

Heavenly strikes it rich with Silver Rush zipline



Rosemary Manning of South Lake Tahoe on her way across the East Peak Reservoir. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Hanging on and letting go at the same. Free, yet harnessed in. Remote wilderness, but modern safety features. For a brief moment the world seems to stand still, and yet it's whirring by at 40 mph.

Welcome to the world of ziplining. While there was a time when this swinging between the trees was a form of transportation, in today's world it's all about the adrenaline rush of flying in a relatively controlled manner from one platform to the next.

Heavenly Mountain Resort this month debuted the Silver Rush. And what a rush it is.



Leonardo Aguirre, a 2013 South Tahoe High grad on break from college, belays off a platform. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Progressively the five ziplines get longer, faster and more suspenseful. In all, it's more than 4,000 feet of soaring, with the last cable being 1,510-feet long.

Before starting off it's necessary to get geared-up. A harness and helmet are the basic pieces of equipment. Chandler and Magdelynn are constantly checking everyone's gear. It's easy for things to loosen up as the day goes on. Redundancy is built into the process. Safety is Heavenly's No. 1 concern.

Fun and exhilaration are what guests experience. Up to eight people can go on each tour, which includes two guides per trip.



Magdelynn ensures equipment is fastened securely.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

Our guides on July 7 added to the wonderful experience. Thorough and serious in their jobs, but fun and encouraging.

We meet near the Tamarack Lodge after taking the gondola up. From there we take the Easy Rider chairlift and walk to the gear shack. After another trek through the woods we come to the first tree with the platform about 20 feet in the air.

The U.S. Forest Service and the company that installed the apparatuses scouted out the location to determine which trees would be best. It's certified on an annual basis. Guides receive weeks of training.



Coming in for a landing is Leonardo Aguirre. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Holding onto what looks like a toddler-size handlebar, each of us is told to essentially sit – though there is only air to sit on – and cross our legs in front of us. For Rosemary and Leonardo it's their first time on a zipline. (They are both hooked and ready for more.) Screams of excitement echo through the pines.

By the third zipline the five of us are feeling pretty comfortable. Then you look at the fourth one. It's so much longer at 1,480 feet. On the other ones it was easy to enjoy the scenery, to look into the Carson Valley. This one, well, it has you realizing just how far off the ground you are and how long you are in the air. There is time to think about how little gear is involved to keep you suspended.

Smiles. Everyone had one as they landed. What an incredible rush.



Getting down requires trusting the guide when she says, “Just lean back.” Photo/Kathryn Reed

Next up it gets worse – in terms of thinking about consequences, and better – in terms of fun factor. Between the platforms is the East Peak Reservoir. This body of water is used during the winter for snowmaking. On Friday its purpose is to be a natural feature to add to the adrenaline searing through our bodies. It works. I don’t want to look straight down, but then I do – just briefly.

Trust in the gear and guides – it’s so necessary.

Beyond the ziplines, the Silver Rush requires climbing two

ladders, walking across a swinging rope-wood bridge, a few short jaunts through the woods, and belaying down from two platforms – one more than 40-feet high. These added features – plus the 4-wheel drive ride back to the start – make for an incredibly fun filled three hours.

It's an impressive amount of ground, um, air, we covered. The drop in elevation is most noticed taking the ride out from East Peak Lodge which is at 8,625 feet. The top of Easy Rider is 9,300 feet.

This isn't an excursion for everyone. Fear of heights could be a stumbling block. Some upper body strength is needed, especially to pull yourself onto the landing platform.



The sky bridge takes guests to the fourth zipline.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

Notes:

- Different packages are available and prices vary based on age. Details are **online**.
- Age and weight restrictions apply.
- Reservations are needed for Silver Rush.