

>>Narrator: Any weekend throughout the year offers plenty of outdoor recreation opportunities in Georgia. Mild winters and long springs and falls invite Georgians to do everything from rafting and hiking to hunting and fishing. Join us for A Georgia Outdoors Guide to Never Spending a Weekend at Home.

Georgia Outdoors Theme Music

>>Narrator: The coast of Georgia offers cycling opportunities, even in the winter. January is mild here and the roads are flat...a great introduction to the sport. The Coastal Bicycle Touring Club rides 12 months out of the year.

>>Hayes: the Coastal Bicycle Touring Club. It was founded many years ago; it started the bicycle ride across Georgia, is the group that actually started that ride. And, it's a group of local enthusiasts from, ah, the low country, which is Savannah, Hilton Head Island, Buford, and Point South as well, Jacksonville; we have members in Atlanta. It's a group of enthusiasts that like to cycle. We, ah, spend every weekend, there's a group of us riding every weekend somewhere every weekend of the year, Christmas and New Years included. Today's ride, Isle of Hope, which is beautiful area that, ah, one of the older areas in Savannah that started out homes down the waterway and built inland as, as time grew up. Wormsloe Plantation, which is a beautiful spot with the oak line driveway and the hard, crushed, ah, driveway of rock. Originally built in 1730's as part of a private residence still on the grounds. The land was donated to the state for the Department of Natural Resources to have a park there.

>>Jewell: I find it to be just a delightful form of recreation, especially in this area. And that's usually the case, even in January and February you have very few days that you can't ride, at least by afternoon.

>>Narrator: January also offers your last chance to hunt for gamecock and deer with firearms until next winter. Georgia has many wildlife management areas, or WMA's, to enjoy like Paulding Forest WMA and J.L. Lester WMA.

Fishing happens all year round in Georgia. In January, try one of Georgia's public fishing areas.

>>Mauldin: There's seven public fishing areas located around the state. Most of those are located in regions or areas where other fishing opportunities may not be as abundant.

>>Baldwin: the public fishing area system that Georgia has is an excellent opportunities for families to get introduced to fishing. Not only do we have pristine areas for the families to come out and do family oriented things like just walking around and seeing the wading birds. It's a quiet area, and it's a place where they can come out and learn some biology just walking along and looking at stuff.

>>Narrator: One of Georgia's new attractions is the Hugh M. Gillis Public Fishing Area in Laurens County.

>>Miller: Hugh M. Gillis Public Fishing Area is a 109-acre compound. We have four different types of fish, channel catfish, largemouth bass, and two types of sunfish, the bluegill and the red ear. We're here for the public, for the public use. It's public money and I want to see the public out here using it.

>>Narrator: February offers your last chance to harvest quail or to try hunting with birds of prey for rabbit.

>>Blackburn: Uh, I am a falconer because I like watching the birds. I mean I participate in all types of hunting, but um, you are more involved in this. We are the birddogs out there, they are the hunters. They are just tolerating us going along, so you are getting to look at it from the other side, which is kind of interesting to do.

>>Narrator: February also offers the ideal time to paddle a touring kayak on the coast while the weather is mild.

>>Chafin: If you're getting sort of stressed out or really worked tired, you know, uptight a little bit, I've never heard a doctor telling you to go to the mall and sit for two weeks. So it's always 'go to the mountains, the seashore, or the country.' And I think we're just a part of this and we need to get out and enjoy it.

>>Narrator...or if you would rather stay on land, try hiking on Cumberland Island.

>>Peters: Cumberland Island is one of those special places. People come from all over the country, even from all over the world. And we don't think of this kind of natural wilderness area in the east, but it really is one of the crown jewels of our national park system. Today visitors can come to Cumberland island and see the human history, especially in the area of Dungeoness, where there are remains of the Carnegie estate. They can go to the beach and take advantage of the 18 miles of unspoiled sand or they can hike, camp on Cumberland island in the sea camp area, which is close to the docks. Or for those who have the skills, the energy, and the equipment, you can backpack to the Cumberland island wilderness and spend several days out there away from modern society.

