

Rock Climbing/ Abseiling/ Rappelling Guideline

Guidelines for Registration with Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Rock Climbing, Wall Climbing, Abseiling, and Rappelling** are exciting outdoor/ indoor activities that involve vertical ascent or descent using ropes and specialized equipment. These activities require proper training, preparation, and equipment to ensure the safety of participants. This guideline provides comprehensive regulations and practices for operators of rock climbing, wall climbing & abseiling activities, aimed at ensuring safety, environmental sustainability, and compliance with national and international standards.

2. Definitions:

- 2.1. Rock Climbing:** Rock climbing is the activity of scaling steep rock formations using specialized equipment such as ropes, anchors, and harnesses. It requires a combination of strength, skill, and technique to climb and navigate the rock surface.
- 2.2. Wall Climbing:** Wall climbing involves ascending man-made climbing structures designed to simulate the experience of outdoor rock climbing. These walls are typically constructed with a variety of holds and features that mimic natural rock formations. Wall climbing can take place indoors in climbing gyms or outdoors on specially designed walls.
- 2.3. Abseiling (Rappelling):** Abseiling, also known as rappelling, involves descending a vertical or near-vertical surface using a rope and specialized equipment. It is commonly used in outdoor adventure activities such as rock abseiling, canyoneering, waterfall abseiling, cave abseiling & Rope jumping. Rappelling is the process of descending a vertical or near-vertical surface using a fixed rope and is often used interchangeably with abseiling. Common activities include tower rappelling and chopper rappelling. The term "abseiling" is commonly used in Europe and other parts of the world, while "rappelling" is more prevalent in North America.

3. Objective

The key objectives of this guideline are to ensure the safety, sustainability, and overall enjoyment of rock climbing, wall climbing & abseiling activities. These objectives outline a regulatory framework to promote responsible adventure tourism;

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- 3.1. Safety Assurance:** Establish comprehensive safety guidelines to minimize risks and protect participants, staff, and the environment.
- 3.2. Risk Assessment & Management:** Develop a system to identify, assess, and manage risks associated with the activities, including equipment, participant health, and environmental factors.
- 3.3. Regulatory Compliance:** Ensure adherence to both national and international regulations that govern adventure tourism activities.
- 3.4. Participant Education:** Provide clear instructions and information to participants, fostering awareness of safety protocols and responsible practices.
- 3.5. Environmental Sustainability:** Encourage practices that minimize the environmental impact of activities and promote respect for natural surroundings.
- 3.6. Continuous Improvement:** Continuously improve operational standards in line with best practices, ensuring long-term safety and sustainability.

4. General Guidelines

4.1. Location

- 4.1.1. The activity site may be on private or public property, or span both.
- 4.1.2. Explicit approvals shall be obtained from property owners before organizing any activities.
- 4.1.3. The site, whether natural rock formations or artificial climbing walls, shall offer proper access and a range of difficulty levels suitable for both beginners and experienced climbers.
- 4.1.4. The operator shall ensure the pre activity check – ups as described from the section 5 Before start the operation.

4.2. Safety Protocols

- 4.2.1. *Service providers shall obtain participants' details and require them to sign personal medical and indemnity forms.
- 4.2.2. *The Rock Climbing, Wall climbing & Abseiling operator and staff shall have adequate professional training and experience.

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- 4.2.3. *The Rock Climbing, Wall climbing & Abseiling operator shall maintain records of ongoing and refresher trainings covering adapting new devices, techniques, and emergency response procedures, safety protocols, risk assessment and first aid.
- 4.2.4. *Prior to the activity, risk factors and safety measures shall be communicated to all participants. Regular checks should also be conducted during and after the activity.
- 4.2.5. *Safety check-ups on all equipment used for activities shall be carried out regularly and immediately before an activity by a qualified instructor or safety auditor.
- 4.2.6. *Ensure activities are conducted under the supervision of a well-trained, experienced facilitator or instructor.
- 4.2.7. Age and weight instructions shall be advised based on equipment specifications and safety considerations to ensure the well-being and suitability of the climbing experience for all participants.
- 4.2.8. Belayer shall undergo formal training and certification to ensure proficiency in belaying techniques, rope management, and emergency procedures. They are continuously supervised during climbing sessions to maintain adherence to safety protocols and respond promptly to risks. Regular inspection and maintenance of belaying equipment, ropes, and anchors are crucial for upholding safety standards.
- 4.2.9. Effective communication between climbers and belayers shall be essential for clear instructions and quick responses. Belay operators shall be trained in emergency response protocols, including lowering techniques and rescue procedures, to manage unforeseen incidents safely and promptly.

