



## NORTHEAST GEORGIA MOUNTAINS TRAVEL REGION

Tourism Update: September 12- 23, 2016

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GA Dept of Economic Development  
Georgia Tourism Division  
Northeast Georgia Mountains*

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## GDEcD & TOURISM DIVISION UPDATE

### **News & eNewsletters**

- [Economic Impact Georgias Tourism Industry Hits Record \\$8.9-billion](#)
- [Georgia Tourism eNewsletter September 2016 Issue 2](#)

### **Peachbytes eNewsletter**

- **2016 Governor's Tourism Conference soared to new heights** - Hosted by the Atlanta Airport District Sept. 12-14, 2016, in College Park, the **2016 Georgia Governor's Conference** soared to new heights with inspiring presentations, unparalleled networking opportunities and evening entertainment filled with surprises. At the Governor's Luncheon and Awards Ceremony, **Gov. Nathan Deal** announced the news that the state's tourism industry generated a record \$58.9 billion impact in the last year and a record 100 million visitors came to Georgia in 2015. Gov. Deal also presented the Governor's Tourism Awards, recognizing leaders and accomplishments in the industry. Read all about it on [MarketGeorgia.org](http://MarketGeorgia.org). [Download presentations](#) from the sessions online and save the dates for the conference next year in Jekyll Island Sept. 10-13, 2017.
- **New data available: 2015 Travel Economic Impact in Georgia** - For the latest information on the economic

impact of travel and tourism on Georgia's state, county and tourism regions, download the newly posted 2015 Travel Economic Impact on Georgia State, Counties and Regions report on [MarketGeorgia.org](http://MarketGeorgia.org). Contact Research Director **Andria Godfrey** at [AGodfrey@georgia.org](mailto:AGodfrey@georgia.org) with any questions or if you need assistance using information in this report.

- **Dogs need vacations, too! Georgia Tourism launches pet-friendly campaign with #ExploreGeorgiaPup** - Travelers who want to enjoy their vacations with their pets now have a new set of trip ideas on [ExploreGeorgia.org](http://ExploreGeorgia.org) and a way to share their experiences on social media. Pet-friendly city guides featuring travel-happy dogs offer recommendations for where to stay, eat and play while visiting Georgia with pets. Visitors are encouraged to use #ExploreGeorgiaPup on social media to share photos of their dogs on adventures in the Peach State. Check out the trip guides and show off your pet-friendly destinations using #ExploreGeorgiaPup!
- **The ExploreGeorgia.org Songwriter Series - don't miss it!** - With three shows down and only three shows to go, the **ExploreGeorgia.org Songwriter Series** is going strong celebrating the **Year of Georgia Music**. Showcasing songwriters in intimate performances, each show is unique, unpredictable and exciting. Plan to check out a show near you: Oct. 7 at the Albany Museum of Art; Nov. 19 at the Holly Theatre in Dahlonega; Dec. 2 at the Douglass Theatre in Macon. See who's playing on [MarketGeorgia.org](http://MarketGeorgia.org).
- **Do you know a Small Business Rock Star?** - The **Georgia Department of Economic Development** and the **Georgia Economic Developers Association** are seeking nominations for outstanding, unique and impactful small businesses in the state. Any small business (fewer than 100 employees) is invited to apply by Oct. 31. Nominate your own company or another great Georgia small business today! Find complete details and a list of previous winners (including Creature Comforts Brewing, Savannah Bee Company and Lauri Jo's Southern Style Canning) on [Georgia.org](http://Georgia.org).
- **Capture holiday business by promoting your destination on ExploreGeorgia.org** - It still may feel like summer, but travelers are already making holiday travel plans! Not to mention, bloggers and travel writers are getting travelers ready for the holiday season with inspirational content designed to send people your way. Don't delay! Make sure everyone can find your holiday events and deals by posting them on [ExploreGeorgia.org](http://ExploreGeorgia.org). Find helpful resources, including the **Explore Georgia FY17 Content Calendar** on [MarketGeorgia.org](http://MarketGeorgia.org)

