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Local News

Getaway: Strike gold in the hills of Georgia

Chéré Coen

There are three speeds to Dahlonega, Ga. Visitors venture to the quaint, peaceful town to de-stress, hikers and bikers get an adrenaline blast on the challenging mountain roads and the start of the Appalachian Trail and history buffs go for the gold; Dahlonega was the site of America's first gold rush.

Whatever draws people to this charming town, there is something for everyone, from panning for gold and horseback riding in the mountains to tasting chardonnays in Georgia's growing wine country.

The town dates back to the Cherokees, who settled northern Georgia. When gold was discovered in 1828, however, the area exploded with early American settlers and Dahlonega became the site of a courthouse and some rip-roaring saloons and hotels.

Even though 80 percent of the Georgia gold remains inside those mountains, the gold Dahlonega residents now find is tourism. The town is only one and a half hours from Atlanta and boasts numerous bed and breakfasts, mountain cabins and upscale hotels. It's one of Georgia's hot spots to get married, the area's wineries are taking off, and it's an outdoors paradise, with great hiking and biking through the mountains and tubing and canoeing on the Chestatee and Etowah rivers. This year, Dahlonega is the site of the Southern Living Idea Home.

August is the lull before the fall foliage storm and the annual Gold Rush Days, and prices are reasonable now for those looking for a quick and easy getaway. Bend of the River offers delightful cabins and chalets with decks overlooking the upper Chestatee; Lily Creek Lodge includes a waterfall in its pool, plus the friendliness of hosts Donald and Sharon G. Bacek and family-owned Forest Hills is a cruise ship on land with its cabins



Book note

Amy Blackmarr exposes the other side of Dahlonega, the dead side that is, in *Dahlonega Haunts: Ghostly Adventures in a Georgia Mountain Town*.



and Victorian houses, spa, horse-back riding, fitness center and full-service restaurant. If you wish to stay in town, try the Smith House, with its gold mine in the cellar or the upscale Park Place Hotel, which comes with a free bottle of wine.



On the Web

www.dahlonega.org

Upcoming events

Aug 15: Fool's Gold Mountain Bike Race and Festival, Georgia's first and only 100-mile mountain bike race

Sept. 27: Six Gap Century and Three Gap Fifty Bike Ride

October: Fall foliage and Gold Rush Days

The town center is the courthouse, now a gold museum operated by the state, with surrounding shops such as an old-fashioned hardware store, ice cream parlor and Gabee's Cajun Kitchen, owned by Charles and Brenda Mikel of Acadiana.

Within a short ride in several directions is Appalachian Outfitters who will offer both tubing and primitive canoe trips, Sunny Farms Stable with its mountain trail rides and two gold mines that give you the sand and you find the gold (and you really do). For those who wish to begin the Appalachian Trail, hike a small section or enjoy the mountains in a rustic setting, the Hikers Hostel offers accommodations at minimal prices, plus the owners will pick up hikers or bikers either from the airport to Dahlonega or from the trails.

And for something completely different, Kangaroo Conservation Center — an 87-acre wildlife park featuring the largest kangaroo collection outside Australia — offers walking trails through natural habitats, wildlife shows and the "Billabong Encounter" full of native Australian birds and reptiles.

And if you're lucky, as we were, a mountain rain will drop the temperature below 80.

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