

Zip-a-Dee-Zip-Line: A Canopy Adventure

by Terry Dagdagan, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Ever wonder what it would be like to fly like Tinker Bell? Has it been your dream to swing through the jungle like Tarzan? If you answered yes to either or both of these questions, then I have just two words for you: Canopy Adventure. In light of Disney Cruise Line's announcement that they will be returning to the West Coast in summer 2008, you may want to start compiling your wish list of shore excursions. One that I would highly recommend for Puerto Vallarta is the Canopy Adventure.

Now, this is not an excursion for the faint hearted. You'll be sliding along ropes strung high above the forest floor, "zipping" from tree to tree (just like in the TV commercials). However, if you ever had the urge to do something adventurous in your life, this just might fit the bill. The Canopy Adventure is open to those ten years and older. While you are required to be over four feet tall, you must also weigh less than 250 pounds and be in good physical condition.

As with most excursions, there are plenty of tour companies that you can book with if you are willing to do the research. We opted to book ours through Disney when we sailed on the Magic the first season it sailed to the Mexican Riviera.

Upon debarking from the ship you will meet up with a tour guide. He will lead the group down the pier, hand out life jackets and board everyone onto a motor boat. A five-minute trip through the harbor brings you to the tour company's office.

The journey continues as everyone loads up and buckles into the back of a Mercedes Unimog all-terrain truck. This 45-minute ride can be a bit bouncy at times as you leave Puerto Vallarta and snake your way up the mountain into the rain forest.

The Canopy Adventure location looks more like a jungle outpost, which helps to set the mood. Everyone is fitted into their equipment which consists of a harness and leather gloves. It won't be your most glamorous pose since you have to squat when putting on the harness. This allows the guide to fit the harness on your body to accommodate hanging from the zip lines.

Next, everyone's valuables are secured, as you are not permitted to carry anything with you. While we felt these items were safe, it is a good idea to only bring the bare necessities for this excursion. Even cameras

are not suggested as you are wearing heavy leather gloves that seem like Mickey gloves when you are trying to manipulate a camera.

After a brief safety talk and demonstration on how to conduct yourself on the zip lines (and most importantly, how to stop at the end of each line) you will head off to the first platform. This one is reached by hiking up a short hill. Here you face the moment of truth--or insanity as a few of us were thinking. As I was being hooked onto the zip line, I couldn't help feeling like I Love Lucy's Ethel Mertz trying to figure out how Lucy (a.k.a. one of my traveling companions) had talked me into this one.

There are several well-trained guides who are interspersed between every four or five guests. They handle all of the hooks and lines for you, so you are always properly connected (you are connected to two safety lines at all times). When transitioning from a zip line to a platform or vice versa, you always have one safety line connected before switching the second line.

The first zip line is the test to see if a guest can handle the adventure. If the guides feel that you will not be able to complete the course, they will not allow you to go past the second platform. Despite looking more like a crazed Goofy than a graceful Tinker Bell, I was still permitted to continue the course.

By the second or third platform most of our group had gotten down the rhythm of how to stop. This technique involves gently pulling down on the zip line from behind to slow yourself when approaching the next platform.

The actual feeling you will have as you zip through the jungle is beyond words. It is one of the most exhilarating things I have ever done. The sheer thrill of feeling like you are flying is incredible.

One thing to note is that I imagined the platforms to be huge landings. Wrong! They were actually about two to three feet wide, as they circled around each tree. Being just a little bit terrified of heights, I was a little unnerved at first. As expected, I got used to them and only felt like quitting when I realized at one point that I had to walk across a hanging bridge that had no handrails (and was about two feet wide). Not to worry though, it does have a cable above it to hold your well-secured safety lines.

The heights of the platforms range up to 90 feet. Some were lower depending on the terrain. At one point there was a gorilla swing, basically a knotted rope, which landed you on solid ground before zipping on to the next platform. There are a total of eleven zip lines

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(each with its own unique name), one swing and two hanging bridges.

At the final platform you will be faced with one more daring feat. From about 30 feet off the ground you will need to rappel down. I was lucky enough to be chosen by the guide to go first (after one of the other guides demonstrated), despite the fact that I was in the middle of the group. Perhaps it was because I had mastered the skill so well that they wanted me to show the others how it was done. Or they desperately wanted to get me out of their trees and off of their platform before I hurt myself or others. I prefer to think it was the former.

Once everyone is on the ground, it is a short hike back to the outpost. Everyone is given a snack consisting of chips and a bottle of water. There are also a variety of beverages (yes, alcoholic too) available for purchase. They accept both Mexican pesos and American dollars, but will give you change in pesos. The tour company sells t-shirts at the outpost also.

Another added feature is that you may purchase a DVD of your adventure. While you are zipping on some of the lines, there are some parallel zip lines traversed by a cameraman capturing shots of each person in the group. This you will need to pay for and it will be mailed to you in approximately two to four weeks. Don't forget to tip the guides for the superb job they have done. Our guides were all very safety conscious, and did their very best to see that everyone had a great experience.

So why not save the shopping and sightseeing for the less adventurous. This excursion is sure to send a thrill up your spine and a tingle in your tummy. Just strap on your courage and start practicing your Goofy yell!

About The Author: Terry and her husband Gene live in Las Vegas with their two daughters. They were excited to be aboard the Disney Wonder for its first 10-night Southern Caribbean Cruise last September, and look forward to their next stay at the Disneyland Resort this summer.

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