>>Narrator: Why not try rock climbing or bouldering. February offers great opportunities for climbing in the North Georgia mountains.

>>Leung: Rocktown and Horsepins Forty in Alabama are, ah, world-renowned for good quality rock, classic boulder problems, and that's why we came. I've been climbing for, I think, nine years. And, ah, I just love the movement

>>Narrator: March means the beginning of spring and your first chance to harvest a turkey in Georgia. You might try Rocky Mountain Public Fishing Area for the challenge of archery hunting.

>>Waters: Rocky Mountain PFA is, is really unique among public fishing areas. It offers not only great fishing opportunities, but also a lot of nontraditional PFA type opportunities like hiking and camping and bird watching and hunting opportunities.

>>Narrator: March is also your first chance to go white water rafting on the Chattooga River, Georgia's "Wild & Scenic" river. The Chattooga forms the border of Georgia and South Carolina; and offers a true wilderness setting with stunning scenery.

>>Linscott: Three companies have permits from the forest service for operating guided trips on the Chatooga. There's Southeastern Expeditions, there's Wildwater Ltd., and then my team, Nantahala Outdoor Center. Private boaters who want to bring out their own canoes and kayaks have—and rafts have certain regulations that the forest service requires. It's got to be real equipment. Innertubes and such aren't permitted.

>>Narrator: One special fishing opportunity starts the last Saturday in March and continues through Halloween. Seasonal trout streams are open to fishing during these times.

>>Pfitzer: North Georgia is a very, very well, a wonderful trout fishing area. There are over a thousand miles of trout streams in North Georgia that are, that are managed regularly for, for trout fishing. And, it's a, it's just a delightful area to, to trout fish. The small stream, most of the streams are small, but they have, the native brook trout occurs there. They've been introduced, rainbow and brown trout are also there; so, it, it's a good variety of fishing opportunities, ah, in the river.

>>Narrator: April is your last chance to catch a striped bass on the Flint River and its tributaries before the season closes on May 1. Fishing for striped bass is prohibited during warm months because the bass congregate in cool, shallow water, making them too easy a target.

In April, try horseback riding on Jekyll Island, while the weather is still cool. Victoria's Carriage and Trail Rides offers rides through the maritime forest and along the beach.

>>Keene: We have a lot of horses that are very children friendly and also non-rider friendly. The beach you just get to see so much more.

>>Tucker: The sand, you see shells, seashells, sand dollars, the lighthouse for one. In the woods you do see a lot, the trees, the moss, deer.

>>Narrator: Georgia has a unique camping experience to try...If you are uninitiated to camping, try yurt camping at Bobby Brown State Park on Clark's Hill Lake near Elberton. What's a yurt? We asked Ralph DelGiorno to explain.

>>DelGiorno: A yurt is an Americanized version of a Mongolian nomad's tent. They're round, 20-foot diameter structures that we have at Bobby Brown, 7-feet tall in the walls, 14-feet in the center. They are basically very upscale tenting structures. The inside sleeps six. Each yurt on the outside has what we call a kitchen area or a picnic area. The yurts are a year-round facility. They are heated and insulated, which is kind of unique for a tent, therefore you can come when you want to. The best season? That depends on what you want to see in the woods. If you want to see, you know, fauns, then come in late spring. If you want to see the wildflowers, then late spring and early spring and fall.

>>Narrator: Bobby Brown and Red Top State Parks are the only ones with yurts, but certainly not the only parks to offer amenities like fishing tackle loaner programs and handicapped accessible facilities.

>>Hatcher: Georgia really is known for having an excellent state park system. We've got 48 state parks and 15 state historic sites spread out all across the state. No matter where you're traveling you're no more than an hour away from at least one. And people tend to think of going to the mountains and going to the coast on their weekends away, but really middle and south Georgia have some beautiful state parks to visit, great places for camping and hiking and fishing; all kinds of activities.

>>Narrator: Birding is excellent during the migratory season in May. Try the Colonial Coast Birding Trail or the Southern Rivers Birding Trail, which includes sites within the state park system.

