



Parks in Helen, Georgia



Overview

Helen, Georgia, is not the first place you might expect to find a touch of Bavaria, but the city has been known as "Alpine Helen" since city leaders fashioned their community after a German mountain town to revitalize its sagging economy. Still, that is not the area's only lure for visitors. Helen, in northeast Georgia, is nestled in the Blue Ridge Mountains, and state parks draw outdoor enthusiasts for camping, hiking, fishing and hunting.

Unicoi State Park and Lodge

Two miles from Helen, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources calls Unicoi one of the state's most popular parks because of its location, beauty and recreational opportunities. The park offers camping and hiking and biking on mountain trails. The 1,050-acre park features tent and trailer campsites, camping shelters, cottages, a 100-room lodge, picnic shelters, tennis courts and beaches for swimming. Rangers conduct several programs throughout the year, including astronomy nights, spring wildflower tours, birding walks, a concert series and holiday celebrations.

Smithgall Woods Conservation Park

Smithgall Woods Conservation Park also is operated by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. Three miles west of Helen, Smithgall Woods features catch-and-release fishing in Dukes Creek, one of the state's best trout streams. The park sits on 5,664 acres and has trails for biking and hiking and plenty of opportunities to study trees, wildlife and streams. The park is a popular location for weddings and features five cottages for lodging. Campsites and picnic shelters are available, and rangers lead special programs, including fishing days and wildflower tours, throughout the year.

Black Forest Bear Park

If you want to interact with nature without leaving downtown Helen, the Black Forest Bear Park has a solution. The park features 16 adult bears living in individual enclosures where they can swim and climb trees. Visitors can buy food trays of fruits and bread to feed the animals, sometimes earning a thankful wave from a bear in return. Black Forest Bear Park also features a snake exhibit with venomous and non-venomous snakes.