



2024
VISITORS GUIDE

Ellijay

Mountain Time

WINERIES,
APPLE ORCHARDS,
AND DINING
DESTINATIONS

INSPIRATION

Trip itineraries,
cabin getaways,
nature outings

EXPERIENCE

Antiques, events,
offbeat attractions

Imagine a place where
heirloom orchards meet
unparalleled vineyards, and
mountain magic is waiting
around every corner.

Here, the adventures are
endless, the memories are
timeless, and the views leave
you breathless.

THIS IS ELLIJAY, GEORGIA

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ELLIJAY
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WELCOME



Welcome to Ellijay, Georgia, where the charm of a small town meets the breathtaking beauty of the North Georgia mountains. As your gateway to adventure, Ellijay proudly holds the title of the Mountain Bike Capital and the Apple Capital of Georgia! Whether you're here to explore our world-class mountain biking trails, savor the sweetness of our renowned apple orchards,

or unwind in our vibrant downtown, you're in for a treat. Indulge in the flavors of local wineries, breathe in the fresh mountain air, and immerse yourself in the warmth of our community. Your Ellijay getaway promises a perfect blend of recreation and relaxation, making every moment a memory. We invite you to experience the heart and soul of Ellijay in 2024—your ultimate destination for a small-town escape and mountain magic!

Jennifer Grimmer

President & CEO
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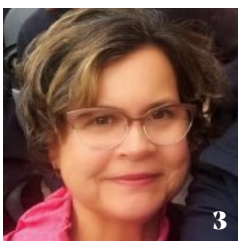
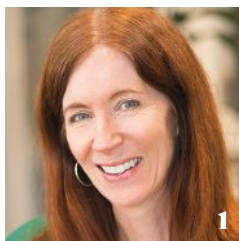
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Photo: neon sign, Vené Franco

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PHOTOGRAPHY: OUTLIVE CREATIVE, UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED

CELEBRATE GOOD TIMES

Ellijay's annual events have something for everyone

BY SYDNEE MUTUKU

April

GEORGIA MOUNTAIN NEEDLE ARTS FESTIVAL

Gilmer County Civic Center

This three-day festival features a variety of yarn, needle art tools, and unique supplies from some of the Southeast's most talented needle arts makers. Knitting, crochet, and fiber arts

enthusiasts can browse to stock their craft room and enter to win prizes.

GEORGIA MOUNTAIN TRAILS FEST AND 5K

Reece's Cider Company

Celebrate the outdoors at the annual Sasquatch Strut 5K and fun run. Enjoy outdoor gear vendors, food trucks, live music, and an educational experience.

WOOFSTOCK ELLIJAY

Downtown Ellijay

Sponsored by Friends of Gilmer Animal Shelter (FOGAS), this event features specialty pet vendors, a pet parade, a '70s-themed pet costume contest, and a dock-diving competition. Animal shelters and rescuers will be on site with adoptable pals.

May

GEORGIA APPLE BLOSSOM FESTIVAL

*Penland's 515 and
Panorama Orchards*

Spend the weekend browsing local arts and crafts at this juried show. Bring the little ones for kid-friendly activities such as rock climbing, bounce houses, and face painting.

PLEIN AIR - ART IN THE MOUNTAINS

Various locations

Enjoy a weekend of outdoor painting or "plein air" at various scenic sites around Gilmer County. Participate in a quick-draw competition and bid on art to take home at the auction.

RUN FOR THE SON 5K

Gilmer Scout Hut

Test your endurance at the 17th annual Run for the Son 5K, which goes through historic downtown Ellijay. Join the activities at the one-mile Fun Run and a Tot Trot dash for the kiddos.



ELLIJAY FARMERS MARKET

Downtown Ellijay

Visit an array of vendors for fresh local produce, homemade goods, and art each Saturday from 8:30 a.m.- 12:30 p.m., May through October.

FUNGI 5K

Ellijay Mushrooms

Put the “fun” in fungi at Ellijay Mushrooms’ 5K race, which includes vendors, mushroom farm tours, mushroom-themed crafts, and of course, culinary creations made with all sorts of ‘shrooms.

MEMORIAL DAY CEREMONY

Ellijay River Park

Honor fallen veterans at the Veterans Memorial Bridge and Garden, and enjoy an entire weekend of family activities and patriotic observances.

ELLIJAY SONGWRITERS FESTIVAL

Various Locations

Memorial Day weekend welcomes the Songwriters Festival. The event is held at various locations around town, including wineries and the Gilmer Arts Playhouse.

July

INDEPENDENCE DAY

Downtown Ellijay

Celebrate July 4th with live music, a parade, plenty of food, fireworks, and more festivities in downtown Ellijay.

August

GILMER COUNTY FAIR

Ellijay Lions Club Fairgrounds

Bring the whole family and enjoy traditional fair rides, live music, an art exhibition, quilts, agriculture, canning, baking, needlework, photography, and more.

September

ELLIJAY BACON FEST

Downtown Ellijay

Everything tastes better with bacon—sample all kinds of dishes made with bacon, watch a bacon-eating contest, browse arts and crafts vendors, and enjoy live music at this porky shindig.

BLUE RIDGE MOUNTAINS WINE AND JAZZ FESTIVAL

White Path Creek Farms

Sample wines from North Georgia and North Carolina as well as local cuisine, peruse fine art, and listen to jazz by local and regional artists.

October

GEORGIA APPLE FESTIVAL

Lions Club Fairgrounds

Locals and visitors from far and wide come to celebrate Ellijay’s biggest annual event featuring hundreds of vendors offering handmade arts and crafts and apple goods of all kinds. Events include an apple parade, classic auto show, and tons of family-friendly activities.

APPLE ARTS FESTIVAL

Downtown Ellijay

The sister event to the Georgia Apple Festival, this takes place on the second and third full weekends of October and focuses on arts and crafts on the square in downtown Ellijay.



CHERRY LOG FALL FESTIVAL

Cherry Log Community Clubhouse

Cherry Log’s harvest celebration features musical entertainment, art, a variety of home-canned and baked goods, and fun for the whole family.

DANCING GOATS FOLKFEST

Gilmer County River Park

Every year Dancing Goats Folkfest brings the community together in celebration of Southern Appalachian culture through a juried folk-art show and sale, live homegrown music, storytelling, and delicious foods.

SCARECROW INVASION

Harrison Park

Sip hot chocolate and view homemade scarecrow exhibits at this annual autumn tradition, where prizes are awarded to the most popular entries. View scarecrows after dark at the Moonlight walk on the first Friday of October.

December

LIGHT UP ELLIJAY

Downtown Ellijay

Ellijay’s annual twinkling light display kicks off the holiday season and features a festive parade celebration, the tree lighting, a meet-and-greet with Santa, and more jolly activities.

Georgia Apple Festival

For 54 years, Ellijay has celebrated its most well-known and abundant harvest at this annual tradition at the Ellijay Lions Club Fairgrounds. For two action-packed weekends, locals and out-of-towners gather to celebrate all things apple-related, including about 300 vendors selling hand-crafted items, doing on-site craft demonstrations, and offering up mouth-watering foods. Indulge in everything red, ripe, and juicy with offerings like apple fritters, apple doughnuts, apple cider, apple pies, and more. Even though you can't pick apples at the festival (be sure to plan for plenty of time to pick apples at a local orchard), local apple houses offer a variety of delicious, already-harvested fruit for purchase. Other festival programming includes the annual Apple Festival Parade in downtown Ellijay, the Apple Arts Festival, the Apple Classic Auto Show, and the Apple Festival 5K Road Race. There's a \$10 admission fee, but children under 12 are free. The Ellijay Lions Club, the Gilmer County Chamber of Commerce, the cities of Ellijay and East Ellijay, and Gilmer County host this local favorite.





October
12-13 & 19-20



Three Days, Three Ways

Find inspiration for the perfect getaway in Ellijay with these customized itineraries for families, couples, or friends

BY JACINTA HOWARD



Buckley Vineyards



Christmas shopping in downtown Ellijay

Right: Hillcrest Orchards

Below: The Pink Pig



Families in Fall

The end of summer doesn't have to mean the end of stress-free, relaxing days with the family. Fall is the perfect time to get everyone together and head outside to enjoy cooler weather. In Ellijay, there are countless ways for your family to fall in love with fall.

DAY ONE

A visit to Georgia's "Apple Capital" isn't complete without exploring its U-pick apple orchards. Start your morning by wandering through **Hillcrest Orchards'** apple maze, the first of its kind in the Southeast. Before you leave, stop by the petting farm, where the kids can interact with friendly farm animals. Grab lunch at **The Shack**, and savor Thai chicken or a seafood bowl featuring jalapeños, bean sprouts, mushrooms, and sesame chili oil. Walk it all off at the **Tumbling Water Trail**, a 1.3-mile, family-friendly path that offers breathtaking views of Carters Lake, creeks, and waterfalls. End your day with a cozy fireside dinner under the stars at your cabin.



DAY TWO

Is there a better way to say "good morning" than with homemade Southern-style biscuits? Kickstart your second day with breakfast at **Mr. P's**, then get ready for more apple season fun with a stop by the **Georgia Apple Festival**. The folksy gathering has something for all ages, including a parade, car show, and of course, plenty of apple-inspired goodies. After you hit the fairgrounds, mill around **Apple Arts on the Square** downtown, where the mood is upbeat and the arts and crafts are one-of-a-kind. End your day with a delicious dinner of ribs, brisket, and homemade peach cobbler at the family-owned favorite, **The Pink Pig**.

DAY THREE

Cap off your trip with a relaxed breakfast at the cabin, then impress curious minds with a trip to **Expedition: Bigfoot**, an impressive 3,700-square-foot wonder that holds the title of the world's largest Bigfoot museum, features cool interactive exhibits, and houses the U.S.'s biggest collection of Bigfoot casts. Wrap up the evening back at the cabin, relishing the crisp fall air and basking in the season's charm. You'll head home knowing you've aced the ultimate fall family adventure.

Couples' Food & Wine Getaway

Escape to the North Georgia mountains for a couples' getaway that's all about rustic charm, culinary delights, and of course, wine. It's an idyllic treat tailor-made for couples seeking a colorful escape with a taste of indulgence.

