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“Fort Mountain Fun”

A family wilderness adventure in the Chattahoochee National Forest

by Kimberly Blaker

If you’re looking for a relaxing, outdoorsy getaway with plenty of awesome sights, look no further. The 749,268-acre Chattahoochee National Forest in northern Georgia is the place to go.

This beautiful forest spanning northern Georgia with wondrous rolling mountains and brilliant colored foliage will keep your family intrigued for days. The Cohutta Wilderness area within the forest offers recreation for the whole family and accommodations for every style.

Accommodations for every style

If you like roughin’ it, you’ll love camping at Fort Mountain State Park. This modern campground resides at the top of the 2,800-foot high Fort Mountain. Amenities include electricity, water, clean shower houses with flush toilets, gravel sites with scenic views, and more. The nearby Amicalola Falls State Park, with a smaller campground, offers similar amenities.

If camping isn’t your style, but you’d still like a taste of wilderness living, Fort Mountain and Amicalola Falls State Parks offer spacious cottages in a variety of scenic

settings. Cottages are available with one to three bedrooms and include baths. Cabins can also be found in nearby private parks.

Can't give up the conveniences of modern living? Then try a room with a panoramic view in a lodge nestled in the mountains at Amicalola Falls or atop Fort Mountain. Lodges offer casual dining and other hotel services.

Plenty of wilderness fun and adventures

Every activity in the Chattahoochee Forest offers awe-inspiring views creating a new appreciation for nature.

Fort Mountain offers several miles of hiking trails from short ½-mile jogs to an 8-mile trek for more experienced hikers. Wind through the mountainous forest, across streams, along a small waterfall, up to a stone lookout tower, and even around the mountainside along steep, deep drops, where you'll find overlooks for breathtaking views.

Kids will get a kick out of listening for the commonly-heard Barred Owl, easily distinguished by its “Who cooks for you?” call.

There is also a small mountain trail leading to an 855-foot-long rock wall from which Fort Mountain derived its name. The mysterious wall is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. There are several theories why ancient Indians built it; the most prevalent that it was built for ancient ceremonies.

For the adventurous family, horse rentals are available for 1-hour trail rides or longer excursions. Bike rentals and helmets are also available for children and adults for splendoring in Fort Mountain's 32 miles of mountain biking trails.

When your family’s ready for some relaxation, a clear mountaintop lake offers fishing, boat rentals, swimming, and a sandy beach.

Enjoy the magnificent Amicalola Falls only a scenic hour’s drive away. Amicalola’s tiered, 729-foot falls are the tallest east of the Mississippi River and can be viewed from both above and below.

While you’re there, Amicalola Falls State Park offers 12 miles of scenic hiking trails including an 8-mile trail that leads to the southern end of the Appalachian Trail.

Kids will also enjoy the park office with its live exhibits and nature displays. The park offers special events, as well as fun and educational weekend nature programs.

At a nearby resort, take your family on a horse drawn carriage or wagon ride. Dinner wagons are available as well.

Although it isn’t likely here, if your family does begin to crave civilization, cruise down Fort Mountain to Chatsworth, and visit the Chief Vann House, a state historic site. This mansion was the first brick home within the Cherokee Nation and is decorated with hand carvings.

Also not far away is the New Echota Cherokee Capital Site, which houses several original and reconstructed buildings from the historical Cherokee capital. New Echota was once the headquarters of the Cherokee Indian Nation that covered a large region including northern Georgia.

These are only some of the things you can see and do in the Chattahoochee National Forest and surrounding area. So pack your bags, grab your kids, and let’s go!

SIDEBAR:

Hiking with kids

To keep your kids’ interest on hikes, turn the excursions into adventures. The Cohutta Wilderness is home to an abundance of wildlife, from numerous species of birds, to deer and even bears. Don’t forget binoculars. An inexpensive pair for each child will keep them scouting and take their minds off weary legs.

SIDEBAR:

If you go...

[Edit for your region]

Fort Mountain is approximately a 12-hour drive from Detroit. For air travel, fly into Chattanooga, Tennessee and rent a car to reach your Chattahoochee Forest destination. For more information about Fort Mountain, Chattahoochee National Forest, camping, and cottage rentals go to: <http://ngeorgia.com/parks/fort.html> or <http://www.visitorguide.com/index.cfm> or call Georgia State Parks at (800) 864-7275. For lodging go to <http://www.cohuttalodge.com/> or call (706) 695-9601. For private cabin rentals, go to <http://www.wildernessviewcabins.com/> or call (866) 517-8810.

PULL QUOTE: Kids will get a kick out of listening for the commonly-heard Barred Owl, easily distinguished by its “Who cooks for you?” call.

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Kimberly Blaker writes for parenting and women's magazines around the country.

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