>>Johnson: The Southern Rivers Birding Trail is the second birding trail in Georgia. The first one of course was the Colonial Coast Trail, which goes from South Carolina line down to the Florida border. This is by far the biggest birding trail in terms of distance and number of sites on the trail. There are 29 sites on the trail and the trail extends all the way from

Stephen Foster State Park on the east then over to Lake Seminole and then north to Callaway Gardens.

>>Narrator: Birding is the fastest growing outdoors recreation activity. And why is it so popular?

>> Swiderski: Well, it's an inexpensive hobby. All you need is a pair of binoculars and a good field guide. It's something you can do anywhere you go, whether you're in a city or in the country. I enjoy looking at the birds, I think they're beautiful. There are certain birds that I love like the indigo bunting with that brilliant blue or on the coast the painted bunting with all the colors. And, I just think they're some of the prettiest creatures on the earth

>>Narrator: Make sure to leave a weekend to paddle a kayak on a section of the Chattooga...the water should be up by May.

The end of May offers a free fishing day during national fishing and boating week, so try one or both of these activities.

June is a great month to do a Sea Turtle Walk on one of Georgia's barrier islands. The Jekyll Island Turtle Project offers interested visitors of all ages the chance to learn about Loggerheads and maybe to see some!

June also has a Free Fishing Day. Use it to explore another of Georgia's Public Fishing Areas.

>> West: At Paradox Public Fishing Area, there's 1250 acres. It encompasses 68 lakes and ponds. And there's 525 acres of water. There's a lot of activities out here. You have fishing, biking, birding, and camping as well. There's a large picnic area and we also have a group camp.

>>Narrator: In June the weather should be heating up. Cool off by snorkeling or scuba diving on the Flint River or one of its tributaries like Spring Creek.

>> Male Voice: If you just want to stay on top or even scuba dive, this affords you excellent opportunities to dive, and you can bring the whole family. Most of the summer, you're dealing with very shallow depths, and a lot of these instances you can actually see the blue holes as they surface to the river. As hot as it is on the Flint River, they're an excellent place just to jump in or wet your face. There are at least one or two local scuba shops in the area in downtown Albany and throughout southwest Georgia and they can assist you. And you'll see all kinds of things in the Flint, adult stripers during the summertime. We have a lot of creatures on the bottom that you can see. There's over 80 species of fish. As we see today, the river's very clear during the summertime, so it doesn't take much, a mask and a snorkel or scuba.

>>Narrator: In the middle of summer, underwater is the coolest place to be. Artificial reefs off Georgia's coast attract a wealth of interesting sea life.

>>Woodward: Well during the summer months, there's a variety of species that inhabit these artificial reefs. You've got the bottom fishes from jackknife fishes, spotted drum, trunkfish, tomtates, red snapper, black sea bass, toadfish, occasionally you'll see a remora, which looks very much like a cobia or a shark. They love to follow divers around and they're structure oriented. You see amberjack. You see a variety of species like that, a lot of the members of the jack family that are migratory. They're here during the warmer months of the year.

>>Ansley: Ideal conditions for diving – summertime is your best shot. There's a couple of dive shops out of Brunswick. I think there are some out of Savannah, basic thing is, they know the wrecks, they know what's going on, so get in touch with them. They're going to know what to do.

>>Narrator: The artificial reefs are made of varied materials; some of them are ships and tug boats which have been submerged for sixty years.

>>Woodward: Dove today on the John Bird wreck itself and it's, you know it's broken down over time. There's still a very prominent stern section. You can actually swim under the stern of the vessel. A real exciting dive, a lot of old growth on it. We always see some nurse sharks on it. A lot of times you'll see sea turtles, other types of marine life around it as well as the fish.

>>Narrator: In July, you have another chance to get wet by paddling the Ocoee, a rare summer whitewater treat and a former Olympic raceway

July is a great month to take a kid fishing at MacDuffie PFA.

>>Atnip: On the MacDuffie Public Fishing Area we offer several types of fishing. We have bream fishing, which includes bluegill and red ear sunfish. You may know them a little better as shell crackers. We also have largemouth bass. And in some of our ponds we supplementally stock channel catfish to provide that extra fish for the public.