### Governor's Conference on Tourism

- Speaker presentations are accessible at [www.georgiagtc.com/agenda](http://www.georgiagtc.com/agenda), but the info is not nearly as impactful as being there to hear them in person, so make plans to attend the 2017 conference on Jekyll Island.
- Gov. Nathan Deal today announced that Georgia's tourism industry generated a record \$58.9 billion economic impact in the last year at the 2016 Georgia Governor's Tourism Conference in College Park. See news release above.
- Deal recognized several of the state's top tourism professionals at the annual industry event, which was hosted by the Georgia Department of Economic Development (GDEcD) and the Georgia Association of Convention & Visitors Bureaus. **The Northeast Georgia Mountains Region had an award recipient. The Bill Hardman Sr. Tourism Champion Private Sector Award was presented to Xavier Roberts from Babyland General Hospital. Congrats, Xavier!** For a list of all the award recipients, go to [www.marketgeorgia.org/article/economic-impact-of-georgias-tourism-industry-hits-record-589-billion](http://www.marketgeorgia.org/article/economic-impact-of-georgias-tourism-industry-hits-record-589-billion)

### "Year of Georgia Music" News

- The Year of Music [microsite](#) was selected as the winner of the "**Most Outstanding Website**" award at the Web Marketing Association's **2016 WebWards!** GDEcD's agency of record for digital platforms, Miles Partnership, was instrumental in building out the microsite and winning the award. Notable comments include...
  - *"You've created a terrific way to explore the varieties of GA music. Nice!"*
  - *"The photography was stellar. The interactive section is one of the first carousels I feel really provides the viewer a great deal of information in an entertaining manner."*
  - *"I would hope that other states will emulate this site and tell their stories, too."*
- Happy to share a placement in National Geographic Traveler for Georgia Music! We earned this spot directly from awareness of the Year of Georgia Music campaign that gave the writer the idea to cover music in the South. She is also finishing up a print piece I've assisted with that will be out in the coming months – I'll let you know the issue once I hear back. This digital article features Atlanta, Augusta, Macon, Athens and Dahlonega. It will be promoted across all Nat Geo Travel social media platforms (Twitter, FB, Instagram). The writer will also

be joining us at the ExploreGeorgia.org Songwriters Series in Dahlonega. Here's the link – [www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/destinations/united-states/regional-south/listen-music-hear-ultimate-southern-adventure/](http://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/destinations/united-states/regional-south/listen-music-hear-ultimate-southern-adventure/)

### Georgia Explorer – Sue Rodman

Check out Georgia's Smart Travel Explorer Sue Rodman's newest blog post "[5 Things to Do Besides Get a Pumpkin at these Patches.](#)"

### Georgia Council for the Arts

The GCA team attended the [National Assembly of State Arts Agencies: NASAA](#) annual conference. During the conference they met with peers from around the country, gained skills and insights from learning sessions designed for public arts funders and experienced world-class artistic offerings!

## TOURISM RELATED NEWS & INFORMATION

### Articles & Media Coverage

- Georgia Downtowns Blog (Joel Cordle): [A Powerful Refresh is on the Way](#)
- [Amicalola Falls State Park sends guests on aerial adventure](#)
- [Find your way in, out of North Georgia corn fields for fun](#)
- [North Georgia Mountains Getaways Toccoa](#)

### Tourism Development in the Northeast Georgia Mountains Travel Region

In each update, I am going to try and spotlight new tourism developments in the region, so please send me news about new additions, new tourism attractions, lodging, etc.

- North Georgia Canopy Tours in Lula has a 9 hole mini golf course that visitors can now enjoy
- Granddaddy Mimm's Distillery and Moonshine Museum opened in Blairsville

### Southeast Tourism Society Newsletter ([www.southeasttourism.org](http://www.southeasttourism.org))

- **Brits love the South because of who we are** - Anyone who deals with international travel to the U.S. knows that British visitors (3.8 million a year) head first to big cities, perhaps multiple times, before they venture into the hinterlands. A recent Conde Nast Traveler [poll](#) of British travel agents says that interest in exploring the South has surged in the last 18 months and that the South has become their clients' third most popular request behind New York and California. Audley, an agency that designs individual itineraries, says some of its most popular programs are self-guided drives along the Gulf Coast, through Georgia and the Carolinas, and through Tennessee and Kentucky. So what's drawing them? It's the Southeast's core products - our distinctive music, our regional foods, good whiskey (hence Tennessee and Kentucky's popularity), and our hospitality. These are aspects of our regional identity that have been centuries in the making and are true tourism magnets to keep in our promotional spotlight. Aspects of the region's geography are an additional appeal. As an Audley representative noted, swamp tours definitely are an experience the Brits can't get back home.
- **5 thoughts for modern group tours** – Many traditions of the tour business (think big-quantity buffet meals and jam-packed itineraries with no individual time) don't make much sense to well-traveled baby boomers, according to Brian Jewell, executive editor of the Group Travel Leader. . Boomers are the industry's target market right now, and tour operators need to adjust. Jewell offers five thought areas in [this column](#), and redefining "value" is at the top of the list. There are lessons for destinations as well as tour operators in the column.
- **Millennials on group tours? Surely you jest** - Even though baby boomers are the big market for the group tour industry (see above), there are niches in the group tour business that appeal to millennials. Skeptical? Read [here](#) about studies from the American Society of Travel Agents and AAA that make that case. Here's a hint: Millennials like river cruises.