DAY ONE

Few things soothe the soul like the smell of fresh bread in the morning. Wake up and drop by **High Mountain Bakery** in East Ellijay for sourdough bread and an array of warm pastries. Then, spend a leisurely afternoon on an eastside wine crawl. Soak in gorgeous mountain views at the family-owned **Ott Vineyards and Winery** and sip on their rich Chambourcin/Lenoire blend. At **Buckley Vineyards**, the scenery is lush, and most days you can enjoy live music along with your merlot. End your wine journey at **Cartecay Vineyards** nestled in the

Southern Appalachian Mountains, where you can unwind in the hammock area or by the chimney patio with estate wine. On the way home, pick up farm-fresh ingredients at **Mountain Valley Farm Store**, then head back to your cabin for a cozy, homemade dinner in your own tranquil retreat.



DAY TWO

Begin your day with a touch of sweetness at **Arlowe's Bakehouse**, where you and your partner can share a slice of their signature carrot cake with cream cheese frosting with your morning coffee. Spend the afternoon on a romantic wine crawl on the west side, starting at **Grapes & Ladders Vineyard & Winery** with its unique muscadine wines. Then at **Engelheim Vineyards**, sip their white wine blend, Engle Weiss, and toast to love amidst the picturesque foothills. Cap off your evening with a stroll through downtown Ellijay and enjoy browsing quaint antique shops, followed by an intimate dinner at **Butcher & Bottle**, indulging in dishes like scallop risotto paired with hand-crafted cocktails like the B&B Manhattan.

DAY THREE

A relaxed breakfast at the cabin sets the tone for a day of discovery and romance. Wander through the 171-acre **Ellijay Mushrooms** farm in the afternoon, where you can buy mushrooms at the farm store and learn about their fascinating benefits. On the way back downtown, visit **Roo Mountain Vineyards** to sample their impressive selection of wines and hard ciders. Cap off your getaway with a cozy dinner at **Ellijay Wood Fired Pizza**, where you can share a classic Margherita Autentico or toast to your memorable trip with their Gilmer County Sangria.

← Left: Buckley Vineyards
Above: Ellijay Wood Fired Pizza

Right: Downtown Ellijay
Below: River Street Tavern



Friends' Holiday Getaway

Gather your friends for a festive escape to Ellijay, where the spirit of the holidays comes alive in a cozy, picturesque setting. Against the backdrop of Hallmark Christmas-esque winter landscapes, make memories you'll keep long after the season ends.

DAY ONE

Start your getaway with a visit to the rustic and cozy **Ellijay Coffeehouse**. Their daily artisan bread, scones, and biscotti are the perfect companions to a handcrafted pour-over coffee. Post-breakfast, head to **downtown Ellijay's** local shops for some browsing and those last-minute gifts, which are sure to please even the pickiest in your group. For lunch, enjoy a local favorite, **Cantaberry Restaurant**, where dishes like the apple pecan spinach salad or the Cantaberry Club sandwich offer a tasty pick-me-up after a shopping spree. End your day with dinner and drinks on the heated patio at **The Roof**, savoring half-braised chicken with peach jalapeño sauce while you enjoy the stunning holiday view.



DAY TWO

Begin your second morning at **Country Corner Kitchen**, fueling up with a fluffy bologna biscuit or breakfast tacos. After some exploring around, enjoy a touch of New Orleans with blackened shrimp and crawfish tails for lunch at the **Cajun Depot Grill**. Later, warm up with a glass of wine by the fire at **Chateau Meichtry**, taking in the scenic mountain landscape. End your evening with a drive to see the **Holiday Lights of Ellijay**, sure to add holiday spirit to your trip.

DAY THREE

Kick off your morning at **Bev's Diner**, where retro charm sets the stage for a trip down memory lane over a delicious, cheesy omelet. Then, hit up Ellijay's **Antiques Trail**, collecting a trail passport from the visitors' center to uncover treasures in charming shops and earn a souvenir. Refuel with a hearty meal, like a steakhouse burger or fried tomato BLT at **River Street Tavern**. As evening falls, wander through **downtown Ellijay's** festive decorations. End your trip with a lively dinner at **La Catrina**, featuring street tacos and unique margaritas like the Hidden Gem, blending red wine, peach schnapps, and fresh lime juice—and toast an unforgettable holiday getaway.



The Roof

Where the Locals Go

Four Ellijay residents in the food and hospitality business share their favorite spots in town

BY LIA PICARD



Annette Cavallaro

OWNER, ELLIJAY'S LITTLE ITALIAN

Family brought Annette Cavallaro to Ellijay in 2022, but it quickly became home. She owned an Italian restaurant and food truck in New York

and brought that unique flavor to Ellijay when she took over what was once an ice cream shop. She kept the ice cream and added Italian street food like panini and calzones. "I've made a lot of friends in the short time that I've been here, so it's been really good."

FOR RISOTTO

The Butcher & Bottle's upscale-casual ambiance lends itself nicely to seafood and steaks, but Cavallaro's favorite dish hides in the sides menu: wild mushroom risotto. The creamy rice dish bursts with smoked

locally grown mushrooms and parmesan.

FOR AN OUTING WITH FRIENDS

"I like to go to The Tea Room at A Little Baked Bakery, because then you can share a pot of tea with your friends and have some pastries," says Cavallaro. The afternoon tea includes sandwiches, English scones, and baked treats.

FOR A TASTE OF NEW ORLEANS

It's a rare treat, but if Cavallaro craves something Cajun, she heads to Cajun Depot. "The standouts there are the catfish po'boy and hush puppies."



Aubrey Miller

BARTENDER,
RIVER STREET TAVERN

When Aubrey Miller moved to Ellijay in 2006, she was a teenager—and not quite thrilled to live in the mountains. Seventeen years later, she loves it. “Now I really like that it’s secluded and safe,” says Miller. “I like all the wineries and I definitely love the weather here.”

FOR AMERICAN DISHES

Miller used to work at Cantaberry but still frequents the eatery. “I love the chicken salad; I love all the soups,” Miller says. A self-proclaimed dessert fiend, she can’t resist the coconut cake.

FOR WINE

Of the region’s many wine destinations, Buckley Vineyards is her favorite. “I just think the wine is the best,” says Miller. “It’s so pretty and just different from the other wineries.”

FOR A SWEET TREAT

Miller loves visiting Das Kaffee Haus in downtown Ellijay. “The coffee is just so good, and they have so many different pastries. Every time I’m in there I’m like, ‘Do I really need to get three things?’ But I want to.”



Chase McDuffie

OWNER, 29 NORTH WINE & ART

Located downtown, 29 North Wine & Art doubles as a wine tasting room and art gallery. McDuffie, who has called Ellijay home for five years, partners with local restaurants so guests can easily bring food to the tasting room (though many opt to grab a drink before dinner and eat at one of the nearby establishments).

FOR MEXICAN

For a Mexican fix, McDuffie heads to Taqueria El Ranchito, a no-frills taco shop known for flavorful salsas and authentic dishes. “They make really good food over there if you like tacos and gorditas and sopes.”

FOR DINNER WITH A VIEW

The Roof is his go-to for a dressier evening out. It excels in Southern classics like shrimp and grits. “You’re up on the highest spot in downtown and you can look out and see the entire town while you’re eating—really good ambiance.”

FOR A GOOD BEER

If McDuffie’s not having a drink at his place, he’s headed to River Street Tavern. “They have good bar food and a nice selection of beers.”



Steve Tarantino

OWNER, PIZZA KING

Steve Tarantino called Florida home when he bought a vacation house in Ellijay. Smitten with mountain life, he made Ellijay his full-time home in 2021 and hasn’t looked back. When he moved here, he purchased Pizza King, a longtime staple known for fresh pizzas, Italian dishes, and chicken wings. “We sell about 600 pounds of chicken wings a week,” he says. When he’s off the clock, Tarantino enjoys exploring Ellijay’s other dining options.

FOR GRAIN BOWLS

For something lighter, he heads to The Shack, downtown. “It’s got good things like tuna bowls and you can get quinoa, rice, and different veggies and proteins,” says. “It’s very fresh.”

FOR A STEAK DINNER

“We like to go to The Butcher & Bottle,” Tarantino says. “They have a nice bar.” He and his wife like to order a glass of wine and a nice steak at the cozy downtown restaurant.

FOR CLASSIC DISHES

Tarantino enjoys Cantaberry’s indoor-outdoor vibe and says it reminds him of a diner. “There’s a pastry case full of cakes and pies, and they have good sandwiches,” he says. “You can get a burger, or a soup and salad if you want to eat light.”

Treasure Hunting

Head out for a shopping adventure on the Ellijay Antiques Trail

BY LISA MOWRY

Ellijay is a hot spot for antiques lovers. For an easy way to find the town's best antiques stores, stop by the Ellijay Visitors Center to pick up a map of the Ellijay Antiques Trail. After getting your guide stamped at each location, return for a complimentary souvenir. Plans are in place for a digital passport later this year.



Antiques on North Main photo: Carolyn Slavenas Photography



Clockwise from top right circle:
The Third Hummingbird,
Southern Flare, Linda's Outback
Antiques, Rey's Relics, Antiques
on North Main



Antiques on North Main

Conveniently located in the heart of downtown Ellijay, this store has a wide and varying selection of antique furniture from England. In addition, they carry vintage collectibles such as Majolica and Ironstone china, antique books and silver, and vintage jewelry. Check their Facebook page regularly to see new items: antique cameras, vintage perfume bottles, and one-of-a-kind artisan pieces from Europe are a few of their unique wares.

Linda's Outback Antiques

Look for the big red barn and "Big Foot" wooden sculpture just off Ellijay's square to find 6,500 square feet of merchandise for perusing. Full of a wide array of items both old and new, you might find vintage clothing, new cowboy boots, custom birdhouses,

LPs and retro lunchboxes, and old signs next to handmade jewelry. "We wanted to provide an atmosphere where people can have an experience walking through," says owner Calvin Wilson. "Even if they don't buy anything, if they walk out with a smile on their face, I'm happy."