>>: There are opportunities for other types of outdoor recreation. We have an archery range. We have a small dove field. And this year, for the first time, we're actually going to have some waterfowl hunting opportunities. There's hiking trails out here. There's—it's just a nice outdoor recreation opportunity.

>>Narrator: You can get a jump on hunting season by going squirrel hunting in August. The fifteenth opens the season every year. Some say the hunting is better later in the fall, but go ahead and get your dogs out for some sporting fun.

August offers the clearest water while diving on Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary.

August is really for the birds. The swallow-tailed kite is truly a treasure and in August they are busy preparing for their long migration.

>> Williams: We find these kites over hayfields just exhibiting some amazing acrobatics just soaring across the fields and then just nose diving and skimming across the edge of the vegetation and plucking these little unsuspecting green June beetles up in one foot. And then they'll just make another circle, lean down and eat that without ever breaking stride. And so it's amazing to watch and it's very important for them because these birds are fixing to embark on a journey that will finally, after a lengthy migration, end up in Brazil where they'll spend the winter.

>>Narrator: If you really want to get out of the heat, try caving. The temperature underground stays the same all year long.

>>Cressler: WELL, THERE ARE A NUMBER OF PUBLICIZED CAVES where BEGINNERS CAN LEARN ABOUT, THERE ARE SEVERAL IN NORTHWEST GEORGIA. ALMOST ANY OUTDOORS STORE WILL DIRECT SOMEBODY TO A CAVE. THEY ALL KNOW ABOUT THEM. THERE'S PROBABLY ABOUT A DOZEN CAVES THAT ARE REGULARLY VISITED IN GEORGIA. IT'S GENERALLY RECOMENDED THAT A PERSON CARRY THREE LIGHT SOURCES INTO A CAVE: WHERE YOU NEED A HELMET MOUNTED LIGHT AND THEN TWO BACK UPS. BECAUSE LIGHTS DO FAIL AND THEY FAIL FOR A NUMBER OF REASONS. BATTERIES CAN GO OUT, BULBS CAN BURN OUT, AND YOU CAN LOSE LIGHT SOURCES. THEY can FALL DOWN THINGS where THEY AREN'T ACCESSIBLE and YOU CAN'T GET TO THEM AND YOU'RE STRANDED AND THEREFORE SOMEBODY HAS TO COME AND RESCUE YOU. AS FAR AS PERSONAL EQUIPMENT BASICALLY ALL you NEED IS SOMETHING THAT CAN GET WET AND MUDDY-ALOT OF PEOPLE JUST USE OLD CLOTHES.

>>Narrator: Many sportsmen and sportswomen anticipate the beginning of September. That's because dove season starts the first weekend of the month. Walton Public Dove Field offers a special event each year.

>>McGowan: Well today we're having our adult/ child dove hunt. It's opening day of dove season, and here at the Walton Dove Field, we relegate the opening day for a special hunt.

We try to have at least one adult/ child hunt for each of our game and management regions across Georgia.

>>Narrator: Alligators were once on the endangered species list, but thanks to careful management, have made a comeback. A short alligator season is now available in September for hunters who would like to harvest an alligator.

>> Waters: What happened and what will happen in years to come is people will fill out an application; they'll send in to the DNR office: they'll state what area they want to hunt in, their first choice, their second choice, their third choice; and then those numbers are entered into a computer. It's a random computer drawing that draws out however many for each hunt area are going to be. Now this year there is only 180. Now for those 180 slots, we had 2,500 and a few odd actually apply. But in years to come we hope to be able to increase the number of alligators that can be harvested.

>>Narrator: If you fancy yourself an archer or would like to be, you need to know deer and bear archery season begins in September.

There is also a statewide free fishing day, so take your rod and reel and head to a Public Fishing Area for some bass fishing.

>> Waters: Every year on a Saturday in late September, we celebrate National Hunting and Fishing Day along with, ah, counterparts all over the nation. And, ah, that provides opportunity for, ah, free fishing on that day, and also we host several events scattered around the state to, ah, help people learn how to enjoy the outdoors.

