

NOLA's Best  
Breakfast Returns

Alabama Shakes'  
New Take on Soul

Saving Georgia's  
Sapelo Island

# GARDEN & GUN

SOUL of the SOUTH  
JUNE/JULY 2015

## Southern Dream Towns

10  
GREAT  
ESCAPES

BLUFFTON, SC  
WINTER PARK, FL  
WATER VALLEY, MS  
MIDDLEBURG, VA  
DAVIDSON, NC  
ROUND TOP, TX  
FRANKLIN, TN  
AND MORE!

(See page 91)

LESSONS  
FROM A  
SHOTGUN  
MASTER

A VIRGINIA  
MOUNTAIN  
ROAD  
TRIP

FIVE  
BARBECUE  
JOINTS  
YOU CAN'T  
MISS

*Sunset on the  
porch in Bluffton,  
South Carolina*

# Ellijay, GA

At play in a mountain hideout where big thrills await by CHARLES BETHEA

**N**orth Georgia has had a problem for decades: Too many outsiders still assume every little town above Atlanta was the inspiration for *Deliverance*, with banjo-wielding locals concocting nefarious plans for them. And though James Dickey did indeed set his novel in these mountains, the region is in fact full of quaint communities such as Canton, Dahlonega, and Blue Ridge, populated by perfectly amiable folks. Ellijay, however, situated on the edge of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests, just might be the best small town in the whole area—even the state—to use as a springboard for outdoor adventure. It's got rivers for running and fly fishing, mountains for biking, and as much hiking as you can handle: The Appalachian Trail starts just up the road.

**THE 24-HOUR AGENDA:** Begin at the **Martyn House in Towne**, an excellent espresso bar—and live music venue in the evenings—where your coffee comes with a side of local gossip. (Owners Rick Lucas and JoAnn Antonelli also run a B&B a few miles outside of town where you can rent welcoming and spacious “luxury sleeping tents.”)

Head over midmorning to the headquarters of **Cartecay River Experience** to get set up for either a two-hour (in kayaks) or three-hour (on tubes) float along the picturesque and occasionally frothy Cartecay. A friendly mutt named Chica often swims alongside the flotillas, barking when you get to a critical split in the river (go right!), and even following you down the ten-foot, Class II sliding rapid known as Stegall Mill Falls.

Hungry? There's decent barbecue to be had, but the best place to refuel after a bracing float is the **Cajun Depot**. Try the deep-fried oyster po'boy or the seafood gumbo. For dessert walk over to **Back Porch Bistro** for a slice of Uncle Dave's tiger butter (layers of chocolate and peanut butter) fudge, and then hop in the car for a twenty-minute drive to **Amicalola Falls State Park**. It's famous for being home to the Appalachian Trail's southern terminus, but there are plenty of paths here that don't necessitate walking 2,180 miles. Such as the rolling, five-mile walk to the **Len Foot Hike Inn**, which offers hearty dinner, and soft bunks if you want to crash then and there.

Or you can make your way back to Ellijay for dinner at the brand-new **1907** restaurant and bar, and tuck into the pork belly cassoulet or the Wagyu meat loaf. If you've got any energy left, limp a few doors down to the **River Street**



**POPULATION:**  
1,637

**DRIVE TIME:**  
Seventy-five minutes north of Atlanta; seventy-five minutes southeast of Chattanooga

**WET AND WILD**  
From top: Rivers near Ellijay promise plenty of whitewater; sleep Swiss Family Robinson-style at the Martyn House.

**Tavern** for a postprandial whiskey. Overnight at **Hearthstone Lodge**, fifteen minutes beyond the town limits, on the edge of Fort Mountain State Park, where the dog-inspired suite has an impressive collection of canine-themed reading material, including *The Dog Who Came in from the Cold* and *It's Okay to Miss the Bed on the First Jump*. A half-mile walk to Sugar Creek and a few little waterfalls will be waiting for you come morning.



**MEET THE LOCALS:** Suzy Wright was born near Los Angeles but moved to Georgia in the seventies and married Frank Wright twenty-one years ago, beginning her adventures at **Mountain Valley Farm**. The Wright family has been farming the valley since 1840. For the last few decades, it's been a grass-fed beef and dairy operation on their four-hundred-acre spread. “I'm a fair-weather farmer,” Suzy jokes. “I mostly work the store while Frank tends the animals and the land. It's a beautiful place to live.”

**Woody Janssen**, the owner of Cartecay River Experience, has been running the Cartecay for more than seven years. “I've probably done it five hundred times,” he says, “and it never gets old.” After playing football at Ole Miss and living in England, Utah, New Mexico, and Hawaii, Janssen quit his corporate gig a decade ago and has never looked back. “We've got great rivers, an awesome mountain golf course, good food, and some pretty serious drinkers. I love it here.”