed-and-breakfast locations (including the Alpine Hilltop Haus and the Sylvan Valley Lodge), not to mention nearly 30 cabin-rental establishments. Even the franchise hotels, such as Econo Lodge and Hampton Inn, have gotten in on the area's Bavarian spirit, changing their building designs to match the local landscape. Prices range from \$17 for a spot at the Cherokee Campground to \$1,050.00 for a weekly condo rental.

Helen has a variety of local restaurants that carve out their own unique culinary space, including the Country Café, Bigg Daddy's Restaurant and Tavern, Hofbrauhaus Restaurant and the Old Bavaria Inn Restaurant & Lounge. Prices vary from your basic \$10 lunch at the Creekside Deli to the \$32 King Cut Prime Rib at Paul's Steakhouse.



The Alpine Village is a big attraction in Helen, Georgia.



Helen, Georgia and its Alpine Village are situated beside the Chattahoochee National Forest and the Chattahoochee River.