



getting a BIRD'S EYE *view*

Paragliding over
the Swiss Alps with
Skywings Paragliding
& Adventures.

The background of the page is a high-angle aerial photograph. It shows a vibrant turquoise lake in the foreground, with a small peninsula or island in the middle ground. The land is covered in dense green forest, with some buildings and roads visible. Several colorful paracord lines (red, blue, purple) stretch diagonally across the frame, suggesting a paraglider's perspective. In the bottom left corner, the legs and feet of a person are visible, wearing tan shorts and brown shoes, hanging from the paracord lines.

Enjoy the sights from the perspective of a winged creature with these up-in-the-air activities.

Story | HALEY SHAPLEY

There's just something about the sky that inspires awe—consider the freedom of birds, the power of Superman, the stillness that exists up where the clouds live. “Once you have tasted flight, you will forever walk the earth with your eyes turned skyward, for there you have been, and there you will always long to return,” Leonardo da Vinci is said to have written.

Whether the quote truly came from da Vinci's pen or not, you can't argue with its sentiment. In this day and age, we have the opportunity to take flight often via airplane, but there are plenty of more interesting ways to explore the heavens, from floating and falling to cycling and strolling.



A FLOATING FANTASY **BAGAN, MYANMAR**

The first hot air balloon with passengers included a sheep, a duck and a rooster. But today, it isn't just farm animals who get to have all the fun—humans have been taking flight in beautiful, basketed balloons since the late 1700s.

One of the most extraordinary places in the world to launch is in Myanmar, which in recent years has emerged as a viable tourist destination for Americans. Known for hundreds of pagodas, temples and ruins that stretch back centuries, creating a skyline of fascinating and unusual shapes, Bagan is even more spectacular from the sky than it is from the ground. Upon seeing all the landmarks of this city on the Irrawaddy River, explorer Marco Polo wrote: “They make one of

the finest sights in the world, being exquisitely finished, splendid and costly. When illuminated by the sun they are especially brilliant and can be seen from the great distance.”

The most well-known ballooning company in the area is Balloons Over Bagan, which offers sunrise and sunset floats that start with a vintage bus ride to the launch site and end with a champagne toast, a worldwide ballooning tradition. The maroon-and-gold balloons add their own elegance to the scene.

The tours fill quickly and only run from October to March due to weather, so booking beforehand is recommended if you want to explore the ancient city from above.



A low-angle, upward-looking photograph of the Canton Tower in Guangzhou, China, at night. The tower's lattice structure is illuminated with a vibrant rainbow of colors, creating a 'bubble' effect. The background is a solid black night sky.

INSIDE THE BUBBLE **GUANGZHOU, CHINA**

Canton Tower



Enclosed in a glass dome almost 1,500 feet in the air, you'll be pretty close to being on top of the world—literally and figuratively—in the Bubble Tram at Canton Tower.

The 111th-floor attraction, which dubs itself a horizontal Ferris wheel, takes about 25 minutes to encircle the tower, offering lots of time to acclimate to the dizzying heights—and take a few photos, of course. From atop China's tallest building, you'll take in panoramic views of the country's third-largest city, Guangzhou, a sight to behold both during the daytime and at night.

That's not your only option at the sky-high Canton Tower, which

opened in 2010 and features a distinctive twisted shape inspired by a woman's figure. You can also climb spiral stairways on the outside, peer out from multiple observation decks, eat in a revolving restaurant, walk across a glass skywalk, and take a 100-foot drop in a ride that starts near the top of the tower.

The Bubble Tram though, is your best bet for a novel experience. The pods are positioned at a 15-degree incline and are said to be able to withstand earthquakes that register a magnitude of 8. Fortunately, chances are good that you won't need to test that out—the only stat you'll likely be focused on is just how far across the landscape you can see.

GLIDE LIKE A BIRD

INTERLAKEN, SWITZERLAND



You can get a bird's-eye view with a lot of activities, but to truly *feel* like a bird, nothing is better than hang gliding or paragliding. And there's perhaps no better place to soar through the sky than in the Swiss Alps, where the legendary mountains and brilliant blue lakes create a picture-perfect backdrop for floating.

In the Bernese Highlands city of Interlaken, conditions are good nearly year-round for gliding through the air, an adrenaline rush whether on a hang glider (a metal frame covered by a cloth that looks like a big kite; the riders hang beneath it in a lying-down position) or paraglider (a parachute-like device that riders sit underneath). Neither

requires previous experience—you'll ride tandem with an instructor, who will explain everything you need to know before you take flight.

Because the area is filled with both stunning scenery and ideal meteorological conditions for the sport, there are a variety of providers. SkyWings Adventures receives rave reviews for customer service, safety and fun—and can set you up with other area adventures. They cater the ride to everyone from the daredevil who wants to feel the sensation of falling out of the sky to the sightseer who wants to quietly take in the terrain. Either way, you'll feel as if you've sprouted wings.





A WALK (AND JUMP) ON THE WILD SIDE

AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND

Standing at the base of Auckland Sky Tower, thrill seekers can crane their necks and look up to see their next heart-pounding adventure.

At the top of the tallest man-made structure in New Zealand—about as tall as 37 buses end to end—are two options: a jump and a walk. Those may sound tame on the surface, but consider that both are happening 632 feet in the air.

The SkyJump, a TripAdvisor reviewer favorite, is like base jumping while attached to a wire. After inching toward the edge in your superhero-inspired flight suit, you'll look at the city skyline below and jump, reaching speeds of about 50 mph before safely landing

in a plaza below. When the fast-and-furious ride is over just seconds later, you'll have joined the ranks of musicians like Beyoncé and One Direction in making the famous plunge.

If you think jumping is scary, try *not* jumping—with the SkyWalk, visitors are challenged to tiptoe along the Southern Hemisphere's tallest tower, taking in the views and hearing about Auckland's history while navigating the edge sans handrail. Below, the city will look like a dollhouse landscape as you make your way around the circle with nothing but air on either side of your (possibly trembling) feet.

Want to try both? Use the password "Look & Leap" to get a discounted rate—and some serious bragging rights.



BIKING IN THE SKY

GLEN SUTTON, QUEBEC, CANADA

At Au Diable Vert, an eco-friendly getaway in the Eastern Townships of Quebec, owners Jeremy Fontana and Julie Zeitlinger wanted an attraction that would fit with their green ethos but wouldn't be too extreme. What they settled on may not be extreme, but it is extremely cool—and rare.

VéloVolant is a recumbent bicycle in the sky that allows riders to pedal through the treetops, suspended by cables strong enough to support five cars. There are only three canopy cycles in the world, and VéloVolant is the highest—reaching 100 feet off the ground at some points.

"It's a very unusual experience," Fontana says. "You get an interesting exhilaration, but you're in control. It's extremely unusual to

have control and exhilaration."

The course, which opened last year, winds its way through pines and maples for a kilometer and takes about 45 minutes to complete at the recommended leisurely pace. This isn't a race track, after all—it's an opportunity to connect with nature from a different vantage point than you usually get. You'll cycle over ravines and waterfalls, with a view of Vermont's Green Mountains in the distance.

Afterward, you'll get the link to a video of your adventure that you can share through social media. If you like the idea of staying up in the treetops after the ride is over, keep the theme going by sleeping in one of Au Diable Vert's treehouse cabins. ♡