



BIRD'S EYE VIEW

WHITEFISH MOUNTAIN RESORT PROVIDES A NEW THRILL FOR SUMMERTIME VISITORS

Story and Photos by Brian Schott



The sound is like jet engines on full throttle—a high, metallic, ear-piercing whine. With my eyes closed, it sounds like I am actually standing on a runway at a major airport with a 757 screeching over my head. But I am standing on a wooden platform on the side of a Montana mountain, waiting for my guide to clip my harness into a trolley, a device that will transport me along a steel line through the air at speeds reaching up to 50 miles per hour.

No wonder some participants close their eyes.

“It can sometimes take a little coaxing,” says guide Tyler Stanley, a 21-year-old Montana native who says he feels lucky to have grown up in the area and has one of the best jobs in the world.

Here at Whitefish Mountain Resort, Zip Lines are the new summer thrill that has catapulted the ski and summer resort into a booming adventure business. In 2003, the resort’s management began an effort to lure summertime visitors with the installation of the Walk in the Treetops attraction.

With the addition of the Zip Lines in 2009, as well as an Alpine Slide, summer at the resort has taken on a new feel, with travelers from across the globe wandering the lower slopes in search of gravitational thrills. At the height of

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summer, a dozen Zip Line tours depart from the base lodge each day, just 15 minutes from downtown Whitefish and the Amtrak station.

To begin our adventure, I sat with a group of travelers from Calgary as we filled out forms with our vital statistics then stepped on a scale to weigh in. For the 6-Zip tour (3 hours, \$75), Zip-liners must weigh between 100 and 230 pounds and be at least 54 inches tall. The 4-Zip tour (2 hours, \$59) can accommodate smaller folks down to 60 pounds. After being fitted with a comfortable paragliding-style harness and

To control speed, point your legs like a pencil to cut through the air, or spread your arms and legs in “starfish” form to slow you down. Landing position means dropping your head so your neck and back are parallel when your trolley collides with a spring-loaded mechanism at the end of the line with a loud crash!—although the sound is more intense than the actual collision.

Two cables span each run, so in addition to flying through the air with a companion next to you, competitions can also be sparked.



helmet, our guides gave a safety talk. I felt like we were a bunch of astronauts waiting for blast-off.

The trolley that slides along the steel line looks just like a miniature cable car, and after a short walk to the “Easy Come, Easy Go” line for some practice, we ventured to the 800-foot-long “Clothes Line” for our first real flight. Lifting your feet from the platform is like swinging from a rope swing—first a weightless feeling, then a drop in the stomach, into smoothly gliding, picking up speed, the air rushing around your body....and you just keep going.

For those on the 6-zip tour, lines 3 and 4 are the longest and highest, with “The Big Daddy” measuring at 1,900-foot long (1/3 mile) and 300-foot high with a 7.3-degree slope. The “Highline” is 1,500-foot long, 200-foot high with a 5.6-degree slope. Then it’s on to “Heaven” (1,100-foot long, 150-foot high, 10-degree slope), and finally, “The Floater,” measuring 300-foot long, 100 feet in the air with an 8-degree slope.

As we walked back to the lodge, trolleys slung over our shoulders, a sense of satisfaction floating in the mountain air, Tyler left us with an appropriate goodbye: “Thanks for flying Whitefish Mountain Resort!”