### The Georgia Dept of Natural Resources Grant

Georgia State Parks Division has recently announced the application deadline for the Recreational Trails Grant Program. Applications will be due on or before November 30, 2016. Eligible project activities include: trail, trailhead construction, trail maintenance, trail assessment/studies, and property acquisition for trail recreation facilities. Please contact the

Economic Development staff at the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission as soon as possible if you are interested in applying to this grant program. 770-538-2626.

### **Advance Travel & Tourism Southeast**

Check out their [free eBook](#) to understand the five stages of travel and leverage them to your benefit. Interested in learning more about how we can help you connect with travelers? [We'd love to connect.](#)

### **ESTO – TIA Educational Seminars for Tourism Organizations**

Learn more about their free webinars at <https://esto.ustravel.org/webinar-series>. The next seminar: Travek Channel Inspires the Travel DNA, presented by Travel channel, Thursday, Sept 29 from 2-3pm EST. [Register.](#)

### **Group Tour Media On Board by Marlene Smith**

For great blogs on a variety of tourism subjects, go to <https://grouptour.com/blog-category/sales-blogs/onboard/marlene-smith/>

### **Surveys, Industry, Marketing & Travel Trends**

- ***The hotel industry's next tech target: Virtual, augmented reality programs*** - Gamification is a powerful driver in nearly every industry, reports HotelManagement.net. Video game developer Niantic definitively proved the concept when it launched Pokémon Go earlier this summer, gamifying the act of walking around by turning public spaces into interactive locations. The technology has arrived, and [it's now up to the hospitality industry to determine its place](#). Best Western Hotels & Resorts has been a willing participant in the implementation of both augmented and virtual reality devices on both the guest-facing side of the business as well as back of house. The company first partnered with Disney years ago to develop an augmented reality program for younger guests, and in 2015 came out with a new AR experience paired with the Disney Movie Experience. Evidence of VR's usefulness is already evident in a back-of-the-house training program that Best Western finished rolling out earlier this year. But while it's easy for a hotel to buy a single VR headset and set it up for training purposes, finding a way to market VR to guests is trickier due to the high cost to entry for the average consumer.
- ***Hilton dishes up new experiential food-pairing program for conferences*** - Everyone who's ever attended a conference knows that feeling around mid-afternoon when your energy crashes and your mental focus starts lagging. Too much coffee, and too many carb-laden bagels and sugar-loaded croissants are often the culprit. To their credit, hotel and conference centers have evolved a long way toward serving more healthy food and beverage options, but many people still tend to grab the donuts before the bananas due to short-term cravings to alleviate stress and/or boredom. Last week, Hilton Worldwide unveiled the next iteration of its "Meet With Purpose" program that [includes a series of turnkey food and fitness pairing programs that meeting planners can easily build into their agendas](#).
- ***Study identifies restaurant flaws that leave a bad taste in diners' mouths*** - Loyalty programs aren't the only way to build repeat restaurant business. A new survey commissioned by Cintas Corporation [identifies common issues that would keep Americans from returning to restaurants](#). Conducted online among 2,034 U.S. adults ages 18 and older, the study found that 97 percent of U.S. adults would be influenced to not return to a restaurant if they experienced some type of issue related to the facility. The top five factors that would turn diners away from a restaurant include dirty surfaces (86 percent), general bad odor (85 percent), dirty restrooms (80 percent), dirty/slippery floors (72 percent), and entryway cleanliness (70 percent).
- ***The six golden rules of responding to guest reviews*** - Whether scathing or glowing, every guest review is a golden opportunity for your hotel [or attraction, restaurant, shop, etc.] to shine or stumble. Guests trust other guests, and the reviews of past experiences at your hotel are one of the most influential factors that can impact future bookings. You can't afford to ignore bad reviews and hope they disappear. Nor, is it okay to simply write canned responses that lack a genuine concern for your guests. It can be dismaying to read negative reviews about your hotel or your colleagues. However, it's more dismaying to know that one horrible (unanswered) review can stop a potential booking dead in its tracks. Tambourine offers [six ways to deal with negative reviews](#), starting with "Cut the (corporate) crap."

