

A weekend in Ellijay

Clara Bosonetto – For the AJC



In North Georgia, hike across mountains with elevations ranging from sea level to more than 3,600 feet. CONTRIBUTED BY GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

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Weekend in Ellijay one of three ways: on a budget, spending a bit more, or when the getaway calls for a splurge.

Trip tips: Just 80 miles north of Atlanta, Ellijay, “Georgia’s Apple Capital,” is the ideal country getaway. The spirited downtown offers unique, locally owned boutiques, antiques shops and outfitters to arrange for adventures on the area’s three main rivers, the Cartecay, Ellijay and Coosawattee.

North Central Georgia’s Gilmer County is home to Amicalola Falls State Park, with Georgia’s highest waterfall. Fort Mountain State Park, located between Chatsworth and Ellijay, has a mysterious archaeological site of prehistoric ruins.

Take a drive to Blue Ridge (an 18-minute drive north) to ride the Scenic Railroad. The four-hour, 26-mile round trip winds along the Toccoa River and makes a two-hour stop in the quaint sister towns of McCaysville, Ga., and Copperhill, Tenn.; \$44-\$79 adults (varied prices for an indoor car, open car or Premier Class), \$29 ages 2-12. www.brscenic.com.

Plan a visit to Ellijay during the Georgia Apple Blossom Festival (May 6-7), www.georgiaappleblossomfestival.com, and the Georgia Apple Festival (Oct. 14-15 and Oct. 21-22), www.georgiaapplefestival.org.

Trip planning at Gilmer County: www.gilmerchamber.com.

BUDGET

Stay: BYO-Bike to Mulberry Gap, a second-generation, family-owned rustic mountain biking retreat in the heart of the “Mountain Bike Capital of Georgia.” Bike trails are just beyond the driveway, or your vehicle can be shuttled to trail heads (\$5-\$35 round trip per vehicle). Choose from camping sites (\$17-\$22 per person, per site) or \$112 per person, per night in a cabin (sleeps four to six) with breakfast and dinner. Guests enjoy family-style meals each day with other guests in the barn. Amenities include a hot tub, fire pits, trail mapping and a trail with a skills course. 400 Mulberry Gap Road, Ellijay. 706-698-2865, www.mulberrygap.com.

Eat: Back Porch Bistro serves up breakfast and lunch favorites and specialties like Greek gyros, Cuban sandwiches, paninis and Mexican dishes. Apple Cake, Sopapilla Cheesecake and cookies are baked daily. Menu items to \$8. 10 Northside Square, Ellijay. 706-636-1111, Facebook: [backporchbistroellijayga](https://www.facebook.com/backporchbistroellijayga).

Experience: Hike the trails at Fort Mountain State Park near Chatsworth, about 30 minutes west of Ellijay. A short footpath leads to the Cool Springs Overlook with a view of the Cohutta Wilderness area. The Old Fort Trail (1.8 miles) leads to an ancient 885-foot-long rock wall (thought to have been an early Indian fortification or for ceremonies), a stone fire tower and overlooks. The Lake Loop Trail (1.2 miles) surrounds the 17-acre mountain lake. Other paths vary from less than a mile to more than 8 miles in length. 181 Fort Mountain Park Road, Chatsworth. 706-422-1932, <http://gastateparks.org/FortMountain>.



The dome wilderness site is surrounded by forests and streams. Carters Lake, a 3,220-acre reservoir, is just a few minutes away for fishing, boating, hiking and bike trails. CONTRIBUTED BY WWW.ELLIJAYHIDEAWAY.COM For the AJC

MODERATE

Stay: Elatse'yi is a 17-acre alpaca farm retreat near Carters Lake. A Geodesic Dome accommodates four people in a bedroom with three beds, a private bathroom, an outdoor shower and an outdoor kitchen. Visit the farm animals, or have a go at archery and bocce ball. Explore the surrounding lakes, rivers and towns and return at night for stargazing. Children 12 and older are welcome. Rates average \$135 a night. Request to book at [Airbnb.com](https://www.airbnb.com/rooms/7913829), www.airbnb.com/rooms/7913829. 589 Berean Church Road, Ellijay. 404-510-3684, ellijayhideaway.com.

Eat: Started back in 1943, Mercier Orchards sells gifts, bakery items, jams, olive oil and Georgia-grown hard apple cider and wines year-round. The diner serves a Mountain Breakfast (\$7) and wraps and sandwiches. The weekend breakfast buffet is \$11 (\$9 age 10 and under). 8660 Blue Ridge Drive, Blue Ridge. 706-632-3411, www.mercier-orchards.com.

Experience: A fun family attraction, Expedition: BIGFOOT is a newly opened complex containing the country's largest permanent display of genuine Bigfoot artifacts, life-size exhibits, photos, up-to-date sighting maps and even a rare Bigfoot butt-print. The museum has the "Sasquatch Theater," a gift shop, and a Bigfoot reference library; \$8 adults, \$6 age 5-12. 1934 Ga. 515 S, Cherry Log (10 miles north of Ellijay). 706-946-2601, <http://expeditionbigfoot.mdom.mobi>.



The Martyn Farm is just 2 miles from historic downtown Ellijay. The Martyn House downtown features an espresso bar and lounge with a fireplace and two outside courtyards. CONTRIBUTED BY WWW.THEMARTYNHOUSE.COM For the AJC

SPLURGE

Stay: The Farm at Martyn House is an 18-acre adult-only retreat set in the Appalachian foothills. Try glamping in one of four luxury sleeping tents from India (April 15-Nov. 15). Each has an entry porch with table and chairs overlooking the meadow or woods, private bath, and a 12-by-12-foot bedroom with a sitting area. On site are a swimming pond, a secluded claw foot tub, an organic vegetable garden, fire pit and the

Martyn House walking trail. Per night rates are \$220 (double occupancy with twins or king bed). A two-night minimum stay required. 912 Flat Branch Road, Ellijay. 706-635-4759, <https://themartynhouse.com>.

Eat: Upscale Lee's on River Street at the 1907 Restaurant prepares Southern favorites such as Chicken & Waffle Skewers (\$8) and Shrimp and Grits (\$24) as well as traditional steaks. 24 River St., Ellijay. 706-635-1907, www.the1907.com.

Experience: Ellijay River Outfitters offers tube and kayak rentals including life jacket, paddle(s) and shuttle transport to the river. Rentals are \$10 per hour; \$20 for three hours for a tube; \$25 and \$35 for a sit-on-top or sit-in kayak. Enjoy the lazy ride on the Ellijay River as it runs through the mountains in and around the town before merging with the Cartecay River. 88 Holt Bridge Road, Ellijay. 706-889-8697, www.tubeellijay.com.

Clara Bosonetto is a retired travel consultant.