Southern Flare

Once a motel, this charming antiques store has multiple dealers spread out over two floors, with distinct rooms that encourage the thrill of the hunt. Some vendors might sell rustic furniture and accessories, while others include a bee-keeper, a wood carver, and an interior designer selling upscale accessories. "Everyone has a unique style, says owner Tej McCormack. "But a lot of customers come just for the amazing view of the river." As a bonus, Southern Flare is open seven days a week until 6 p.m.



More to Explore

Main Street Antiques & Collectibles: Two floors of relics here include military memorabilia, coins, license plates, and other collectibles.

Misty Hollow Antiques & Collectibles: Home decor, signs, and an array of other accessories fill this spot on North Main Street.

Rey's Relics: Vintage collectibles of all types are ever-changing at Rey's, which might feature Star Wars items, old baseball cards, and comic books.

The Third Hummingbird: Vintage furniture and accessories, with unique jewelry and art, draw people to this Ellijay mainstay.

Unique Ellijay: Vinyl, cassettes, and 8-track tapes draw music-lovers to this store, which also features one-of-a-kind items and gifts.





History to the Core

ELLIJAY'S APPLE ORCHARDS
ARE HEAVILY ROOTED
IN FAMILY LEGACY

By Lia Picard

Apples are synonymous with Ellijay, also known as the Apple Capital of Georgia. While there are plenty of ways to enjoy the natural beauty of Ellijay, from kayaking to hiking, it's hard to beat the region's beautiful orchards set against a backdrop of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Here, you'll find more than 22 varieties of apples that are ripe for the picking late summer through fall.

Apple season in Ellijay starts Labor Day weekend and peaks in mid-October, but many orchards start selling their apples in June into late November. Apple picking is serious business: More than just plucking apples from trees, orchards frequently offer a host of activities, including hayrides, petting zoos, and games. Picking apples is an all-day affair that can entertain anyone, making it an ideal outing for families, friends, and couples alike.

One of the highlights of apple season here is the Georgia Apple Festival, which brings people together over two weekends in October. Established in 1971, the event features fair treats, crafts,



Panorama Orchards



Aaron Family Orchards

Ellijay's orchards offer rich history in addition to the delicious apples and natural beauty.

live music, and demonstrations. Plenty of bites star the red and green fruit, too, including fritters, cider, and pies of all kinds. It's a great time to spend a weekend in Ellijay, visiting both the festival and nearby orchards and farm stores.

Ellijay's orchards offer rich history in addition to the delicious

apples and natural beauty. The region became an apple hub after boll weevils ravaged Georgia's cotton, driving farmers to plant another crop for income. This brought people to the area to plant orchards, many of which are still around.

One longtime business is **Aaron Family Orchards**, which

took root in 1938 when Shafter Aaron purchased about 200 acres, allowing the Aaron family to sell apples wholesale. Today, the farm is much smaller (about six acres), but Aaron Family Orchards is now in the capable hands of Josh Aaron, Shafter's great grandson. "Right now, I'm working to plant some apple



↑
Above: B.J. Reece Orchards;
top right: Aaron Family Orchards;
bottom right: Panorama Orchards



trees, bringing some agritourism opportunities to the orchard,” says Aaron. For now, though, apple-lovers can visit the Aaron Family farm store where they sell their apples, of which they grow about 20 varieties. “When people visit, it’s actually the original building that my great grandparents built,” says Aaron. “The wooden floor is original to the building.” Today the store sells canned goods, baked goods, and gifts in addition to the apples. “It’s all centered around things that we grew up here in Southern Appalachia enjoying,” he adds.

Another Ellijay mainstay is **Panorama Orchards & Farm Market**, where Sarah Stembridge carries on a version of her great grandparents’ legacy. The Stembridge family moved to Ellijay around the 1920s to enjoy the

mountain air. Stembridge’s great grandmother, who worked in a post office, saw an opportunity to ship apples, so they began growing them and selling them to customers up North. It was Stembridge’s parents who built a retail shop on Highway 515 in the ‘80s. “We shifted from wholesale to just all retail. Then we added on to the market, some bakeries, fry kitchens. We continue to evolve according to what our customers request,” says Stembridge.

The Stembridge family no longer grows apples, but the farm store sells locally grown apples as well as apples shipped in from North Carolina. Additionally, there are scratch-made apple-sauce breads, apple brandy cake, and fried apple pies. “The fried pies came from an old recipe that was passed down using dried

apples, which are rehydrated and cooked,” says Stembridge. “This gives it a more intense apple flavor than the prepared filling that a lot of the other apple houses are using.”

For these longtime orchards, the younger generations didn’t always plan on taking over the family business. Stembridge planned on stopping over during a life transition and realized she enjoyed the mountains and the apple business, and she hasn’t looked back after 30 years. For Aaron, it was a chance to carry on his family’s dream. “I kind of had the realization that if I didn’t come home sometime, then the farm would be no more,” he says. “I didn’t want the farm to end on the path it was going, and so I knew I needed to step up or we were going to lose that legacy forever.”

An Apple A Day

Most of these area apple orchards and farm markets are open seasonally, and some offer pick-your-own options.



Aaron Family Orchards offers a large selection of jams, jellies, honey, syrups, chutney, relishes, and baked goods as well as custom gift baskets.

B. J. Reece Orchards features apple cannons, a corn maze, pony rides, and a petting farm, along with a bakery filled with fried pies, donuts, and breads.

Hillcrest Orchards ramps up family fun with cow train rides, giant slides, a vortex tunnel, and a petting farm. It also boasts an apple tree maze, the first of its kind in the Southeast.

Mack Aaron’s Apple House is open all year, serving up more than 10 kinds of homemade fried pies and selling a variety of jams, jellies, ciders, honey, and other goods.

Panorama Orchards & Farm Market offers more than 20 varieties of apples as well as homemade ice cream and fudge and made-from-scratch goodies like applesauce bread and apple brandy cake.

Penland’s Apple House grows a wide assortment of fruits and vegetables, and its farm market features everything from ciders and salsas to peanuts and pork skins.

R&A Orchards is open year-round and sells seasonal produce, including fresh strawberries in the spring. There’s also a well-stocked market and a cafe.

Red Apple Barn offers a U-pick pumpkin patch, a Family Fun Barn, a farm market, and its own cookbook filled with local recipes.

A-peeling Picks

Gilmer Country produces dozens of apple varieties. Here are some favorite types you'll find while visiting the orchards.

By Jennifer Rainey Marquez

Illustrations by Debbie Choi



Ginger Gold

RIPENS: August

FLAVOR: Slightly tart with bright acidity

FUN FACT: The original Ginger Gold seedling was discovered on a Virginia farm six years after Hurricane Camille blew through in 1969.



Gala

RIPENS: Mid-late August

FLAVOR: Sweet, juicy, and crisp. The perfect apple to munch straight to the core.

FUN FACT: Gala is the country's best-selling apple, but you'll find different strains in the South than in other parts of the U.S.



Mutsu

RIPENS: September–October

FLAVOR: Super juicy, sweet, and tart with a hint of spice

FUN FACT: This yellow-green apple was introduced from Japan in the mid-20th century, and is sometimes referred to as Crispin in the U.S.



Granny Smith

RIPENS: October

FLAVOR: Very tart and firm, making them famously great for baking into pies

FUN FACT: According to legend, the first Granny Smiths grew after a farmer's wife—Maria Ann Smith—tossed her crab apple core out of the kitchen window, and it cross-pollinated with another variety.



Yates

RIPENS: October–November

FLAVOR: Juicy, tender, and aromatic

FUN FACT: This heirloom variety was discovered in Fayette County, Georgia, in the 1840s and remains a popular local favorite for making into cider or jelly.



Arkansas Black

RIPENS: Late November

FLAVOR: Crisp and tart with notes of cherry and spice

FUN FACT: This heirloom apple, which was brought from Arkansas in the 1870s, can be starchy when fresh-picked, but the flavor mellows with time, making it a good variety to put away for the winter.



Bear Creek Trail

Mulberry Gap

Roo Mountain Vineyards

White P
Distiller

Red Apple Barn

Cartecay River Brewing Co.

DOWNTOWN ELLIJAY

R & M
Orcha

Tumbling Waters Trail

Coosawattee river

Penland's Apple House

Grapes and Ladders Winery

Panorama Farm Market

Ott Farms and Vineyard

Engelheim Vineyards

Chateau
Win

Map illustration by Kerry Hyndman

Ellijay

Expedition: Bigfoot!



Picture Perfect Adventures

Ellijay River Vineyards

Wine Shop



Cartecay & Craft



Stover Mountain Orchards



Aaron Family Orchards

Ellijay River

Wine Shop

Cartecay Vineyards

Reece's Cider Co.