>>Narrator: October has many hunting opportunities including: Primitive weapons hunting for deer and for bear.

>>Narrator: Delayed Harvest of Trout is available on the portions of the Chattahoochee, but the season ends on Halloween. Also try other types of fishing this month.

>>: Come Fall, which is really the most, in my opinion, overlooked time of year to fish, the weather's really good and the fish are biting. Again, bass fishing's good; crappie fishing can be very good; trout fishing can be good. Just about anything you want to fish for, you can catch in the fall.

>>Narrator: The cooler weather of October is the perfect time to visit one of Georgia's Nature Centers, like Elachee Nature Science Center, Birdsong Nature Center, or the Chattahoochee Nature Center.

>> McClendon: The Chattahoochee Nature Center is about—has been here for over 25 years. We're right on the banks of the Chattahoochee River right here in Roswell, GA. The

Chattahoochee Nature Center is a wonderful treasure to the Atlanta area. It offers a place—we have 130 acres of land here, and it offers a place for people to come and hike, learn more about the native plants and animals in the area, and really just enjoy themselves and enjoy time with family or time by themselves. To be able to come out here and enjoy the boardwalk, the trails, the different kinds of animals that we have, the different kinds of wildlife that we feature, it's just a wonderful treasure to the community.

>>Narrator: In November, many weekends have good camping weather. Consider renting camping gear if you don't own any and trying out a campground.

>>Cohen: I feel real strongly about the environment and bringing people into the outdoors so they can see what a wonderful place it is and to want to preserve it. And I wanted to make sure that it was accessible to a large number of people. That, whether it was because of equipment or not having experience or not knowing where to go, that people could get outdoors. We do rental equipment and then we provide the opportunity to lead people on trips. That's kind of the helpful little push that it takes to get some people in the outdoors. Especially families, and especially with kids, it's wonderful to expose them. I feel like we spend too much time indoors.

>>Narrator: November is your last chance to go whitewater rafting for the year on the Chatooga River. Many November days are warm and the water is usually still up.

The evening sky in autumn is a perfect chance for stargazing. Cooler temperatures make the sky clearer.

>>Cirincione: We're at Unicoi State Park in Helen, GA and we are doing our state park astronomy. It's a sidewalk astronomy that we do for the children and the campers and the families. We start out with a slide presentation and just set up scopes, and let the kids and parents go scope hopping to see different things.

>>Narrator: November is a transition time for hunters. Quail and rabbit season starts and marsh hen season ends. Also firearms season for bear hunting ends.

December offers a bounty of hunting opportunities. Woodcock Season and winter dove season begin as do fox and bobcat seasons. There are also specific days in which waterfowl hunting is allowed. The number of days is carefully selected so too many waterfowl are not taken each year.

>>Waters: Along the coast, there's a lot of opportunity, including the, ah, Altamaha waterfowl management area, ah, down just north of Brunswick. And, ah, other parts of the states there's, ah, goose hunting and duck hunting opportunity on several of the large reservoirs, including Lake Oconee, Lake Seminole, Lake Lanier, Allatoona.

>>Narrator: Just because you have Christmas shopping to do this month is no excuse to stay in the mall every weekend. Saltwater fishing opportunities abound in December, especially over Georgia's artificial reefs.

>> Woodward: Fishing on artificial reefs is a year-round process. In the dead of the wintertime, you can go out and have fantastic black sea bass and sheep's head fishing. Some of the best cobia fishing of the year is in the fall.

>>Narrator: If the weather is too where you live, try camping on the coast in December. Sapelo Island offers a unique camping experience between the maritime forest and Cabretta Beach. You can also go on a tour of historic Hog Hammock community. A pleasant 30-minute ride aboard the Sapelo Island ferry from the mainland will get you there, but be sure to make reservations.

Now you have no excuse to stay at home on the weekends. Use our guide and take your family, your friends or your dog and get out there. Whether you like to fish or to climb, to bike or to dive, get out and enjoy Georgia Outdoors.

Georgia Outdoors Theme Music