

A Mountain of Food

Small-town Pine Mountain offers up a delicious alternative to city life

BY HOPE S. PHILBRICK



All photos courtesy of Pine Mountain Tourism



If a getaway only accomplishes one thing, it should eliminate stress. Whether you're stuck in Atlanta traffic, a Birmingham conference or the nine-to-five routine in Charlotte, small-town simplicity beckons. The reward of a drive to Pine Mountain, Georgia, is that its refreshing air and breathtaking vistas invite visitors to take a deep breath and linger.

Here, downtown announces itself not as gridlock but as a cluster of storefronts along one main street. Life is immediately simplified, if only because it would be hard to get lost. And if you do somehow manage to lose your way, well, "You'll get found real soon," says Hank Arnold, executive director of the Pine Mountain Tourism Association.

Odds are, you arrived on less than one tank of gas. So stay a few hours, or for several nights—whatever it takes to get that tension out. No matter how long your visit, you'll need to eat; so to help you figure out where to do it, we present some of Pine Mountain's best dining options.

The Purple Cow Café is exactly the kind of eatery you'd expect to find in a quaint, small American town. It's a clean, friendly place where you can order coffee, a sandwich and an ice cream treat. As an added bonus, the café is one of only two tasting centers for The Georgia Winery, so wine is available for tasting and purchase. "We want this place to be an experience," says Roger Bryant, who owns the café along with his wife Emily. "We don't want you to forget it anytime soon." Housed in a 3,600-square-foot space that was previously the general store, the café combines counter service and shopping areas with adequate seating. The food is simple and wholesome. **[\$, 161 N. Main St., (706) 663-8080]**

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The **Rose Cottage Tea Room** encourages guests to imagine the good old days in England. Its antiques, warm colors and cozy tables feel like a friendly hug. From sandwiches and salads to hot beverages and desserts, the philosophy is to serve "the best of the best ingredients," says Chef Shannon Klein. "Everything is homemade, it's all gourmet and we use only the freshest ingredients." Her creative recipes have a European flair. **[\$, 111 E. Broad St., (706) 663-7877]**

Carriage & Horses provides the unique opportunity to dine overlooking horse pastures. Choose a table next to the window, and you may find an Arabian watching you dine. The eclectic menu presents an impressive array of choices. "Everything is a special," explains owner Bechara Dagher. Most guests are repeat customers. On one recent evening, a gray-haired diner confided, "This is the best escargot I've ever had, and I've been eating escargot since this hair was black."

This type of rave review is common for Carriage & Horses, leading Dagher to make a bold prediction: "Come once, and I guarantee you'll come back." **[\$\$\$, 607 Butts Mill Rd., (706) 663-4777, reservations suggested]**

Callaway Gardens is home to a variety of restaurants, each with a unique menu and atmosphere. The overriding philosophy at all of them is "to meet the expectations of each visitor and give them what they're looking for," says Tony Labatos, Callaway's food and beverage director. Thierry Connault, CEC, who has served as Callaway's executive chef since 2000, agrees. The French-trained chef says he and the four chefs and 50 other cooks on the kitchen team operate with one objective: to accommodate the guest, no matter the style of food.

The Country Kitchen, located in Callaway Gardens, is reputed to be the original inspiration for the nationwide Cracker Barrel Old Country Store chain. Like its more famous counterpart, it combines a family-style restaurant with an old-fashioned country store. Specialties include speckled-heart grits and Muscadine preserves, which are available on the menu and on the shelves. The place feels welcoming and familiar, even on the first visit. **[\$, in Callaway Gardens, (800) 225-5292]**

The Gardens Restaurant boasts a porch that overlooks Mountain Creek Lake and Lake



View Golf Course. The menu features local Georgia items like trout, Vidalia onions, grits and Muscadines. According to Labatos, the most popular dessert at The Gardens is the chocolate martini: "As soon as someone sees that, it's what they crave." High-quality food and picture-perfect views combine to create a place that has hosted more than one marriage proposal. **[\$\$, in Callaway Gardens, (800) 225-5292.]**

The Piedmont Dining Room serves breakfast, lunch and dinner. Omelets are popular breakfast options, while certified Black Angus beef is a key feature at lunch and dinner. Rustic décor gives this steakhouse a Western flair. **[\$\$, in Callaway Gardens, (800) 225-5292]**

Although menus are available at the **Plantation Room**, the place is best known for its generous breakfast, lunch and dinner buffets. The seafood buffet every Friday (\$24.95 per adult, \$12.50 per child), Italian buffet every Saturday (\$19.95/\$9.95) and Sunday breakfast buffet (\$17.95/\$8.00) are local favorites as well as deals worth driving for. "It's been a tradition for forty-plus years," says Labatos. The Plantation Room is "our No. 1 restaurant in volume." He says the line moves fast in the summer, and there are far shorter lines and almost no waiting most other times of year. So why wait? **[\$\$, inside The Mountain Creek Inn at Callaway Gardens, (800) 225-5292]**

After all, nothing satisfies like a full tummy.