Meichtry Winery

Wine Shop

Fainting Goat Vineyards

Mountain Valley Farm Store

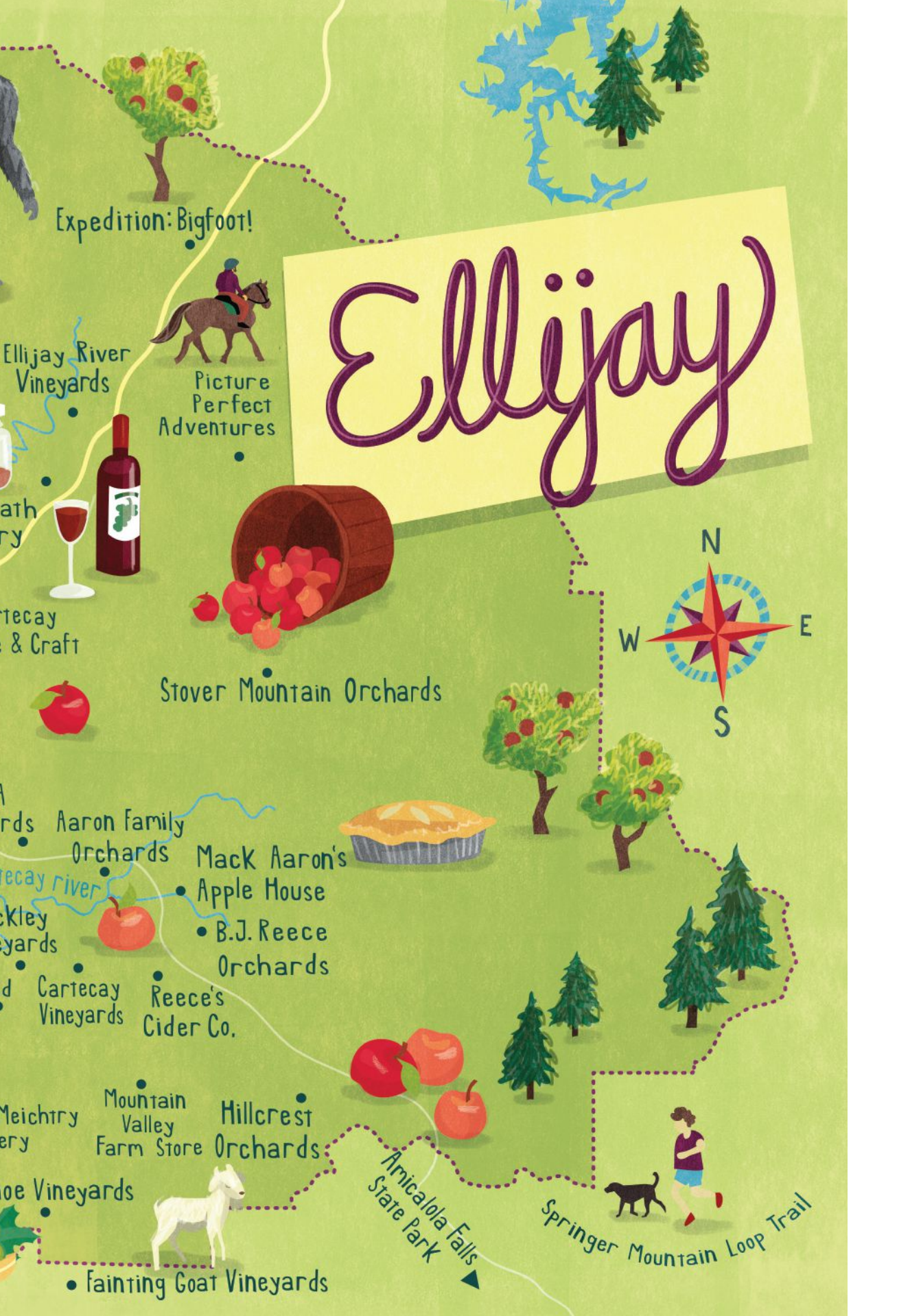
Hillcrest Orchards

Amicalola Falls State Park

Springer Mountain Loop Trail



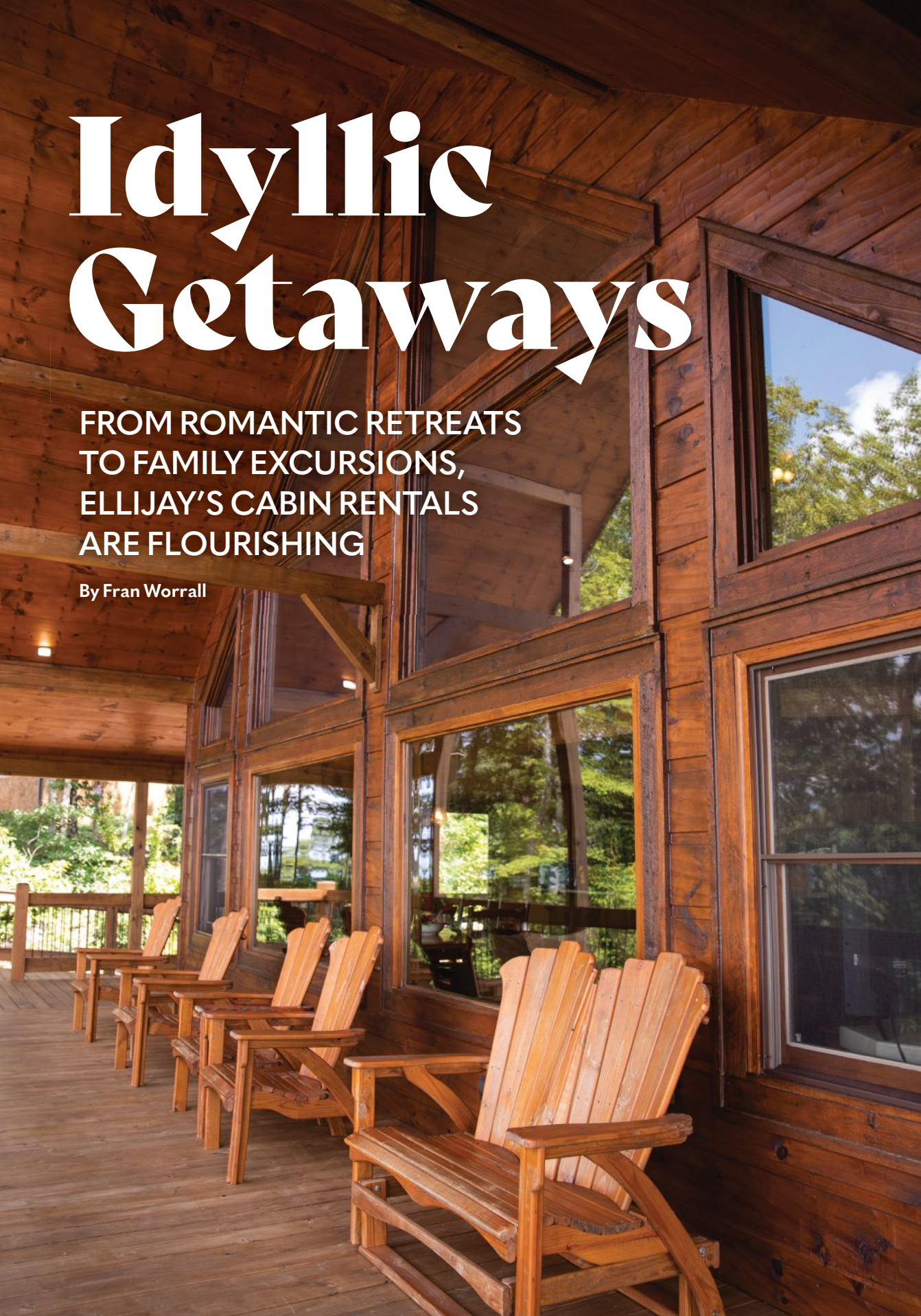
Mack Aaron's Apple House
• B.J. Reece Orchards



Idyllic Getaways

FROM ROMANTIC RETREATS
TO FAMILY EXCURSIONS,
ELLIJAY'S CABIN RENTALS
ARE FLOURISHING

By Fran Worrall



One of the most important parts of planning a vacation is choosing a place to stay. In fact, the accommodation is often as important as the destination itself. And while hotels are standard choices, they sometimes leave travelers wanting more. According to a recent report by *TripAdvisor*, there's a growing trend toward vacation home rentals as consumers seek increased flexibility, more spacious lodgings, and cost savings.

In Ellijay, a town known for its beautiful scenery, excellent dining, vibrant shopping, and abundance of outdoor activities, cabin rentals are more popular than ever. Visitors looking for outdoor fun can rent a cabin close to the Chattahoochee National Forest, while those more interested in exploring the area's restaurants and shops can select a cabin closer to downtown.

"After we reopened following the pandemic, business was booming," said Nicole Tinker, director of operations at **Blue Sky Cabin Rentals**. "Demand is higher now than it was before 2020." In business since 2004, Blue Sky offers 185 properties in Ellijay and the surrounding area. Ranging in size from one to seven bedrooms, prices start at \$135 per night and go up to \$1,500 per night. "All types of vacationers rent our properties, from honeymooners to book clubs," she said. "We also have a lot of large groups, such as church gatherings, family reunions, girlfriend retreats, and gentlemen's fishing trips."

At **Mountain Oasis Cabin Rentals**, which opened in 2014, Debbie Osborne and her husband, Eddie, offer 65 properties—ranging from one bedroom to five bedrooms—in Ellijay and nearby towns. "After staying in a cabin, most people don't go back to a hotel," she said. "This is a home





away from home. You have everything you need, from sheets to dishes. A cabin also gives you more of an experience, often at a more affordable price point.”

Kathy Crisp, general manager at **Sliding Rock Cabins**, says privacy is the biggest advantage in renting a cabin instead of staying in a motel or an inn. “Hotels can be crowded and noisy, while cabins are quiet and secluded. You have plenty of living space and your own kitchen. And you can bring

your pets with you.”

The latter benefit is especially important to guests who have a tough time enjoying a vacation without their four-legged family members. Sliding Rock, in business since 2001, has gained a reputation for welcoming furry friends. Indeed, its website declares that it is the pet-friendliest company in the universe. All the cabins—numbering around 40—allow dogs, and several are cat-friendly as well.

“We know that pets are family, and we don’t want guests to have to leave a family member behind,” Crisp said, noting that no breeds are banned, and there’s no additional charge for large dogs. “Our cabins are prepped and waiting for your pets, with treats, toys, bowls, beds, and even towels for muddy paws.” Many of the cabins have gated decks and fenced yards. Similarly, Mountain Oasis and Blue Sky offer pet-friendly accommodations. About 90 percent of

In Ellijay, a town known for its beautiful scenery, excellent dining, vibrant shopping, and abundance of outdoor activities, cabin rentals are more popular than ever.

Mountain Oasis cabins welcome dogs, while Blue Sky has more than 50 pet-friendly cabins.

