

## Go Georgia: Where to enjoy sports, outdoors, and adventure in Georgia

Tracey Teo – For the AJC  
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Columbus is home to the longest urban white water rafting course in the world. Contributed by the Columbus, GA., Convention and Visitors Bureau

From the mountains in the north to the beaches in the southeast, Georgia features diverse landscapes with stunning natural beauty — scenery that's ideal for sports lovers and adventure seekers.

### **Amicalola Falls State Park, Dawsonville**

Amicalola Falls, the tallest cascading waterfall in the Southeast, pummels boulders 792 feet below, its thunderous roar echoing throughout Amicalola Falls State Park.

Visitors can stay the night at Len Foote Hike Inn, the only backcountry lodge in Georgia. The cabin-like hotel is known for its proximity to Springer Mountain, the southern tip of the Appalachian Trail.

Guests are warmly welcomed at this rustic, 20-room inn, a place that provides the perfect opportunity to disconnect from mobile devices and busy city life, leaving nearly everyone immersed in the beauty of the serene, remote, mountainous location. There are no electrical outlets in the bunk rooms, and when nature calls, you have to trek to the composting toilets in the bathhouse — a small inconvenience for a night or two in this tranquil oasis.

Wildlife, including deer and raccoons, is abundant. Black bears inhabit the woods, but despite their aggressive reputation, these creatures are shy, so most onlookers are likely to glimpse their backsides scampering away.

A 5-mile hike from the visitor center takes trekkers past pine-topped ridges and beneath canopies of dogwood blossoms in spring.

*280 Amicalola Falls State Park Road, Dawsonville, (800) 581-8032, [hike-inn.com](http://hike-inn.com). Amicalola Falls State Park, [gastateparks.org/AmicalolaFalls](http://gastateparks.org/AmicalolaFalls)*

### **Chattahoochee River, Columbus**

The thrill of whitewater rafting can be enjoyed outside of the Grand Canyon or the Zambezi River. Simply head to the Chattahoochee River in Columbus, the world's longest urban whitewater rafting path. WhiteWater Express, a professional river outfitter, guides rafters through the man-made 2.5-mile course that gushes through the heart of downtown.

The rapids range from lazy to crazy, with opportunities to float peacefully to admire the vibrant cityscape or practice complex paddling maneuvers while bouncing along Cut Bait, a stomach-churning, tsunami-like, Class 5 rapid loved by adrenaline junkies.

Whitewater rafting trips often mean roughing it in a chilly tent and swatting mosquitoes during dinner — not for everyone. However, in Columbus, when rafters are ready to dry off and enjoy a meal, they can visit a local restaurant and get a good night's sleep in a comfy hotel.

*WhiteWater Express, 1000 Bay Ave., Columbus, Ga., (706) 321-4720, [whitewaterexpress.com](http://whitewaterexpress.com)*

### **Georgia Sea Turtle Center, Jekyll Island**

Being a sea turtle isn't always easy. Take Mahi, for example. The juvenile green sea turtle was found in St. Johns County, Florida, so tangled in fishing line, she had bound herself to the leg of a picnic table, severely injuring her front right flipper. To further complicate her predicament, she had swallowed part of the line. The injured creature was sent to the Georgia Sea Turtle Center on Jekyll Island for rehabilitation.

Mahi's recovery took two years because her injured flipper had to be amputated, but after extensive training, she was able to fend for herself and was released back into the wild.

There are many inspiring stories like Mahi's at this reptile hospital, and visitors are welcome to see firsthand how Georgia's five species of sea turtles are treated for various illnesses and injuries.

Sea turtles are opportunistic feeders, meaning they will eat almost anything, so litter caught in the digestive tract is a common ailment. Boat strikes are another hazard and often leave the creatures stranded.

Kids love getting acquainted with these massive migratory marine reptiles that can weigh hundreds of pounds.

An exhibit depicts the life cycle of a sea turtle through interactive displays, emphasizing nesting and migration behaviors essential to their survival. Visitors leave with an understanding of what they can do to help these creatures avoid becoming a patient at the center.

*214 Stable Road, Jekyll Island, Ga., (912) 635-4444, [gstc.jekyllisland.com](http://gstc.jekyllisland.com)*

### **Wild Adventures, Valdosta**

It's no April Fools' Day joke. On April 1, Wild Adventures Theme Park in Valdosta opens the much-anticipated Ohana Bay, a new \$2 million addition in Splash Island Water Park.

Take the plunge in this Hawaiian surfing-themed area featuring seven waterslides, five of them designed for younger guests.

The Alfani Falls can accommodate six sliders, so BFFs can squeal all the way down together.

The biggest, wettest thrill comes from spiraling through the Uli Uli Twisters, a pair of slides that are 27-foot high and 200-foot long, sure to attract daredevils.

Wild Adventures makes sense for budget-minded families, especially considering it's a theme park, water park, zoo and concert venue all rolled into one getaway. One ticket gains admission to all 170 acres of fun.

*3766 Old Clyattville Road, Valdosta, Ga., (229) 219-7080, [wildadventures.com](http://wildadventures.com)*

### **Reynolds Lake Oconee, Greensboro**

Reynolds Lake Oconee, formerly the Reynolds Plantation, has long been a golfer's paradise, but now there's one more reason to love this sprawling golf resort between Atlanta and Augusta — the Reynolds Kingdom of Golf presented by TaylorMade.

Following a \$500,000 expansion, the game improvement center can now fit players of all levels for custom-made clubs in the same high-tech setting used by the pros. Cutting-edge Motion Analysis Technology by TaylorMade (MAT-T) provides golfers with an in-depth look at their game. Then the data is used by a master club builder to craft specially-fitted clubs in the on-site TaylorMade Tour Trailer, a fixture on the PGA Tour from 2003-2007. Outside of TaylorMade headquarters in Carlsbad, California, this scenic resort is the only place the service is available.

After getting new custom clubs, golfers receive world-class instruction on how to use them, perfect preparation for playing on one of the resort's five courses.

The exclusive golf center was once open only to PGA Tour players and a handful of special guests, but now any player who wants to improve his or her swing is welcome at Reynolds Kingdom of Golf.

*2381 Lake Oconee Trail, Greensboro, Ga., (706) 467-3563, [reynoldskingdomofgolf.com](http://reynoldskingdomofgolf.com)*