

ADRENALINE TRAVEL

It's Not Just For The Hardcore. All you need is an adventurous spirit and a can-do attitude to tackle this popular destination travel phenom. Surprised? Read on.

by JAYME OTTO

Kiteboarding in Aruba...

Rappelling is not actually hard. Wearing a harness attached to a rope, you pretty much just back your way down a rock wall, or in my case, down a 65-foot ravine into the Camuy River. The hard part occurred in the river after the rappel, in which I was to remove the harness and reattach it to the rope, so my guide could pull it back up. Unclipping from the harness was trickier than it sounded, since the water was over my head and intent on sweeping me downstream.

I suppose I could have just spent my time in Puerto Rico lying on the beach, engaging in the ever-popular brand of tourism I like to call “sand snooze travel.” But I’d chosen the opposite experience—adrenaline travel. This involved heading inland with friends and two guides to trek to Resurgence Cave, a 45-million-year-old limestone cavern where the Rio Camuy resurfaces after flowing underground for 10 miles.

Here was our plan. Once we’d all rappelled into the river, we would float down to the water-only entrance to the cave, and explore its innards. Inside, we’d flip on our headlamps, dodge the resident bats and investigate Resurgence’s seemingly infinite chambers, moving between them by crawling on our knees and elbows, squeezing through vertical cracks, and sliding down (and slithering up) mudslides. Impressed, aren’t you?

Before you write me off as an adrenaline junkie, a hardcore athlete or a super freak, hear this: I am a cheerleader from Ohio. Cleveland, to be precise. And yes, Cleveland rocks, but offers very little in the ways of outdoor adventure experience. Need more evidence? People explore Resurgence Cave every day during the high season, including children as young as eight. As a matter of fact, this particular caving trek can be booked through the San Juan Marriott, and includes a shuttle service to and from the hotel and a bagged lunch.

The secret about adrenaline travel is that the trips sound much more dangerous than they actually are (thus a great way to impress your friends and family). Competent local guides and safety equipment go a long way to mitigate the majority of the risk.

Case in point: even as I waited for my friends to join me at the base of the rappel into the Rio Camuy, struggling to get my harness off and fretting about being carried prematurely into the Resurgence Cave, I never felt afraid. The water may have been over my head, but I certainly wasn’t in over my head considering I was wearing a life jacket. Plus, one of our guides had rappelled down first, and was there



RIVER RUNNERS, WHITEWATER.NET

in the water to lend a helping hand.

Another little-known fact is that most adrenaline travel excursions require no experience, no special skills and minimal athletic ability. The Resurgence Cave trip requires participants to be less than 280 pounds, but that’s only because they couldn’t fit through some of the cave’s cracks otherwise. As an adventure traveler, your legwork involves hunting down the best guide service, not obtaining any certifications or getting into the best shape of your life.

As Kavel, one of my guides, said, adrenaline travel is all about feeling the surge, without actually taking a significant risk. If you’re physically fit and not afraid to try new things, this type of experiential travel might just become your new obsession.

Dare to get bit by the adrenaline travel bug?

Check out these unforgettable trips:

KITEBOARDING in Aruba

Combining surfing, wakeboarding and paragliding, the exhilarating sport of kiteboarding relies on wind caught by kites to

propel surfers across the ocean. Thanks to major equipment advances over the past few years, being attached to a giant kite is no longer a dangerous proposition. “Depowering” the kite is as simple as releasing the handle, and there is now an appropriate kite size for nearly every suitable wind speed.

With warm, flat water and plenty of wind, Aruba is emerging as one of the best beginner-friendly kiting sites in the world. Equipment rentals and lessons come prepackaged, and recent gear improvements mean less of a learning curve. Look for a program that’s affiliated with the International Kiteboarding Organization (IKO), uses the latest gear and provides helmets.

