

TREACHEROUS TREKS

Europe's Ropes Courses & Zip Lines

By Genevieve Northup

The last time I'd been on a ropes course, I was a fearless preteen. Fifteen years later, I geared up at Area 47 in Austria. A petite woman with the arm strength of a body builder tightened the waist strap on my harness. She attempted to wiggle the helmet on my head and nodded in approval when it didn't budge.

My husband and I trudged up several flights of stairs to the suspension bridge. Contraptions hung from the underside of the structure, 90 feet above the Ötztaler Ache's churning white water. Far below, paddling explorers shrieked with surprise when chilly waves splashed into their raft. I felt a surge of adrenaline as I stepped from the starting platform to a horizontal log that swayed with every twitch of my muscles.

Are you ready to test your mental and physical stamina this summer? Try these treacherous treks ... if you dare.

One course to rule them all

Area 47 in Ötztal, Austria

I didn't realize it then, but Area 47's is one of the tallest in the world. Though long and demanding, there are many turn-around points if you don't want to complete it. The most grueling segment features spindly tree trunks that rock and spin as you climb. Gain momentum to swing toward the next one, just beyond your grasp. More terrifying challenges lie ahead, like stepping on flip-flopping 12-inch-round disks and balancing on a skateboard across nothing but air. Celebrate your finish on the nearby Flying Fox attraction, a four-story free fall followed by a 1,300-foot-long zip line.

Descend the Dolomites

Adrenaline X-treme Adventures in San Vigilio, Italy

A total of 10 zippers take you from the peaks of the Dolomites to the town of San Vigilio, an altitude change of 1,300 feet. Carren at 50 miles per hour, reaching a maximum height of 330 feet off the ground, during your 10,000-foot-long journey.

Soar Like Superman

Zip World in Bethesda, Wales

Fly face-first as fast as cars on the autobahn – 100 miles per hour – 500 feet above a former slate quarry. You'll remember spending 60 seconds on the world's fastest pulley system long after returning to sea level.

Be Brave at the Beach

MountMitte in Berlin, Germany

This compact tower at Beach Berlin offers

six routes and 90 obstacles. Once you've summited Matterhorn, Everest and Skywalk, take the easy way down via Skyfall, a 40-foot plunge to solid ground.

Survive Multiple Scares

Zip World in Ffestingiog, Wales

Jump around a maze of elasticized nets and down corkscrew slides on the Bounce Below, located in the depths of a cave. A greater feat awaits fearless Zip World Cavern spelunkers who ascend sheer rock faces, zip through narrow passageways, and traverse catwalks over chasms. For fresh air, head to the Titan Zip, where four people zoom simultaneously across the Welsh countryside.

Fly Between Mountains

Pena Adventura in Ribeira de Pena, Portugal

Catapult across a 5,000-foot-wide valley – headfirst – at 80 miles per hour on the Fantasticable. A moderately strenuous forest ropes course and 50-foot-tall reverse bungee also test your limits.

Find Excitement Close to Home

Rope Adventure in Bad Kreuznach, Germany

Located 45 minutes from Wiesbaden and an hour from Ramstein Air Base, this park offers a beginners area for children and 30-foot-high spider webs, narrow beams, Burma bridges and more for thrill seekers. Leap from a log pole as big around as your feet to grab a trapeze, and make a grand exit on the giant swing. ■



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