Find Out Atlanta

Outside Adventure Guide

Explore the best parks and adventures inside the South’s “City In a Forest.”

Peek out the window as you fly into Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport, the world's busiest passenger airfield, and you'll understand why this Southern metropolis is known as the “City In a Forest.” A lush canopy stretches out from its skyscrapers, shading the bustling city in every direction. But the real action happens beneath the leaves as Atlanta has been busy building out its park system, including the BeltLine, an ongoing rail-trail conversion and one of the most ambitious greenway projects in the country. Though only a handful of sections have been completed, the trail already attracts nearly 2 million visitors a year, and once the project wraps up, hopefully by 2030, more than 30 miles of planned multiuse paths will connect 45 Atlanta neighborhoods and 1,300 acres of parkland. And the BeltLine is far from the only game in town. Here are our favorite picks for getting outside when you’re “inside the perimeter,” the imaginary border formed by the L-85 loop that separates Atlanta from the suburbs.

Cabbagetown Street Art
DeKalb Ave. and Wylie St., Atlanta, GA

With the likes of local graffiti superstar Greg Mike leading the charge to put the city’s historic street art scene on the international map, you can head to nearly any corner of Atlanta and find a mural. Or you can hit DeKalb Avenue in Cabbagetown, the perfect place to stop shop in the city for sampling the scene. The neighborhood’s Knocked Up Foundation (KOUP) is building a rail-trail between DeKalb Avenue and Wylie Street, houses an ever-changing collection of paintings. The wall that separates Wylie Street from the rail yard is covered in some of the city’s finest street art, thanks in large part to Forward Warrior, an annual event where the public can watch celebrated artists practice their craft.

Cascade Springs Nature Preserve
2852 Cascade Road, Atlanta, GA 30311
404-546-6744
explorefor Georgia.org/atlanta-outdoors-nature/cascadesprings-nature-preserve

There’s a lot of history inside this 120-acre green space. You can still smell the gunpowder and feel the heat from the charred bodies once considered to be restored by Atlanta’s early residents. Today, the forest boasts 3 miles of trails that sprawl over a challenging hill, a small wetland and a unique installation where local artists painted vibrant murals on the park benches and tables. “It’s probably my favorite green space inside the perimeter,” says Michelle Jackson-Sauls, co-founder of The Outdoor Journal Tour, which facilitates outdoor beer gardens, complete with camp chairs, cornhole boards and a shipping container-turned-restaurant set to open later this year.

East and West Palisades
Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area
npa.gov/chato/index.htm

This National Recreation Area northeast of downtown protects 48 miles of the city’s beloved Chattahoochee River from Buford Dam to Peachtree Creek. It also sees nearly 3 million visitors a year. Only a third of them actually get on the water to paddle or fish, says Berta Sarkisian, an Atlanta resident who works for Sweetwater Brewing Co. There are even cooling stations—stainless steel tubs filled by ice pop-makers King of Pops. “It’s the perfect place to go after a hike to let your dog finish getting her energy out while you have a cocktail,” says Tucker Bert Sakis, an Atlanta resident who works for Sweetwater Brewing Co.

Historic Fourth Ward Park
680 Dallas St., Atlanta, GA 30308
404-477-3003
beltline.org/parks/historic-fourth-ward-park

It wasn’t long ago that this 11-acre slice of the Old Fourth Ward neighborhood, the childhood home of Martin Luther King Jr., was a war zone. High-crime and drug dealers controlled the area. Thankfully, the popularity of the King's Park has grown since it was transformed into a multistory retail, dining and office space is one of Old Fourth Ward’s most popular neighborhoods, and the BeltLine may get all the attention these days, but there’s another multiuse path that shouldn’t be missed. The Stone Mountain Trail runs for 19 miles from downtown’s Centennial Olympic Park to the granite domes and 3,200-acre park, home to the REI Boathouse. Serious cyclists can knock out the entire route plus a 0.5-mile loop around themondial before heading back to town. Casual riders can stick to the in-town section, which connects Centennial Park with the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historical Park, the Fernbank Museum of Natural History, and the BeltLine near the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum.

Morningside Nature Preserve
3202 Lenox Road NE, Atlanta, GA 30306
404-275-7577
morningsidenature.org

This park isn’t huge—just 33 acres—but it wassing out for preservation more than a decade ago by The Nature Conservancy, which found the rarity and location of its mature forest to be key for the nearby Chattahoochee River’s water quality. Running around 2 miles of hiking trails, the trail’s namesake 425-foot-tall Kittiwake is the sandy beach beneath the wooden expansion bridge that traverses South Park Peachtree Creek. “It’s beautiful scene and a great place to run with dogs,” says Daniel Jesse, REI regional environmental manager. “You feel like you’re in the middle of nowhere.”

