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Georgia's Must-See Attractions for 2009

A year full of experiences in all corners of the state

ATLANTA, January 16, 2009 - Each year brings new experiences waiting to be discovered, and Georgia has something for everyone. From the growth of one of the world's rarest and most endangered species to theater grand openings, final showings of spectacular exhibits to international music festivals, here are a few of Georgia's must-see attractions, events, exhibits and destinations for 2009.

Zoo Atlanta is home to 2009's cutest must-see attraction: Xi Lan, the only giant panda born in the U.S. last year. As one of only four U.S. zoos to house pandas, Zoo Atlanta is considered one of the premier panda destinations in the country. Visit Xi Lan, the newest cub and learn more about Zoo Atlanta's contributions towards giant panda conservation and research.

Marietta welcomed 2009 with the grand opening of the Earl Smith Strand Theatre, a 1930s art-deco landmark. The theater and its resident company, Atlanta Lyric Theatre, launched into an exciting schedule that includes films, Broadway revues, musicals and operettas. While in the city, hitch a ride on the new Historic Marietta Trolley. This one-hour, fully-narrated tour includes the historic town square, antebellum homes, Kennesaw Mountain, and more. Also celebrating its grand opening this year is the Tellus Northwest Georgia Science Museum. Conveniently located off I-75 in Cartersville, this 120,000-square-foot structure contains a plethora of galleries, interactive exhibits and hands-on experiences, as well as a 120-seat state-of-the-art digital planetarium and observatory complete with 20-inch telescope.

Make sure to hit the Otis Redding: I've Got Dreams to Remember exhibit at the Georgia Music Hall of Fame in Macon before it closes on April 19. This exhibition, named Best in the State by the Georgia Association of Museums and Galleries, has been extended due to its wild popularity. Born, raised and buried in Georgia, the legendary Redding is a prime example of the state's incredible music heritage. Over 175 artifacts, including photographs, hand-written lyrics and personal memorabilia document the life of one of the state's greatest musical performers.

Spring kicks off on the coast with the annual Savannah Music Festival. Georgia's largest musical

arts festival was named one of the “best events around the world in 2009” by The Times of London, the only U.S. event to make the list. From March 18 to April 5, the festival will present more than 400 classical, jazz, blues, bluegrass and international artists against the backdrop of Georgia’s first city. The festival has been extended to accommodate even more artists, commissioned works and original productions.

For Atlanta’s High Museum of Art, 2009 marks the culmination of two unprecedented global partnerships years in the making. Through April 19, The First Emperor: China’s Terracotta Army exhibit is showcasing over 100 artifacts from one of the greatest archaeological discoveries of the 20th century. It features the largest number of complete terracotta warrior figures ever to travel to the U.S. In its third and final year, the High Museum’s unmatched partnership with the world-renowned Musée du Louvre in Paris offers visitors a rare experience until September 6. The Louvre and the Masterpiece exhibition features ninety-one works of art from all eight of the Louvre’s collection areas, spanning 4,000 years. Everything from paintings to sculpture, decorative arts to drawings are on display. Together, these two exhibits offer visitors the once-in-a-lifetime chance to view some of the greatest treasures of France and China under one roof in America.

The 25th anniversary of Georgia’s Antebellum Trail will be celebrated this year, a milestone marked by the first-ever Antebellum Trail Pilgrimage, a journey back in time through seven historic communities. Enjoy special events and tours along the trail during the last three weeks in April, including access to private, historic homes not open to the general public. From antebellum homes to battle sites, fascinating museums to antique shopping, this great trail promises to be especially remarkable this year.

Georgia’s summer will be filled with the incredible sounds of Sweet Auburn Springfest 2009, the 25th anniversary celebration of great festivals on Auburn Avenue in Atlanta. Started in 1984 by civil rights leader Hosea Williams, the festival has grown and developed ever since. Featuring seven stages of continuous entertainment, numerous fairs and expos, kids’ zones and mouth-watering food, the 2009 Sweet Auburn Springfest is one of the most anticipated outdoor events of its kind and has grown into one of the largest multicultural street festivals in the southern U.S.

A classic must-see for over a century, Georgia’s gorgeous beaches and coastal islands are a favorite summertime destination. Jekyll Island is known for its golf, bike trails, bird watching and refined history, boasting the Jekyll Island Club as one of America’s premier coastal summer destinations since the 1880s. The private resort Sea Island boasts Travel + Leisure Magazine’s highest-rated hotel in Georgia for 2009, The Cloister, and offers such amenities as an equestrian center, luxurious spa, and three golf courses. St. Simons Island and Little St. Simons Island offer golf, fishing, trails, lighthouses, historic Fort Frederica and even more adventures, while Cumberland Island anchors the state’s coastline in the south, covered with pristine maritime forests, wild horses, undeveloped beaches and splendid estate ruins.

The mountains welcome the fall at Helen’s Oktoberfest, the longest and most recognized Oktoberfest celebration in the South. Helen was renovated as a Bavarian Alpine village in the heart of Georgia’s Blue Ridge Mountains decades ago, and its fall celebration has grown in reputation and stature over the years to become a unique annual tradition. From September 10 through November 1, the town is alive with festival-goers, live music, delicious food and good cheer. Also worth a visit is the mountain town of Dahlonega, site of the first American gold rush. Tour a nearby mine, shop on the historic public square, or taste some wine from one of the many local vineyards and wineries.

There is no shortage of exciting experiences in Georgia, all just waiting to be discovered in 2009. Find information on these and many other must-see destinations at www.exploregeorgia.org.

The Georgia Department of Economic Development (GDEcD) is the state's sales and marketing arm, the lead agency for attracting new business investment, encouraging the expansion of existing industry and small businesses, locating new markets for Georgia products, attracting tourists to Georgia, and promoting the state as a location for film, video and music projects, as well as planning and mobilizing state resources for economic development.

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