

FEEL THE RUSH

Unleash your inner daredevil and take to the air.
(Warning: You may get hooked.)

By Jessica Ridenour

EVER DREAM OF SOARING through the air like a superhero? Now you can act out those flying fantasies for real. These three high-flying adrenaline sports—paragliding, skydiving, and bungee jumping—will get your feet off the ground and your adrenaline pumping. All you need is a free afternoon and an adventurous spirit.

PARAGLIDING

Imagine silently floating above the earth, snugly seated in a comfortable harness tethered to a large inflated wing overhead, with only the sound of the wind and a bird's-eye view as your companions. It's this feeling of blissful freedom that makes paragliding so addictive to its more than 4,000 registered pilots in the United States—who soar at heights up to 15,000 feet, often for hours at a time.

According to instructor Kay Tauscher of Peak to Peak Paragliding in Boulder, Colorado, paragliding is a life-changing experience. "It's perceived as such an exceptional thing," she says, "that when people surmount it and learn how to do it, it brings such a sense of accomplishment and self-worth."

Paragliding does not take a lot of strength, but it does require some know-how, which is why you'll start out learning the basics on the ground. For around \$75 to \$300 (rates vary from school to school), you can start off with an introductory lesson, which will teach you how to launch, steer, brake, and land. If that first taste of flight hooks you, for about \$1,250 you can become a certified solo pilot, recognized by the U.S. Hang Gliding and Paragliding Association, after a minimum of 25 flights. Once you're trained to fly solo, you might want to get yourself a harness, glider, reserve parachute, and helmet (you could spend anywhere from \$1,000 to \$3,000 on the equipment); then you can take to the sky on a whim.

Kay believes that women tend to excel at paragliding because it's all about finesse. "It's a sport about feel and touch, and you start to feel and sense what the glider's doing and what it needs," she says. "Because of that, I think women make really good pilots."

SKYDIVING

If a heart-pounding 120-miles-per-hour freefall from 13,000 feet sounds exciting, skydiving may be the sport for you. Nothing can ever fully prepare you for that first terrifying leap, but most skydiving schools will provide ample training to make your first jump both safe and exhilarating.

Skydiving virgins have two options for experiencing the sport. If a onetime shot is more your thing, you can take a tandem jump physically lashed to your instructor for \$100 to

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\$200 and about an hour of your time. If you prefer to jump solo, you may sign on for an accelerated freefall course (AFF), where you spend approximately six hours learning how to operate the parachute; how to "fly," or steer, your body through the air;



FLY SCHOOLS

Want to feel the rush for yourself? Here is a list of paragliding, skydiving, and bungee jumping schools and sites where you can fulfill your daredevil fantasies.

PARAGLIDING

Peak to Peak Paragliding in Boulder, Colorado
www.peaktopeakparagliding.com; 303 817 0803
\$150 tandem; \$350 intro solo course

E-Ville Outfitters in Ellenville, New York
www.evilleoutfitters.com; 845 647 3377
\$99 intro lesson

Fly Texas in Austin, Texas
www.flytexas.com; 512 467 2529
\$99 intro lesson

Or find a school in your area at www.usbpa.org.

SKYDIVING

Skydive Elsinore in Lake Elsinore, California
www.skydiveelsinore.com; 877 THE JUMP [877 843 5867]
\$209 tandem jump; \$329 AFF

Skydive Kapowsin in Olympia, Washington
www.skydivekapowsin.com; 800 SKY DIVE [800 759 3483]
\$195 tandem; \$275 first-level AFF

School of Human Flight in Tallahassee, Florida
www.skydivetallahassee.com; 850 627 7643
\$193 tandem