Hope S. Philbrick is a freelance writer because she doesn't think work and fun should be mutually exclusive.

Legend

\$ = Entrées average less than \$10

\$\$ = \$11-\$20

\$\$\$ = \$21+

Pine Mountain, Georgia

Where to Stay

Callaway Gardens offers more than 794 rooms at various facilities, including villas and cottages. The Mountain Creek Inn, with nightly rates from \$119, is the most affordable lodging option. Its 323 rooms and suites are adequately spacious and offer all the necessary amenities, plus reliably comfortable beds and thick linens. Some rooms boast extras like king-sized beds and garden or pool views.

For more information, call 1-800-CALLAWAY (225-5292) or go to www.callawaygardens.com. Pine Mountain also offers a variety of lodging options beyond Callaway Gardens, including B&Bs, motels and campgrounds.

What to Do

In Pine Mountain, there are a number of ways to work off those extra calories you pile on in the town's restaurants.

- Shop the boutique stores, which include several antique shops and the new Bon Cuisine II gourmet kitchen store.
- Tour the Little White House museum in nearby Warm Springs.
- Hike the 40 miles of trails in F.D. Roosevelt State Park.
- Ride horses at Butts Mill Farm or Roosevelt Stables.
- Visit exotic and domestic animals at the Wild Animal Safari.
- Explore Callaway Gardens. Within its 13,000 acres, you'll find a butterfly conservatory, biking trails, a discovery center, beaches, a vegetable garden and much more.

THE NEW 6-PACK

A new Gallup poll finds that America's drink of choice is WINE.

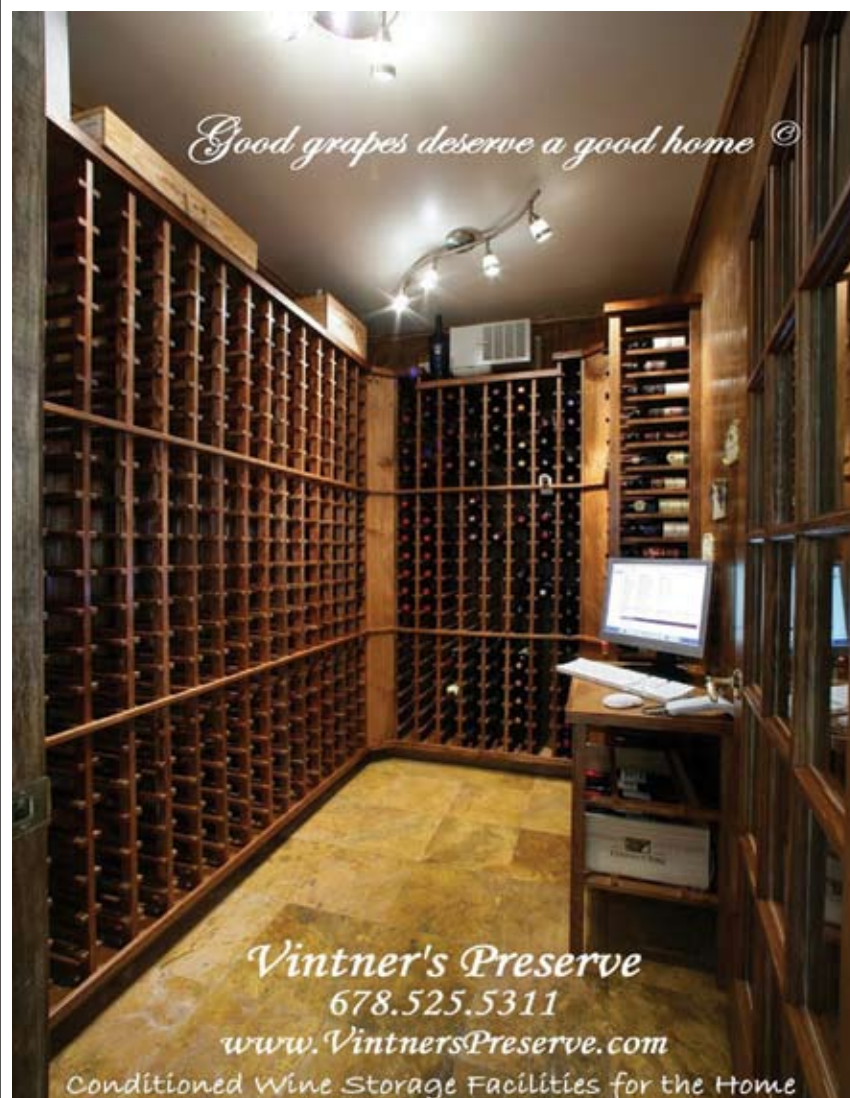


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