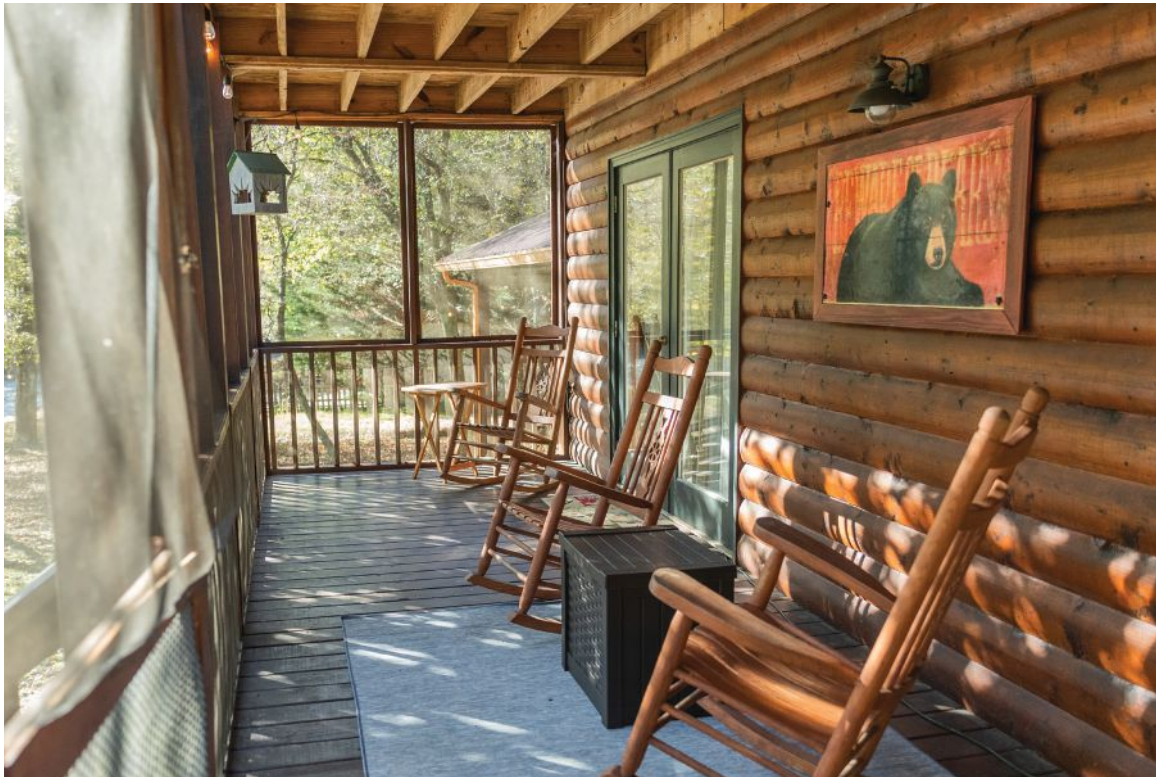
There's no shortage of amenities either, including hot tubs and saunas, swimming pools, wood-burning fireplaces, walk-in showers, game rooms, and more. "Every home in the Blue Sky collection has a hot tub. It's a requirement," Tinker said. There's also a concierge service, which is especially popular with honeymooners and couples celebrating anniversaries, birthdays, and other special occasions. "We have a guest relations department that can set up everything from horseback riding to grocery purchases. We're a one-stop shop."

At Sliding Rock and Mountain Oasis, concierge services will deliver gift baskets and groceries, make restaurant reservations, book massages, and connect visitors with local chefs who can cook

a gourmet meal on site. Mountain Oasis also offers its own laundry service. "We provide the linens and do all the laundering in our own commercial facility," Osborne said.

Accommodation styles range from Craftsman to contemporary. Many cabins have waterfront access; others have breathtaking mountain views. Some of the rentals at Blue Sky are located inside the Coosawattee River Resort, a planned community at the junction of the Cartecay and Ellijay rivers.

Regardless of how or where visitors book, it's important to research the rental companies as well as the properties themselves. "There are so many things to consider when booking," Tinker said. "Do you want to fish, hike, or go whitewater rafting? Or are you more interested in shopping and dining out? Will children be in the group? Or is this a romantic





Ellijay Cabin Rental Fact Sheet

- **Number of cabin rentals:** 1,500
- **Busiest months:** March, July, and October
- **Slowest months:** February and August
- **Most concentrated cabin locations:** Coosawattee River and Walnut Mountain
- **Advance booking:** 27 percent of visitors book more than 60 days in advance. 47 percent book 14 days or less in advance.

(Source: Gilmer County Chamber of Commerce)

getaway? What kinds of amenities are most important to you?"

Osborne suggests reading online reviews. "They will give you a good idea of what to expect and will alert you to any problems other guests have encountered. You can learn a lot simply by doing some homework." She also recommends contacting the rental company by phone before booking online. "Don't rely solely on email and texting. Have an actual conversation with someone who can answer your questions and guide you to the right property."

Additionally, Crisp advised, be sure to understand the rental company's policies and procedures—check-in and check-out times, required fees, pet policies, cancellation procedures, and the like. Ask about safety, too. Does the property have a smoke detector, carbon monoxide detector, and a fire extinguisher? And don't forget travel insurance. "It's not expensive, and it protects your money," Crisp said.

When it comes to extra-special cabins, Tinker recommends Blue Sky's "Moonlight Hideaway," especially for a romantic retreat. The property boasts a hot tub, a private deck, an outdoor fire pit, a wood-burning fireplace in the primary bedroom, and panoramic views of the mountains. Osborne is especially fond of "Creekside Fairytale," a Mountain Oasis cabin nestled in a lush forest setting and steps away from some of the area's best hiking trails.

Crisp of Sliding Rock Cabins can't choose just one special property. "They are all great," she concluded. "It really depends on the season. Water cabins do well in the spring and summer, and mountain view cabins are best in the fall and winter."

Top Tips for Ellijay Vacationers

Interested in renting an Ellijay cabin for your next mountain getaway? Follow this checklist of travel tips offered by Kathy Crisp, general manager of Sliding Rock Cabins; Debbie Osborn, co-owner of Mountain Oasis Cabin Rentals; and Nicole Tinker, director of operations at Blue Sky Cabins.

Research the area. Most visitors, especially ones with only a week or less of vacation time, find it helpful to narrow their itineraries. The Gilmer County Chamber of Commerce website is a great place to find out about upcoming events in Ellijay and the surrounding area.

Pack comfortable shoes. Hiking, shopping, and wine tasting require a lot of walking.

Don't forget the insect repellent. Warm-weather vacationers often encounter ticks, chiggers, and other insects, especially if their cabin is in the woods.

Bring an appetite. Ellijay has dozens of great restaurants, ranging from brew pubs and bistros to world-class fine dining establishments.

Think about transportation. Vacationers will need a car to get around, especially if the cabin is in a secluded area. Although services such as Uber and Lyft operate in Ellijay, those services are limited.



In Good Taste

THREE LOCAL RESTAURANTS
SHOW LOVE THROUGH COOKING

By Carly Cooper



Cantaberry



Items are made in-house, often using family recipes, with quality ingredients.

Ellijay is a small town with big flavors. Its restaurant scene is vast and varied, ensuring there's something for every preference and palate. The one thing that's consistent across every local restaurant is the passion—Ellijay residents cook with love. Items are made in-house, often using family recipes, with quality ingredients. Don't know where to eat? Try one of these top choices.

A Family Affair

Husband-and-wife team Case and Jessica Bruner have operated **Cantaberry** since 2008, pouring love into their sandwiches, soups, and salads. Though Cantaberry is best known as a lunch spot—both the locations in Ellijay and Blue Ridge serve it seven days a week—the Ellijay restaurant also offers dinner Wednesday through Saturday. Cozy and quaint, it's housed

in a former movie theater and still features the original windows, as well as brick and wood, for an old-school feel.

Look for house-made soups like tomato basil and chicken and wild rice, a popular Reuben, and comforting chicken salad. In the evening, the restaurant serves simple Southern fare such as burgers, meatloaf, and country fried steak, along with collard greens, macaroni and cheese,

MAKE AT HOME

Cantaberry Chicken and Wild Rice Soup

SERVES 6

INGREDIENTS

4 cups hot water
15-ounce package Uncle Ben's
Country Inn Chicken and Wild
Rice with seasoning packet
3/4 cup heavy cream
6 teaspoons chicken
bouillon powder
1 cup cooked chicken, shredded

INSTRUCTIONS

In a large saucepan, combine hot water, wild rice mix, and seasoning packet. Add heavy cream and bouillon powder. Bring to a boil and cook until thickened. Stir in chicken. Serve hot.

and squash casserole. Pair your meal with Georgia craft beer on tap or Reece's hard cider. Wine is available, too. For dessert, there's coconut cake from Just Like Home Bakery in Blue Ridge and carrot cake from Alpine Bakery in Alpharetta. Cantaberry does not accept reservations but welcomes walk-ins or calling ahead.

Crafted with Kindness

The Butcher & Bottle strives to be known for its hospitality. By focusing on the little things, owners Adam Anacker and Brian Stanley—who also operate B&B Tavern Sixes and B&B Tavern Free Home—ensure every guest leaves with a smile on their face. Formerly Emily's, The Butcher & Bottle offers two environments in one: It's an upscale restaurant with a patio downstairs and a tavern upstairs, seating a total of 250 people.

Expect beef empanadas, tuna tartare, lobster hush puppies, and beef-and-pork meatballs—and that's just the appetizers. There's a seasonal salad, salmon BLT, and multiple seafood options such as trout and sea bass. Signature items include a dry-aged Duroc pork chop, short rib ragout pappardelle, and a chicken stack with apple chutney. Don't forget to order a cocktail to complement your meal. The Gin Julep and 1920 Old Fashioned are staples.

Every week, The Butcher & Bottle hosts a variety of events. Wednesdays are Open Mic Night, Fridays are Prime Rib Night, and Saturdays feature live music. Come Sunday, brunch offerings range from "eggs your way" to an open-face French toast burger.



The Butcher & Bottle



The Butcher & Bottle

**The one thing
that's consistent
across every
local restaurant
is the passion—
Ellijay residents
cook with love.**

MAKE AT HOME

***The Butcher & Bottle
Pan-Fried Trout with Spinach***

SERVES 1

INGREDIENTS

*For Trout Breading
(makes extra):*

- 4 cups panko
- 2 bunches parsley
- ½ cup red pepper flakes
- 1½ cups parmesan cheese

For Trout:

- olive oil
- 2 trout filets
- 4 ounces spinach
- 2 ounces bacon-onion mix
- Sherry vinaigrette)

INSTRUCTIONS

Combine all ingredients for trout breading and blend until well mixed. Store for up to five days. Next, heat olive oil in a saute pan. Coat trout with breading. Sear each side for approximately two minutes. Place saute pan in 350-degree oven and cook for three to four minutes. In a separate pan, saute spinach with bacon-onion mix for one to two minutes. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Drizzle fish with sherry vinaigrette and garnish with grilled lemon. Serve alongside spinach.