- ***How to choose the right social media platforms for marketing your site*** - Large hotel companies with the budget to invest big in their social media strategy are likely to see big results, but what about independent hotels or individual franchise properties? With smaller marketing teams - and smaller budgets - individual hotels need to be strategic about where they spend their time and money online. HotelManagement.net says there are four [questions to ask when choosing the right social media platforms](#) for a hotel - suggestions that might also be considered for another type of property such as an attraction or restaurant. For instance, first decide on the audience you want to reach and consider how well the demographics of each social platform's users matches up with the kind of guests you're looking to attract.
- ***France is banning plastic plates and cutlery*** - France has become the [first country to pass a nationwide ban on plastic cups, plates, and cutlery](#), reports CondeNastTraveler.com. The move comes not long after the French banned single-use plastic shopping bags as of March and will also extend to a ban on Keurig pods and other disposable products used for drinking coffee. The plastic ban will not fully come into effect until 2020, giving businesses time to get rid of their existing stock and come up with alternative products, such as cutlery made from a form of compostable wood or cups constructed out of corn-based recyclable plastic. In 2015, France's parliament voted in favor of a law that required all new buildings in the country to have roofs made of either plants or solar-energy panels.
- ***Panel: Think outside the room for new revenue streams*** - With worries about the state of the hotel cycle and slowing rooms revenue growth, [hoteliers are looking for new and novel ways to drive revenue and profitability at their properties](#). Speaking during the "Beyond rooms and F&B: Total revenue management practices" panel at the Hotel Data Conference, sources said there are several ways that many hotels are leaving money on the table. One panelist said there are lessons to be learned from how music festivals and amusement parks manage to create tiered experiences based on how much consumers are willing to pay. One panelist said there are lessons to be learned from how music festivals and amusement parks manage to create tiered experiences based on how much consumers are willing to pay. One panelist has been successful leasing out retail space, and another noted Omni has seen solid revenue growth by opting to lease out restaurant spaces instead of keeping F&B operations in house.
- ***Hilton is piloting more restrictive rates at select properties*** - Hilton Worldwide once more is [experimenting with rate types that make canceling hotel rooms more difficult](#), reports BusinessTravelNews.com. Newer rate tiers like Semi-Flex and Prepay Restricted have started to appear online for select properties on Hilton's brand.com websites, with special loyalty member rates also available for each tier. The Semi-Flex rates are refundable up to seven days before check-in but charge a cancellation fee thereafter. The Prepay Restricted rates are nonrefundable and unchangeable. The initiative is not dissimilar from a pilot conducted by Hilton last year in which it charged guests at select hotels a \$50 penalty for canceling any time after booking. Still, if Hilton's initiative sticks and other hoteliers follow suit, it could revolutionize pricing for the hotel industry, aligning it more closely with the airline industry, where flexibility comes at a premium.
- ***Seattle puts restrictions on restaurant scheduling, hiring*** - Large restaurant companies will be required to [finalize Seattle employees' labor schedules at least two weeks in advance](#) and pay penalties for changes afterward under a law unanimously passed Monday by the Seattle City Council. The measure also requires companies with at least 500 employees nationwide to increase the hours of people already on the payroll before new hires are added to the staff. In addition, employees who work the last shift of a restaurant's work day will be required to be given at least 10 hours off before they are expected to report back to work. Work schedules must be set at least two weeks before a shift. If hours are cut between that point and shift time, the employee must be paid half of what he or she would have earned without the change. If hours are increased, the staff member is paid for the hours worked, plus the wages for one additional hour. Employees, however, can request a reduction in hours without penalty. They can also swap shifts. The vote makes Seattle the second city, after San Francisco, to adopt a so-called secure scheduling law. Last week, New York City Mayor Bill De Blasio proposed that his charge become the third. The measures share many of the same requirements, a reflection of the concerted effort by organized labor to get the scheduling laws on the book.