WHITEWATER RAFTING

in Colorado

River rafting conjures images of relentless rapids thundering through a canyon, tossing brawny paddlers and their inflatable watercrafts through stomach-dropping hydraulics. But just like there are differences between ripples and waves, so are there distinctions between Class II rapids, which even children can negotiate with a guide, and Class VI rapids, for professionals only.



Exit Strategy:
Descending the Terrapin Tower headfirst down the "Rainbow Serpent" at Terrapin Adventures.

LOCAL ADVENTURE

You don't need to go far from home to get in on adrenaline travel. The following outfitters offer world-class experiences in our neck of the woods.

River Expeditions

There's a reason River Expeditions has been voted the best in West Virginia. Located in the heart of New River Gorge National Park, River Expeditions offers adventurers everything from family-fun rivers to extreme expeditions, and all on the famed Appalachian wildwaters, with more than 70 years of combined outfitting experience.

RAFTINGINFO.COM

Terrapin Adventures

Only 30 minutes from Baltimore, Annapolis and Washington DC, Maryland's Terrapin Adventures offers nearly every adrenaline activity imaginable. From zip-lining and ropes courses to river tubing and geo-caching, consider this your one-stop shop for outdoor invigoration.

TERRAPINADVENTURES.COM

Navitat Canopy Adventures

New this spring, Navitat takes guests on three-hour canopy tours in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Located just 20 minutes north of Asheville, Navitat features zip lines, rappels and sky-bridges created by Bonsai Design, Inc., the leader in US canopy tour design and construction.

NAVITAT.COM

The Arkansas River, the darling of whitewater, lures thousands of adrenaline travel-minded folks to Colorado each spring and summer. Guide companies have been here since the 1970s, many of them still in operation, creating one of the safest, most experienced whitewater scenes in the country. Choose from 1.5-hour family floats on Class I-II rapids in Buena Vista, to half-day excursions navigating the Class IV-V rapids in Canon City's Royal Gorge, to everything in between.

CANYONEERING in Arizona

Besides caves, canyons represent one of the last great, unexplored frontiers of America. Narrow gorges with multiple layers and sculpted walls of limestone, sandstone, granite and basalt, sometimes laced with waterfalls,

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LET'S GET OUTSIDE™



A woman zips through the rainforest on a Swiss Travel canopy tour arranged by the Marriott Hotels and Resorts of Costa Rica.

IMAGE COURTESY MARRIOTT HOTELS AND RESORTS OF COSTA RICA

mark the stomping ground of the canyoneer. These modern day pioneers combine navigation and route finding skills with hiking, scrambling, climbing, rappelling, anchoring and swimming to descend into and explore canyons using a hodgepodge of gear from other sporting disciplines. As canyoneering's popularity increases, more specialized equipment is being invented and manufactured, such as all-terrain shoes and waterproof bags for stashing sensitive gear and cameras.

Slot canyons carved hundreds of feet deep into ancient stone are hidden throughout the Arizona desert. Some of the most photographic ravines in the world are found here, offering startling scenery akin to something you'd expect to find in outer space. Look for an Arizona guide company committed to Leave No Trace practices.

ZIP-LINING

in Costa Rica

Zip-lining has made its way out of backyard tree forts and into the rainforest canopy. The zip line itself is a pulley that runs on an inclined cable, allowing you to Tarzan your way from point A to point B using gravity. In order to ensure adrenaline travel aficionados fly through the air safely, zip lines include a harness attached to the cable. Along with the harness, zippers also wear thick leather gloves, allowing them to break, and a helmet.

Costa Rica popularized the concept, banking on the fact that eco-tourists would want to spend time up in the canopy, where two-thirds of a typical rainforest's species live. With breathtaking lines reaching more than 100-feet tall, and canopy tour operations in or close by every major tourist area in the country, Costa Rica remains one of the best places to zip on earth. •

Jayne Otto lives and writes in the playground known as Boulder, CO. More at JaymeOtto.com

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