Cartecay River Pizza Company

Friendly Faces, Fun Flavors

From slices to pies, **Cartecay River Pizza Company** slings goodness year-round. The wood-

fired pizzas are hand-tossed and cooked to perfection in a brick oven. Look for specials such as stuffed peppers, chicken pesto pizza, and stromboli supreme (with mushrooms, green peppers,

onions, bacon, pepperoni, sausage, and basil oil), available for dine in or take out. Add some breadsticks or garlic knots for a true feast. Don't feel like pizza? Salads, subs, and pasta are always on the menu. Everything is made from scratch in-house, from the sauces to the chicken parmesan. In fact, Cartecay is the only restaurant in Ellijay to use LaGrander's Hillside Dairy whole milk cheese.

"We don't use processed food," says owner Abigail Prieto, who also operates The Shack of Ellijay and Bev's Diner. "It's not about the money for us. Everyone deserves to eat better."

Her brother, Adan Prieto, is the executive chef; their family has been in the restaurant business for three generations. His dream was to have a brick-oven pizza business, and Cartecay's cozy space with a total of 50 to 60 seats indoors and out is a perfect fit.

MAKE AT HOME

Cartecay River Pizza Company House Marinara Sauce

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

1 large can (28 ounces) whole peeled tomatoes*
1 medium yellow onion, peeled and halved
2 large cloves garlic, peeled but left whole
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
1 teaspoon dried oregano
Pinch of red pepper flakes (optional, omit if sensitive to spice)
Salt, to taste
Optional, for topping: grated Parmesan cheese, chopped fresh basil, additional olive oil

INSTRUCTIONS

In a medium, heavy-bottomed saucepan, combine the tomatoes (*with their juices), halved onion, garlic cloves, olive oil, oregano, and red pepper flakes (if using). Bring the sauce to a simmer over medium-high heat, then lower the heat to keep the sauce at a slow, steady simmer for about 45 minutes, or until droplets of oil float free of the tomatoes. Stir occasionally, and use a sturdy wooden spoon to crush the tomatoes against the side of the pot after about 15 minutes.

Ellijay's Treats Trail

Indulge at one of these tried-and-true spots designed to tantalize your taste buds

A Little Baked Bakery

Sample cookies, pies, cakes, tortes, and more at the new location in historic downtown Ellijay.

Arlowe's Bakehouse

This boutique cottage bakery focuses on artisan breads with gluten-free options available.

B. J. Reece Orchards

Apple products are the name of the game at this u-pick spot complete with a petting farm, pony rides, and country bakery.

Bavarian Chocolatier and Fudge Shop

Located on the square, this sweet shop makes all its treats in house, from truffles to chocolate-covered strawberries.

Das Kaffee Haus

From specialty coffee drinks to pastries, Das Kaffee is the perfect place to taste European-inspired goodies.

Ellijay Coffeehouse

In addition to paninis, this warm and welcoming coffee lounge sells cookies, scones, biscotti, and cinnamon "stix"—perfect for a sweet tooth.

High Mountain Bread

A rustic bakery, High Mountain serves sandwiches on artisan sourdough. Pair it with a Danish, bread pudding square, or chocolate croissant.

Panorama Orchards

This family-owned fruit farm has been in business since the 1920s. Be sure to try the homemade ice cream, apple cider donuts, or apple cinnamon bread.

R & A Orchards

One of the few places you can indulge in apple-stuffed fried pies year-round.

The Gumdrops Fun Shop

Pick your favorite candies from the self-service bin—enjoy gummies, chocolates, and sour options.

Bavarian Chocolatier and Fudge Shop



A Little Baked Bakery



All in the Family

A close-up photograph of a hand pouring red wine from a glass decanter into a wine glass. The wine glass has a logo that reads "BUCKLEY VINEYARD WINERY" and "Buckley VINEYARD". The background is a warm, wooden surface, possibly a table or bar.

UNCORK THE TASTE
OF THE MOUNTAINS
AT THESE FAMILY-OWNED
ELLIJAY VINEYARDS

By Katie Kelly Bell

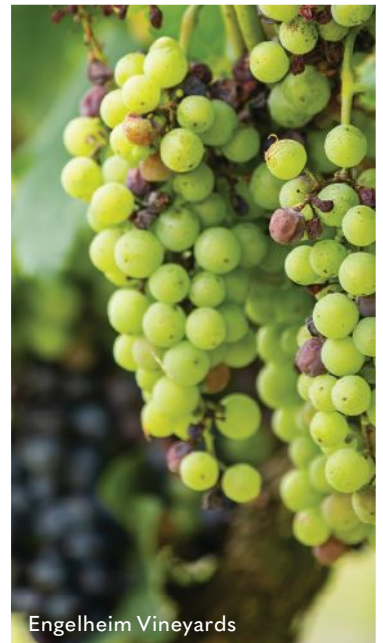


The best way to truly explore and discover a destination is through authentic experiences with locals, and visiting Ellijay’s wineries is the perfect way to do that. This bucolic slice of North Georgia is home to several family-owned wineries where visitors can enjoy a truly locally grown taste of the mountains—just consider it a bonus that the wines are delicious and the mountain setting is beautiful.

Buckley Vineyards

Kevin Buckley and his wife, Gay, originally planned on a quiet, idyllic retirement when they bought their land in 2017. When

locals started asking them if they were planning to plant grapes, “I hadn’t thought much about that part of it. I was just going to enjoy the other wineries. But of course,” he laughs, “the magic of winemaking pulled us in and we ended up planting an acre.” Even then, Buckley was only intending to sell his fruit to other wineries. “As time went on, I realized it was smarter to get into the winemaking part of it, and what started as a light retirement project became a big retirement project.” Today, Buckley, who was an architect and developer in his first career, not only farms eight acres of vineyards, he and Gay (who is an interior designer) also operate a bustling tasting room and event facility as well as



Engelheim Vineyards

overnight accommodations in the vineyard.

The tasting room, says Buckley, "is a stunner," thanks in large part to his wife's talented eye for style blended with his architectural background. "It has North Georgia-meets-industrial chic with a splash of country; people are stunned when they walk in." In terms of winemaking, Buckley aims for the top, trying to craft wine on the same level as California or Washington and keeping in mind the importance of tannins and structure. They are willing to experiment, too. "We make an apple wine that is dry like a sauvignon blanc. The wine

connoisseurs who try it love it. It's been a very successful wine for us." They also craft an orange wine (which legally must be called "amber") from vidal blanc that they crush and leave on the skins for months. Says Buckley, "It's complex, dry, and full-bodied with a caramel bourbon flavor on the finish."

Despite the retirement plan that turned into a full-time job, Buckley is happy with the move. "You have to roll into whatever happens in life, and one of my favorite things is to hang out on weekends and meet all the people who come through. That's really the best part of this."

Ott Vineyards

Mike Ott started his business career as an agricultural entrepreneur at the age of 17, when he opened his own fernery (a cut foliage business) in Deland, Florida. Ott successfully grew the company only to lose business to Mexico years later. Seeking a new opportunity, he hit the road. "I went for a rideabout," he explains, "I had to find something to do to make a living. I visited my brother, who lived in Ellijay, and he talked me into staying." It was only a matter of time before Ott grew busy consulting with local winemakers on trellising and other projects—always keeping an





Ott Vineyards

The best way to truly explore and discover a destination is through authentic experiences with locals, and visiting Ellijay's wineries is the perfect way to do that.

eye out for a property of his own. During that same time, Ott met and married Lee, his wife of eight years, and together they found and built what Ott describes as “the winery with the best view anywhere—there is not one rooftop for miles, just endless mountains and mountains.”

His time spent searching was also an opportunity to research and discover which grapes performed best in the North Georgia climate. Ott is most proud of

his seyval blanc, vidal blanc, chambourcin, and traminette bottlings. Ott Farms is about eight acres of vine, and demand has been so strong that that he has since built two additions to the winery tasting room and tripled the size of his parking lot. Presently, Ott produces about 1,000 cases of wine per year, and hopes to start work on rental cabins for visitors, which he says are in high demand.

As much as Ott loves farming

work, what he’s come to love most about life in Ellijay is the community. “I love to work, and making money was important, but the biggest surprise for me has been the support from the locals and the relationships we have made. It’s just like one big family up here.” Almost 75 percent of Ott’s harvest help is comprised of local volunteers. He says, “There is an entire community that supports the wine industry here; it’s really special.”



Engelheim Vineyards

More Sips

Cartecay River Brewing delivers on people-pleasing libations whether you opt for one of their signature Seltzer Slushies or something more unique such as their Old Goat Brett Barleywine sour that gets barrel aged and re-fermented with wild brettanomyces yeast.

Cartecay Vineyards hosts live music every weekend and has several Instagram-worthy tasting spots, especially the charming vineyard bridge. Grab a table on the popular chimney patio and enjoy the honeyed and floral aromatics of their Pymment—a blend of mead and traminette.

Cartecay Wine & Craft blends together the best of both worlds in this downtown Ellijay tasting room that features specialties from their brewing and winemaking production as well as selections from other Georgia vineyards.

Chateau Meichtry Family Winery and Vineyard is an official Monarch Waystation for migrating butterflies and has a lively setup on weekends with food trucks, live music, and your choice of places to idle with a glass of wine. Don’t leave without tasting George’s Cuvee, their gold-medal winner.

Ellijay River Vineyard is home to 20 acres of North Georgia scenery threaded by vineyards and the pretty Ellijay River—which makes for a lovely setting to enjoy any one of winemaker Marijn Brummer’s aromatic wines (he makes 20 different ones), but don’t miss his seyval blanc, which is always the top seller.

Engelheim Vineyards has 62 acres of rolling hills and 15 acres of vineyards; this award-winning winery is a great place to bring a group for a relaxing afternoon of premium wines and local Georgia bites. Their onsite tasting room has a fireplace and sweeping mountain views.

Reece’s Cider Co. offers 16 different ciders on tap, all crafted with estate-grown apples. Enjoy a flight of four tastes or just tuck into a glass of the popular Caramel Apple expression. Owner Taner Reece is a fourth-generation farmer, and this is the first cidery in Ellijay.



Reece's Cider Co.