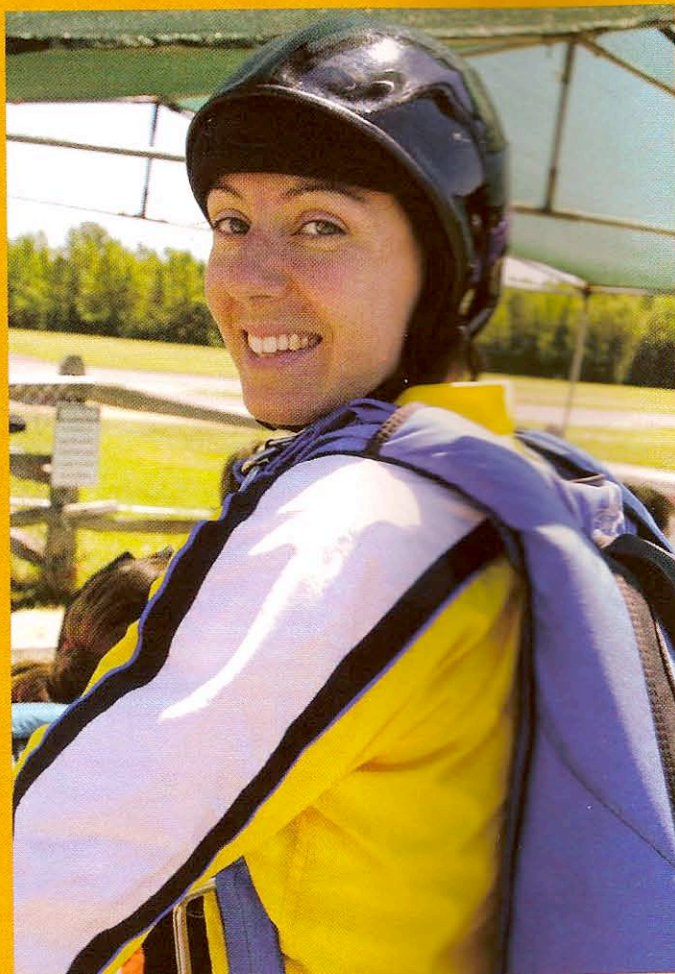
Or find a dropzone in your area at www.dropzone.com.

BUNGEE JUMPING

Bungee Masters in Woodland, Washington
www.bungee.com; 503 520 0303
\$75 for one jump; \$99 for two

Bungee America in Los Angeles, California
www.bungeeamerica.com; 310 322 8892
\$69 for one jump; \$109 for two

Whistler Bungee in Whistler, British Columbia
www.whistlerbungee.com; 877 938 9333
\$100 for one jump



how to land; and how to prepare for any possible (but unlikely) malfunctions. You then jump with your own parachute and two instructors holding on to you. After you've successfully completed seven jumps that way, you're certified to go solo.

Prices for the AFF course vary and will likely be the biggest investment in the sport; but once you're certified to jump solo, your out-of-pocket cost is significantly reduced. Most dropzones (where you take off and/or land) offer lift tickets for around \$20 a pop to experienced skydivers. With more than 250 dropzones in the United States, skydiving is becoming increasingly accessible for those wanting to feel the rush. All you have to do is take the plunge.

Dealing with jangled nerves can be the hardest part for first-time skydivers. "Breathing and relaxing your body is really important," says Melanie Curtis, competitor, coach, and marketing director for Skydive Elsinore in southern California. "Trust and have confidence in your instructors and equipment. Bring a friend for moral support—not that you would need that, it's just cool to have someone experience it with you."

BUNGEE JUMPING

Not for the faint-hearted, bungee jumping is a sport where a brave soul plunks down about a hundred bucks to jump from a tall structure, like a bridge, tower, or crane, tethered by a stretchy cord. Although



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not as popular as paragliding or skydiving, bungee jumping is accessible worldwide, particularly as part of adventure tourism in South America and New Zealand. (You can find a bungee site online at www.goneawol.com.)

After you sign up with a bungee company that is licensed, insured, and inspected by the state, you'll be weighed to determine what size harness and cord set you'll be jumping with. Forget those ankle harnesses you see on TV; these days most jump sites use a seat/chest harness combination (or something similar) to provide redundant protection and prevent you from dangling upside down like a piece of meat. A quick prejump lesson teaches you to jump out and away from the platform, rather than straight down, to avoid "bungee slap." Then you're harnessed in with locking steel carabiners, every anchor point is double-checked, and you're ready to jump.

"That's when the psychology kicks in, where the person has to dig deep and face the primal fears," says Casey Dale, president of the North American Bungee Association and head of www.bungee.com. His jump site—a private bridge in southern Washington State—is the tallest in the United States, at 191 feet.

The height of your jump will vary depending on the structure you're jumping from, but regardless of the distance between you and the ground, your jump will last only a few seconds—albeit possibly the most terrifying seconds of your life. But bungee aficionados agree: the rush is worth it. **WA**