

# Holiday ideaway



BY JENNIFER S. KORNEGAY

**Take a break from the holiday hustle and visit a North Carolina inn that promises serenity amid simple luxury.**

Climbing up the curvy roads leading into Highlands, N.C., and the Inn at Half-Mile Farm, worries seem to wither with each additional foot of altitude gained. On 14 acres right down the road from the main “town” of Highlands, the Inn at Half-Mile Farm offers an idyllic scene immediately upon arrival. A white, 1870s farmhouse and a mirror-surfaced lake fed by chilly mountain creeks are ringed by round-topped members of the Blue Ridge Mountains rising in the background.

Every room at the Inn (all named after area waterfalls) is decorated individually in a cozy chic style that fits the Appalachian setting and the slightly upscale attitude of Highlands. Four of the 15 total rooms are in the original house; the others are in two additional buildings added onto the house in the late nineties. Ten of the rooms boast a working fireplace and their own balcony with views into the mountain woodlands surrounding the property. There are also cabins and cabin rooms

available, including the charming Fish Cabin that’s right on the banks of the lake.

Owner Wendy Messer has taken great care to make every guest feel welcome, and it’s the little touches that give a stay at the Inn the feeling of being at home—only better. Things like fresh-baked cookies available for the taking in the living room of the main house all day, every day; a bountiful gourmet breakfast (included in your room rate) served every morning at your leisure between 8:30 and 10:30 a.m.; or delicious hors ‘d oeuvres (created by property chef Jason Tardo, who also whips up breakfast) paired with carefully selected wines and served in the living room each evening from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. Guests gather for a before-dinner-drink and snack while chatting in the warmth emitted by the enormous stacked stone fireplace. “We love having people here,” Wendy said. And it shows.

While you can canoe on the Inn’s lake, drop a line for a fish or two or just sit on the porch and disappear into a good book, the Inn at Half-Mile Farm also makes a great base camp for the multitude of other activities available in and around Highlands

year round. And, situated only about 15 miles over the Georgia state line, Highlands is an easy, four-and-a-half- to five-hour drive from Montgomery.

### Fishing for a Good Time

Whether you're a novice fisherman or an avid angler, the rivers and streams around Highlands make for a great fly-fishing outing. Go after brown trout, rainbows or the native brook trout. Regardless of what you catch, the fresh mountain air and sounds of gurgling water act as a tonic for almost any ailment.

Of course, to increase the odds of actually landing a few fish while enjoying the outdoors, it makes sense to hire a guide. A good guide can help you improve your casting technique, instruct you on the right flies to use, and take you to the "sweet spots" on the rivers.

The best place to find one of these good guides is through Highland Hiker, a local outdoor outfitting store that sells camping, hiking and fishing equipment. Owner David Wilkes (just recently elected the mayor of Highlands) will set you up with all necessary equipment and a guide for a full or half-day of fly-fishing. Ask for Eugene Shuler. Captain of the North Carolina fly-fishing team and a regular fixture in fishing magazines and on fly-fishing television shows, Shuler has been guiding professionally for over a decade and for Highland Higher for almost a year.



### A Taste of Highlands

Fishing, hiking or just taking in the spectacular views can whet your appetite, and in Highlands, the options for satiating that hunger are many and varied. Two perennial favorites are Wolfgang's Wine Bistro & Restaurant and Lakeside Restaurant.

At Wolfgang's, the atmosphere is decidedly rustic sophistication, with exposed wood beams and a funky chandelier made of branches melded with low light and silk curtains. Popular menu items include the shrimp and lobster bisque, the onion soup and the escargot. Chef and co-owner Wolfgang Green is known for his braised beef short ribs and for very good reason. The meat is fork-tender, flavorful and perfectly paired with creamy mashed potatoes.

Lakeside Restaurant sits on little Harris Lake. The intimate dining room is ideal for a romantic evening, and the food, including several seafood selections, seals the deal. To meet the demand, Chef and owner Marty Rosenfield often and expertly prepares his signature dish, hand-cut, grass-fed lamb chops, grilled and served with mint pesto (the mint comes from the chef's herb garden right outside). Lakeside has also been the recipient of *Wine Spectator's* awards for 10 years running.

If the annual holiday rush is proving too much for you and yours, let a visit to the mountains and the Inn at Half-Mile Farm melt your cares away.

### Scenery & Shopping

From now until Dec. 23, The Inn at Half-Mile Farm and many Highlands' merchants have come together to offer an amazing deal. Rooms at Half-Mile Farm are 20 percent off during these dates, and the Inn's guests also receive 10 to 25 percent off purchases from over 20 selected retailers. For unique home décor, art and gift items, stop in Ductchman's. For a great selection of cashmere sweaters, try McCulley's. **ML**

**Details, details...**

The Inn at Half-Mile Farm

1-800-946-6822

[www.halfmilefarm.com](http://www.halfmilefarm.com)