Cartecay Wine & Craft



Chateau Meichtry

Journey Into Adventure

GILMER COUNTY HAS OUTDOOR FUN FOR THE ACTIVE TRAVELER

By Tony Rehagen



Vacation isn't always about the destination—often it's about the journey. Think about your favorite pleasure cruise or weekend road trip. Sometimes vacation is the journey. You want to move and explore verdant forests, misty mountains, and placid lakes. You yearn to challenge yourself against rugged trails and roaring rivers. You want to hunt and fish. If action and adventure are your favorite pastimes, look no further than the Blue Ridge Mountains and Gilmer County, Georgia, where the terrain will test your body, the natural beauty will inspire your mind, and the outdoor experience will replenish your soul.

Horseback Riding & ATV Adventures

True explorers prefer to survey their surroundings from the back of a horse. **Picture Perfect Adventures** can get you settled in the saddle and guide you and your new four-legged friend comfortably across mountain streams and up wooded Appalachian trails on their private, 90-acre equestrian estate just outside of Ellijay. Or, if you prefer a little more horsepower, you can also peel out in a rented ATV to kick up some gravel and explore the rustic terrain.

Kayaking

The waterways of Gilmer County are like an amusement park for paddlers—and there's a ride for everyone. If you want to get wet in the whitewater, there are Class II and III rapids you can tackle; for the younger, less experienced, or chill-seekers, Cartecay River has plenty of peaceful scenic stretches. And if



you're unsure, start at **Cartecay River Experience**, where expert kayakers can dole out advice and gear, shuttle you to and from the put-in point, and even go along for a guided float trip.

Mountain Biking

They don't call Ellijay the Mountain Bike Capital of Georgia for nothing. With hundreds of miles of scenic mountain terrain to pedal, the experts at **Cartecay Bike Shop** can help you pick the right grade and length for you and your gang, outfit you with any gear you might need, and even host you for a social ride. Or you can take a B Line to

Mulberry Gap basecamp for a more immersive experience splashing through the creeks, scrambling along ridgelines, and darting through tunnels—and even unwind afterward with a cold craft beer.

Hiking

Sometimes, all you need is the ground beneath your feet. Gilmer County, the southern terminus of the Appalachian Trail, accommodates with hiking trails of all grades and difficulties—all breathtakingly scenic. And there's no shortage of photo-ops: Bear Creek Trail leads you to the

Carters Lake



Gennett Poplar, the second-tallest tree in Georgia (see sidebar); and Fort Mountain State Park's 1.6-mile Lake Loop Trail takes you and the family past the rock wall, stone tower, and many picture-perfect overlooks.

Tubing

Ever notice how vacation can often feel like a lot of work? Don't misunderstand: It's great to get a little exercise through hiking, biking, paddling, and swimming. But sometimes you also want to, you know, relax. All you need is a visit to [Cartecay River Experience](#), where they will set you up with an inner tube, a life jacket, and shuttle service to and from the Cartecay River running through the majestic North Georgia mountain beauty. The rest is just a lazy, peaceful day on the water.

Boating

With 3,200 surface acres and 62 miles of natural shoreline, Carters Lake is the deepest reservoir in Georgia—and one of the most scenic lakes in the Southeast. Be the captain of your own vacation and disembark from one of dozens of public ramps or rent a pontoon from [Carters Lake Marina & Resort](#). Swim in the cool, clear waters, cast a line to lure some fish, and drift casually away from the stressors and concerns of the workaday world.

Camping

While you're biking, floating, or hiking through Gilmer County, why don't you stay a day or two? The lush, wooded foothills; dazzling streams, rivers, and lakes; and breathtaking mountain vistas are best enjoyed when you've settled in amongst them. Pitch

your tent below the tree shade of Fort Mountain State Park or along the banks of Carters Lake; set up family camp at [Plum Nelly](#) or [Diamond Lure](#); or park the RV at [Talona Ridge RV Resort](#), with a pool and easy access to nearby vineyards in Ellijay.

Fly Fishing

The memories and experience of Gilmer County are usually sufficient, but if you're looking for a souvenir, look no further than the trophy trout that swim in abundance here. Winter and spring cool the waters of Cartecay River, Ellijay River, and the surrounding creeks, beckoning schools of these ray-finned freshwater dwellers. And if you need gear, advice, or a guide to help you master this graceful angling technique, look no further than [Reel Em In Guide Services](#) in Ellijay, where professionals can hook you up.

The Gennett Poplar

At the end of Bear Creek Camp Road, a rutted two-mile lane near Ellijay, you'll come to a fork. To the left, a sign says, is Pinhoti Trail. Go right toward the sound of the trickling waters of Bear Creek, which runs along most of its namesake trail. The sun streams through gaps in the thick green canopy. The trail only climbs 200 feet over its 1.7-mile length. Follow the bright green blazes, hopping on stones to cross the shallow creek at times. A walking stick will help you balance. Watch for wildlife and mountain bikers. And about .8 miles, you'll come to steps that descend to the tree.

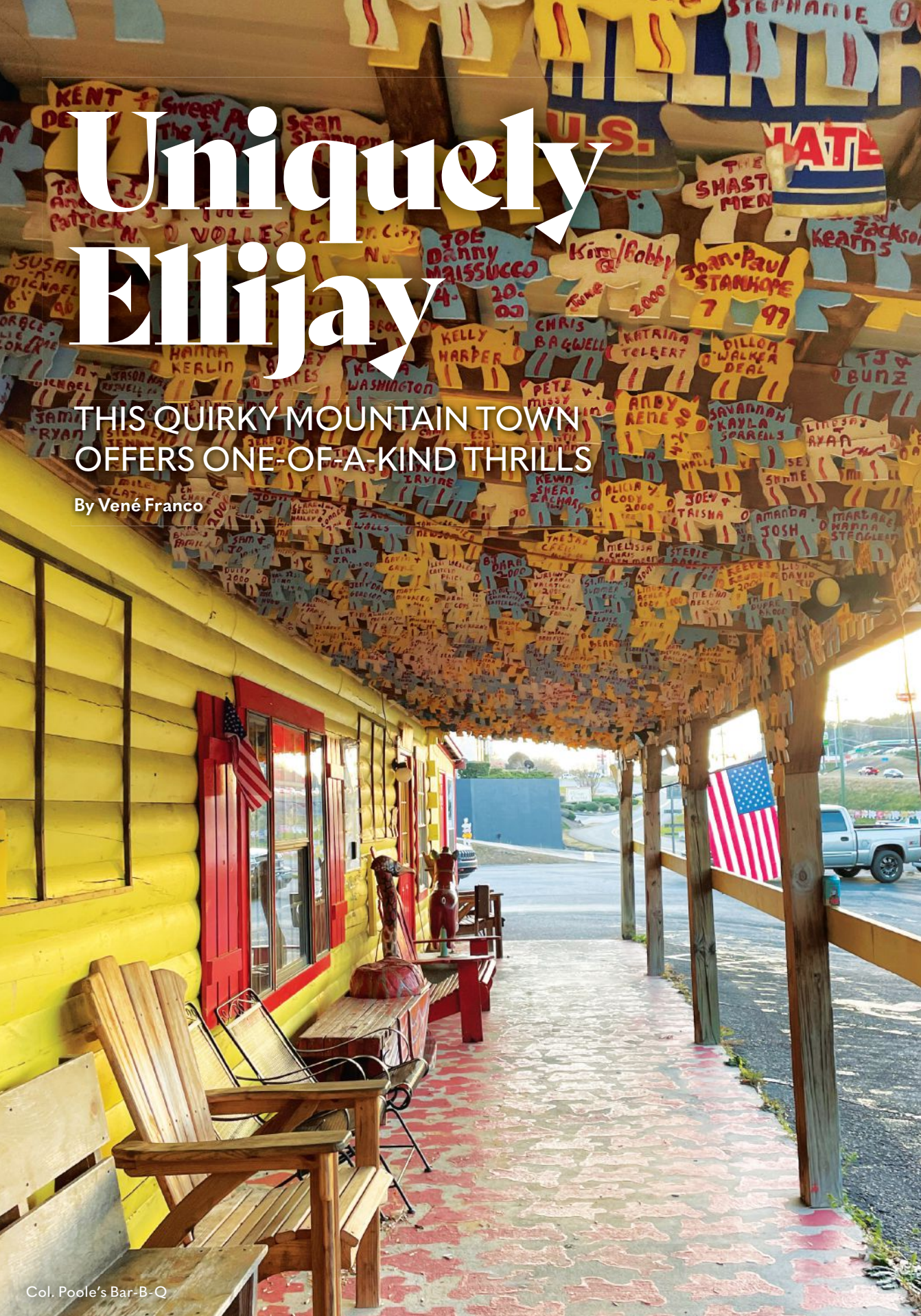
Named for a family who owned a nearby lumber mill, the **Gennett Poplar** has defied generations of lumberjacks and other hazards. Its base circumference is 18 feet, making it the second-largest tree in Georgia, meaning it is likely one of the oldest. Take a moment, stare up at the poplar, and capture a photo of a piece of history.



If action and adventure are your favorite pastimes, look no further than the Blue Ridge Mountains and Gilmer County, Georgia.

Cartecay River





Uniquely Ellijay

THIS QUIRKY MOUNTAIN TOWN
OFFERS ONE-OF-A-KIND THRILLS

By Vené Franco

Expedition: Bigfoot



Expedition: Bigfoot

A menacing, lifelike Bigfoot towers over the cabin's entry and music from *Jurassic Park* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark* plays from the front porch. Hiking boots and camping gear are strewn about as if hikers are in residence, and Tibetan prayer flags wave gently yet forebodingly overhead. For believers, it's an adrenaline rush. For skeptics, it's a mind-blowing exploration.

The Sasquatch Museum, as it's also known, is part roadside attraction, part research and reporting center. Founder David Bakara, who runs the tourist spot with his wife Malinda, is a former investigator with the Bigfoot Field Researchers Organization in Florida. He says reports of

sightings continue to come to his office weekly, not to mention those from visitors who pull him aside in the gift shop.

The self-guided tour of the 7,000-square-foot space begins with photos of renowned researchers, videographers, and anthropologists who have contributed to the exhibits. Artifacts, witness interviews, eerie audio recordings, docudrama screenings, and more scenes from the "Blurryverse" abound, from modern times to ancient civilizations.