Piedmont Park
400 Park Drive NE, Atlanta, GA 30306
404-875-7275
piedmontpark.org

Situated between two of Atlanta’s most popular neighborhoods, Virginia-Highland and Midtown, this open space acts as the city’s “Central Park.” And like its northern sibling, Piedmont’s walking trails are an oasis in a concrete wasteland. “It’s the perfect place to go after a hike to let your dog finish getting her energy out while you have a cocktail,” says Tucker Bert Sakisian, an Atlanta resident who works for Sweetwater Brewing Co.

South Peachtree Creek Trail
N Druid Hills Road to Medlock Park and Dooley Drive
404-875-7284
piedmontfoundation.org/trails/southpeachtreecreek-trail

A look on this path is a great way to understand how Atlanta earned its nickname, “The City In the Forest.” For 3.5 miles, it travels through dense hardwood groves northeast of Midtown, often as an elevated boardwalk that you can pedal yourself. The 3.5-mile trail also connects to several smaller parks and Emory University. The BeltLine may get all the attention these days, but there’s another multiuse path that shouldn’t be missed. The Stone Mountain Trail runs for 19 miles from downtown’s Centennial Olympic Park to the granite domes and 3,200-acre park, home to the REI Boathouse. Serious cyclists can knock out the entire route plus a 0.5-mile loop around themondial before heading back to town. Casual riders can stick to the in-town section, which connects Centennial Park with the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historical Park, the Fernbank Museum of Natural History, and the BeltLine near the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum.

Southside Trail
3460 Jonesboro Road SE, Atlanta, GA 30354
404-846-6786
southsidetrailatlanta.org

In 2016, the Atlanta chapter of the Southern Off-Road Bicycle Association leveraged grants from REI to help build a 121-mile beginner trail in Southside Park, a 271-acre green space a few miles south of downtown. It was the first major city trail in an Atlanta park city, and it was recently converted by a new 3-mile intermediate loop. The Southside Trail is an elevated boardwalk that offers riders a roller-coaster ride ideal for those just learning the ropes or improving their skills. “It’s a cofee ride,” says Saulters, cofounder of The Outdoor Journal Tour, which facilitates outdoor beer gardens, complete with camp chairs, cornhole boards and a shipping container-turned-restaurant set to open later this year.

Waterworks Greenspace
17th St., and Northside Drive, Atlanta, GA
waterworksatlanta.org

Residents spent more than two decades working to get the land surrounding Atlanta’s Waterworks facility reopened to the public after it was closed during the 96 Olympics for security concerns. Last winter, visitors were finally welcomed into this 4.5-acre park. It’s the perfect place to go after a hike to let your dog finish getting her energy out while you have a cocktail,” says Tucker Bert Sakisian, an Atlanta resident who works for Sweetwater Brewing Co.

Westside Trail
Lena St. to University Ave., Atlanta, GA
404-477-3003
beltline.org/explore-atlanta-beltline-trails/westside-trail

While the 3-mile long Eastside Trail has already become a hot spot of recreation and development, the recently opened Westside Trail offers just as much mileage with a fraction of the users. The path crosses by the BeltLine’s Urban Farm and Plenty of new restaurants and bars, like Le Cinque and the Stones at the 115-mile Southeast Connector Spur Trail to easily extend your ride, run or walk away from the crowds.

Water gardens beneath the wooden expansion bridge that traverses South Park Peachtree Creek. “It’s beautiful scene and a great place to run with dogs,” says Daniel Jesse, REI regional environmental manager. “You feel like you’re in the middle of nowhere.”

The transformation of this former Sears, Roebuck and Co. building into a multistory retail, dining and office space is one of Old Fourth Ward’s most popular revitalizations in recent history. You’ll find trendy shops and some of the best food in the city on the main floor, where several renowned chefs have opened spots in the casual hall. Take the freight elevator to the rooftop for the beer garden and cocktai bar and Skyline Park, a concert with� Patrick Wolf and Sleek-Blow. Through August, it’s also a home to a faux summer camp that’s filled with food, music and games. Of course, the biggest attraction might be the view, which looks over the city’s dense tree canopy toward the southern sky all year long