

# Forget hill walking; try ziplining in Snowdonia

North **Wales** is fast becoming known as 'the adventure capital of Europe'. It no longer just conjures up images of rolling hills and gentle hill walking. Leading the activity renaissance in the area is the world's fastest zipwire - a mile-long adrenalin rush stretching over the Penrhyn Quarry. Situated just outside the Snowdonia National Park, in the hamlet of Bethesda, this thrill-seekers' heaven is about a 50-minute drive from the better-known city of Bangor.

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## Prepare your party to fly through the sky

The team bringing the airborne thrills to North Wales is Zip World Velocity. Open daily, apart from Christmas Day, you'll need to allow at least two-and-a-half hours for the whole experience which includes a quarry tour. One thing to check on the day of your visit is the weather as rides are occasionally cancelled due to high winds or extreme cold.

As with any extreme sport or activity, it's important to prepare correctly and this includes wearing the right clothes. I'd recommend the following: trainers or hiking boots, waterproof trousers and jackets, and gloves as it gets quite cold up the mountain! Lastly, long hair should be tied back and jewellery removed.



## Soar over the quarry at breath-taking speed

Make it through to reception and you'll be loaded on to the signature red ex-army trucks. These beasts slowly climb 1,000 feet to the holding platform, barely visible from anyone watching down below, which is where your first zip experience kicks off. The military procedure continues as you climb into a bright red suit, fasten the safety helmet on your head and strap tightly into a harness.

Then, it's all about flying down wires at high-speed. To get you acclimatised, there is the Little Zipper to get down first; a good shout, especially if you've never done this before. After a brief countdown, and facing head-first down the mountain, away you go! Although much shorter than the main event, you still get the amazing thrill of flying through the air really fast - hurtling towards the ground at 40mph.



As soon as you've landed, it's back on the truck to the top for the final zipline; the big one. On a clear day, the views are absolutely superb, stretching across to Anglesey and the Isle of Man. With the quarry lake now a tiny spot on the horizon and your harness linked back up to the wire it's 3, 2, 1, go! This time around you're whizzing along at a supercharged 100mph for around a minute, wind blowing in your face with barely a chance to take a breath. It really is an unmissable experience - like skydiving without jumping out of a plane.

Do bear in mind that children need to be over 10 years old and all under 18's must be accompanied by an adult. If powering down the zipline at Velocity isn't for you, you can always just do the quarry tour and watch the rest of your team fly past from the safety of solid ground. If you can be tempted, though, the oldest participant to date has been 93!

Penrhyn Quarry, which you zoom directly over, is still in use and is a fascinating glimpse into Wales' industrial heritage. In its heyday towards the end of the 19th century, 3,000 quarrymen used to work here and it was the biggest slate quarry in the world. You'll notice most of the buildings in the surrounding area are built from local stone with slate roofs.



## Ziplined out? Explore the nearby caverns

If you get the adventure-bug, Zip World has three other sites, including Zip World Caverns, about an hour's drive from each other offering slightly different adrenalin-filled experiences. If you book these in a package, there are also some great discounts available.

An enclosed viewing platform with attached restaurant is due to open at Velocity in April 2017. In the meantime, for a village of its size, Bethesda has a large number of hostelries, most serving draught beer and local brews together with simple pub food. Three quarters of the population in the area speak Welsh, one of the highest proportions in Wales, so if you want to keep it authentic, stay local. There are several places to stay, both self-catering and B&B, which are mostly small family run affairs. YHA Idwal Cottage, although a youth hostel, is squeaky clean, has free parking and is licensed. It's self-catering, so get your provisions in Bangor or use the small local supermarket. If you yearn for a hotel and small city life, Bangor could meet your needs. Try the family run Garden Hotel in the High Street with a good Chinese restaurant next door.



Although driving to North Wales is not always easy, with its twisting roads and lack of motorways, once you are there, the stunning natural beauty of the place, slower pace of life, and lack of crowds will disarm you. And there's always that zipline ride to look forward to!