Prepare for your visit by listening to Bakara's guest spot on the *Blurry Creatures* podcast, where he reveals plans to open another museum, a deep dive into the world of other notable cryptids—Mothman, Dogman, and the Giant of Kandahar, among them.

Expedition: Bigfoot





Col. Poole's Bar-B-Q

Col. Poole's Bar-B-Q

Longtime devotees of Poole's ribs, pulled pork, chicken, and other barbecue mainstays say new owners Marcelo and Candace Sandrini are doing justice to this beloved hillside establishment. The husband-and-wife team revived the yellow and red shack after its closure in late 2022. The couple refreshed the furniture; tweaked the brisket recipe; added a few items, including smoked pastrami and a Carolina mustard barbecue sauce; sourced meats from sustainable purveyors; then re-opened in early 2023.

The Sandrini (who also own downtown's Ellijay Wood Fired Pizza and Kasei Sushi) have maintained the informal coziness at the "Taj-Ma-Hog." Photos of the original owners, the "Colonel" Oscar and his wife Edna Poole, line the dining room walls, and

printouts of the restaurant's backstory are preserved under the varnish on the wooden tables.

Keeping up Col. Poole's tradition, customers "with an honest face and good intentions" (and \$5) can still have their names painted onto pig-shaped wooden markers, which are set into the Pig Hill of Fame behind the restaurant. Well-known to barbecue lovers at home and abroad, the landmark boasts thousands of bright "piglets" visible from the roadway. Overflow markers hang, too, from the entry eaves and patio.

Keeping up the hometown revelry, Marcelo co-hosts a weekend bluegrass music festival called Holla Yella. It takes place in June at nearby White Path Creek Distillery. Expect campers, food trucks, vendors, beer, a big-name headliner, and performances by furry horn player, "Saxsquatch."



Ellijay Coffeehouse



Ellijay Coffeehouse



Mountain Town Antiques

Mountain Town Antiques

Situated on the downtown square, the store is bright and spacious, with roomy aisles and tidy vendor niches—the vibe of a former hardware store remains. It’s chockablock with collectibles, plus handmade souvenirs, specialty food items, and more. In its current incarnation and ownership (Andrew Roach of Ellijay Coffeehouse and his dad), the antiques emporium is also home to Mountain Town Toys and Cowabunga Video, both located upstairs. The top floor sells almost exclusively vintage/retro toys, curated by Darryl Roach, “the Mountain Town Toys elf.” The store specializes in Mego and Marx toys from the 60s and 70s, and science fiction toys from the 40s and 50s. Loads more playthings abound, so prepare for childhood memory triggers at every turn.

In the back corner, follow the neon spaceship and pizza signs to Cowabunga Video, an homage to the era of watching movies on VHS tapes (films and equipment are available to rent). A handpicked selection of movies and old TV shows covers several genres, with a fondness for sci-fi and action heroes evident. But, heck, you’ll even find Shirley Temple movies and *The Jack Benny Show*.

On your way out, don’t miss cassette tapes and records by local artists Doctor Deathray, Eli Pop, and Connor Dylan.

Ellijay Coffeehouse

This self-dubbed community “living room” is a lodge-like ramble with two large but cozy meet-up rooms, window counter seating, and deck and garden patios. Owned by Amber Kirkpatrick and her husband, Andrew Roach, the bohemian hangout is pretty much ground zero for keeping Ellijay caffeinated, connected, and cool. Kirkpatrick oversees the food and drinks service, with an assist from baking diva Flora Fauna. Roach serves as a ringmaster for an eclectic, small-town empire that includes the coffeehouse, Mountain Town Antiques, Analog Revolution Records, and Ellijay Makerspace—an art and media collective and multi-purpose workshop. The space has also partnered with

Gilmer Arts to host indie concerts at the local theater.

Back at the coffeehouse, choose from nearly a dozen Mountain Town Coffee Roasting brews with names like Sasquatch Select, Cafe de Chupacabra, and Joltin’ Jersey Devil. The menu features paninis, salads, and signature and seasonal drinks (Bigfoot latte, caramel apple spiced cider). In the sweets case, don’t miss the chewy-crunchy gingerbread cookies topped with coarse sugar crystals.

An array of handmade gift items offers fun, impromptu shopping and the *Cryptids and Coffee* ‘zine (\$2) compiled by Jess Eves, editor and overseer at Ellijay Makerspace, contains poetry, fiction, interviews, and recipes.

What's in Store for 2024

Looking to visit Ellijay this year? There's always something new going on, and you can be among the first to experience the exciting things to come.



Opening: The Door

How do you get to The Roof? Through The Door, of course! The Roof has quickly risen to prominence as one of the best rooftop restaurants in Georgia. With panoramic views of the Appalachian Mountains and an unbeatable menu, it is easy to see why people love this local restaurant. However, one of the biggest can't-miss features at The Roof has always been the inventive cocktails—and these tasty libations are getting a place of their own in 2024.

If you've ever felt like you missed out on the elusive and secretive glamour of speakeasy culture, The Door will make your dreams come true. Stepping into this new hot spot will make you feel like the clocks have rolled back to the Roaring Twenties and you're a guest at Downtown Ellijay's most exclusive spot. Expect world-class cocktails, creative appetizers, and curated callbacks to a time when moonshine ruled the backwoods and revenuers roamed Gilmer County.

Expanding: Reece's Cider Co.

Reece's Cider Co. made a major—and flavorful—splash when they introduced the first locally crafted hard cider to Ellijay in 2021.

Their award-winning hard cider draws quite a crowd, and they've expanded their tasting room to

accommodate the thirsty patrons who come to sample their spirits. When you visit, plan to linger a while in their expansive, two-story addition for gorgeous views of the Gilmer County countryside.



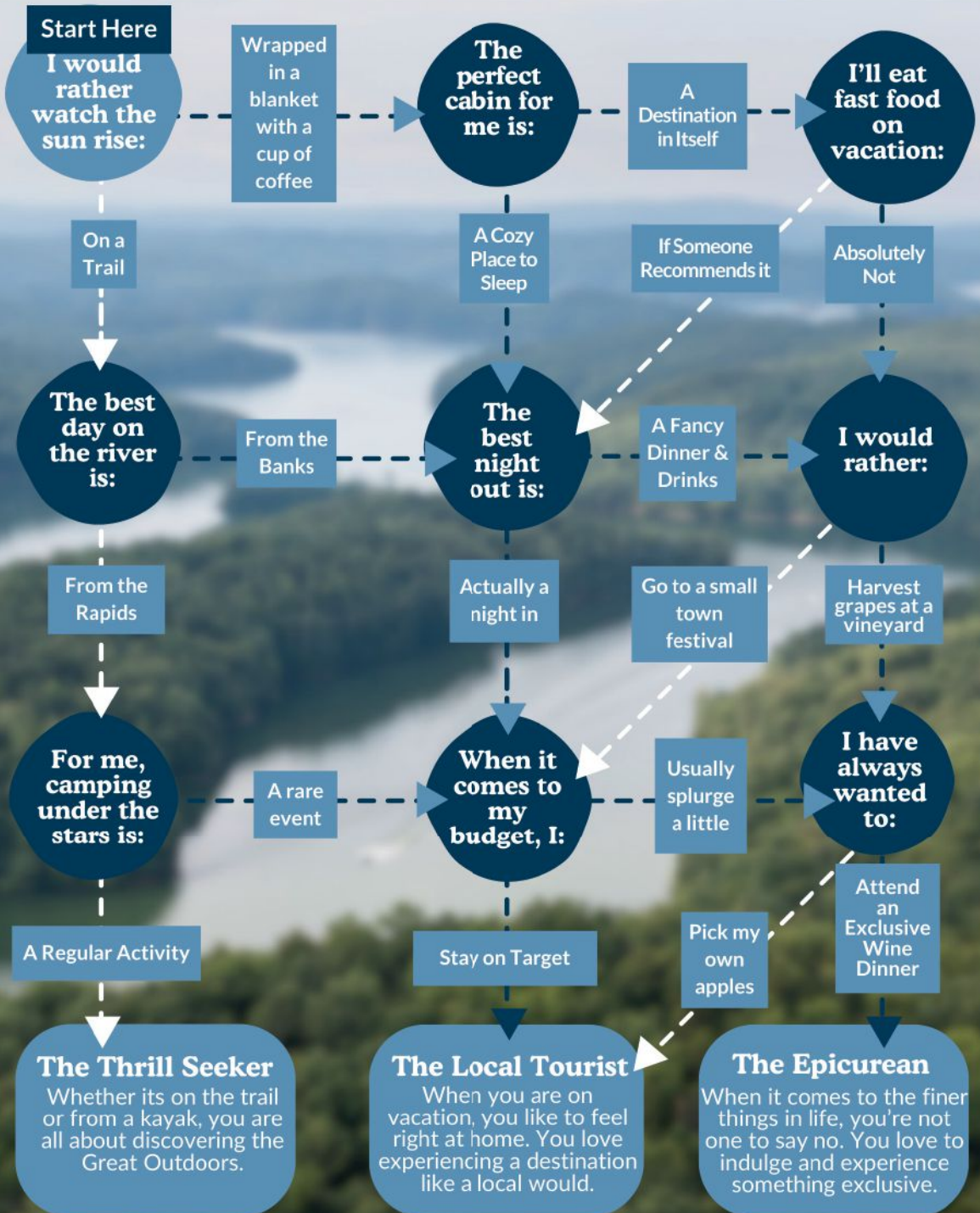
Spotlighting: Downtown Light Nights



When you visit Downtown Ellijay during the holiday season, don't miss Downtown Light Nights. This self-guided walking tour of the square and surrounding areas gives visitors a chance to see Christmas lights at local businesses and to cast their vote on the best display. Follow @PickEllijay across all social media channels to make sure you don't miss more exciting developments.

CHOOSE YOUR ADVENTURE

Having a hard time deciding how you want to experience Ellijay first? We get it: you're not just one thing and neither is Ellijay! Take this quick quiz to help you plan your perfect getaway in the North Georgia Mountains.



Visit gilmerchamber.com/youradventure for ideas to fit your style!



MEET YOU IN THE MOUNTAINS

WWW.PICKELLIJAY.COM