

It is Friday afternoon, and you longingly approach the moment when your kids and your husband become your own for two fun-filled days. No one has made any plans, and that leaves you as the executive coordinator of the weekend activity world. Summer is drawing to a close, and you want to seize the chance to do one more outdoor activity. Luckily, North Georgia offers a rare blend of outdoor adventures through its scenic landscaping. Richly forested mountains, cascading rivers and glittering lakes provide the perfect weekend destination for family activities. One particular river has been named as one of North Georgia's most popular destinations for kid-approved activities of the adventure sort.

Eighty miles north of Atlanta's asphalt jungle is the remote, but quaint town of Ellijay, GA nestled among the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. Cutting between the mountains is Cartecay River, a paddler's paradise and one of the most popular destinations in Northwest Georgia. Kayaking and tubing is provided at minimal rental cost through the Cartecay Water Shed Kayaks and Tube Rental. Tubing is around \$10 a tube and sit-on-top kayaks are \$30 to rent, but specials and group rates are provided throughout the year. These prices include all of the accessories needed from life jackets to helmets. Most funding for this facility is provided through donation, and those that work or volunteer their time there will teach you the ends and outs of the river, brief your family on the aquatic life, birds, and turtles that may be residing there, and they even provide a concession stand of goodies. Shuttling services are free and visitors are welcome to bring their own boats and equipment that will also

Family River Adventures are a Short Drive Away



The Cartecay River in Ellijay, Georgia provides family fun for all ages.

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be shuttled at no charge. The drop-in point is a quiet little cove cut out of the river, and the pick-up point, only two miles down the river, is beneath a charming covered bridge. A van greets you here only minutes after your adventure. In between drop off and pick up are fantastic sights that can't be described as anything less than breathtaking.

On the adventure side of things, Cartecay's rapids vary from class I (a quick trickle) to class III (hold on to your sunglasses). Seasoned paddlers can really test their strength and technique through rapid stretches given names such as “The S Turn”, “Chili Run” and “Blackberry Falls”.

However, the natural design of the water flow is easy on boats and tubes just wanting to glide through calmly and easily. Go Kayak, Atlanta's leading kayaking school, guides a number of paddling classes at this stretch of the Cartecay River. “Cartecay is the closest river to Atlanta with the greatest variety of rapids,” Craig Hefflin, Go Kayak's leading instructor told my husband and I. “It's great for beginners, but awesome for the advanced!”

Cartecay River is also a place of beauty, and spectacular sights. Almost the entire stretch of this river is shrouded beneath of canopy of trees. Ducks, fish, frogs, and turtles are common sights on or in the crystal clear water. This river also passes by many impressive homes with large back porches and barns with picturesque American flags gently waving in the breeze. For the decorator and landscaper side of me, I am enticed and inspired with ideas while admiring the river bank landscaping of these talented homeowners. It is like nature's version of a Tour of Homes.

Pack up the towels, the sunblock, the flip flops or water shoes, and the crew, and head to Ellijay while the remaining days of warmth allow water activities. A thrilling, educational, and adventurous time together for the fraction of the cost of an amusement park awaits you.