There were over 5000 general responses to the recent survey for the Pedestrian Safety Action Plan and they are now moving forward with plan development (the [pedestrian survey](#) is still live if you'd still like to take it or share it). In tandem with the Pedestrian Safety Action Plan they are also developing a **Bicycle Safety Action Plan**, led by Georgia Bikes. They need your input as they begin the plan development process to ensure that the plan addresses the needs and challenges of Georgians. This survey is for everyone and anyone in Georgia. **Please take the survey then share it!** Post to your social media platforms, email to your friends, share with your neighborhood organizations, school, church group, book club, etc.

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfidsTgnyXMk8j\\_74yCFENPI8XU5j2cnFY9R5hFfxEUlob0XQ/viewform?c=0&w=1](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfidsTgnyXMk8j_74yCFENPI8XU5j2cnFY9R5hFfxEUlob0XQ/viewform?c=0&w=1)

Contact: Katelyn DiGioia, E.I.T, **State Bicycle and Pedestrian Engineer**, Georgia Department of Transportation, Office of Traffic Operations [kdigioia@dot.ga.gov](mailto:kdigioia@dot.ga.gov) 404.635.2834 935 East Confederate Avenue | Building 24 | Floor 2 | Atlanta, Georgia 30316-2531

### Georgia Mountains Regional Commission activities

- The GMRC is completing a Conceptual Master Plan for the Sautee-Nacoochee center in White County. This plan sets out their vision for renovation of outdoor areas and the installation of new amenities of the campus strives to increase their use and appeal as an arts and cultural hub in the Georgia Mountains Region. Once complete the Center will use the plans to coordinate their expansion and to aid in funding.
- ARC Pre-Applications submitted
  - Sautee Nacoochee Community Association Marketing App
  - Cradle of Forestry in America Interpretive Association – Museum & Video Updates
  - Hall County – Healan’s Mill Land Acquisition
  - The Foxfire Fund – Mobile Application
- The City of Hartwell received \$150,000 in Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) grant funding for the Hartwell Railroad Street Farmers Market.
- The City of Toccoa received \$46,295 in Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) grant funding for sound system improvements to the Schaefer Center.

### Northeast Georgia Regional Commission

This year marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passing of the National Historic Preservation Act. During the year, the NEGRRC is showcasing successful preservation projects in their region to celebrate the anniversary. For the month of June, the Shields-Ethridge Heritage Farm in Jackson County was featured.

### Solar Powered Audio Box

If you have one or know of one in your community, please let me know.

### FIY Tourism Marketing Conference

This conference is just a little less than two months away from the [DIY Tourism Marketing Conference](#) in Asheville, NC! Their line up for November 14 and 15 includes five panelists with expertise and experience promoting Asheville's tourism community. Gain insights from those who have had success attracting visitors from the restaurant, hotel, large attraction, craft beer, and destination marketing industries during our "Marketing Asheville" Lunch Panel.

## TOURISM INDUSTRY CALENDAR

For a complete list of all the 2016 Georgia On My Mind Days [click here](#).

Oct 5-7	<a href="#">GA Municipal Cemetery Association Conference</a> – Douglasville, GA
Oct 12	<b>NE GA Mtns RTA Meeting (11:30am)</b> Sky Valley Clubhouse, Sky Valley, GA
Oct 14	<b>STS Top 20 Festivals &amp; Events</b> - Deadline to Nominations <a href="#">to nominate</a> 2017 Apr/May/Jun
Oct 21-23	<a href="#">Georgia Bike Summit</a> - Westin Jekyll Island, GA
Nov 19	<a href="#">ExploreGeorgia.org Songwriter Series</a> – Holly Theatre, Dahlonega, GA
Nov 28-Dec 1	<a href="#">Travel South USA Intl Showcase</a> - Atlanta, GA
Dec 7	<b>NE GA Mtns RTA Meeting (11:30am)</b> TBD

Jan 23-24 2017	<b>Tourism Hospitality and Arts Day at the Capitol</b> – Atlanta, GA
July 18 2017	<b>RTA Leadership Conference</b> – Dublin, GA
Aug 21, 2017	<b><a href="#">Total Eclipse of the Sun</a></b> (Path through Georgia includes Blairsville, Clayton Helen, Hiawassee & Toccoa)

*Have suggestions for content?*

*Send me ideas or requests to make this a newsworthy and informative tourism update.*

*No festival or tourism visitor event info. Events and festivals should be posted on [www.ExploreGeorgia.org](http://www.ExploreGeorgia.org).*

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