4.3. Services Protocols

- 4.3.1. *The Rock Climbing, Wall climbing & Abseiling operator shall provide the communication facilities (mobile communication, radio communication etc.) throughout the planned Rock-climbing, Wall climbing & Abseiling activities.
- 4.3.2. *Overall course briefing (ground rules & safety briefing) and changing of appropriate attire shall be conducted prior to the activity started.

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- 4.3.3. *Conduct a pre-activity demonstration to familiarize participants with the equipment and safety procedures. Allow participants to practice using the equipment under close supervision before starting the course.
- 4.3.4. *Providing all participants with the necessary safety gear required carrying out an activity and ensuring the participants wear proper and appropriate safety gear when taking part in any activity.
- 4.3.5. *Adequate and quality all essential Rock Climbing, Wall climbing & Abseiling gear and equipment's shall be made available well in advance.

4.4. Operational Protocols

- 4.4.1. *The operator shall have a written safety management plan that outlines the procedures for risk assessment, training, supervision and emergency response.
- 4.4.2. *Well written code of conduct shall be available for the Operators and Passengers according to the SOP.
- 4.4.3. *The service provider offers a transparent and detailed sustainable policy, demonstrating commitment to environmental, social, and economic responsibility for participants awareness.
- 4.4.4. *In case of emergency, service provider shall be learned and aware rescue operation procedure with adequate staff and gear.
- 4.4.5. *Adequate number of trained & qualified staff shall be available for each activity in Rock Climbing, Wall climbing & Abseiling.
- 4.4.6. *Service provider and the staff shall have adequate knowledge and the skills of fall protection safety, wilderness first aid/ elementary first aid, lifesaving and emergency rescue procedures.
- 4.4.7. *Service provider shall ensure valid public liability insurance, workmen's compensation insurance, dully filled medical referral form and accident management report.
- 4.4.8. *All emergency contact numbers (such as hospital, doctors on call, police station, fire brigade rescue unit, armed forces, and relevant local authorities) of parties to be contacted in case of an emergency shall be always available with the Rock Climbing, Wall climbing & Abseiling instructor as well as at the communication base station.

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4.5. *Mandatory Safety Gear particularly for Rock Climbing, Wall climbing and Abseiling activities;

- 4.5.1. **Climbing Helmet:** Protects the head from falling debris and impacts full body & half body harnesses.
- 4.5.2. **Ropes:** Dynamic ropes for climbing and static ropes for abseiling.
- 4.5.3. **Harness:** Secures the climber to the rope and provides attachment points for gear (full body harness shall be used for 100m or above waterfalls Abseiling)
- 4.5.4. **Belay Device:** Controls the rope during belaying and rappelling.
- 4.5.5. **Carabiners:** Used to connect ropes, harnesses, and other gear.
- 4.5.6. **Anchor Systems:** Includes bolts, cams, nuts, or other devices to secure ropes.
- 4.5.7. **Climbing Shoes:** Provide grip and support on rock surfaces.
- 4.5.8. **Chalk Bag and Chalk:** Helps keep hands dry for better grip.
- 4.5.9. **Quickdraws:** Connects ropes to bolts for protection while climbing.
- 4.5.10. **Prusik Cord:** Used for emergency ascents and backups.
- 4.5.11. **Descender:** Allows controlled descent during rappelling.
- 4.5.12. **Anti-burn Gloves:** Protect hands during rappelling and handling ropes.
- 4.5.13. **Personal Anchor System (PAS):** A tether used to connect the climber to anchors.
- 4.5.14. **Nut Tool:** Removes protection placed in cracks while climbing.
- 4.5.15. **Helmet Light:** Provides visibility during low-light or nighttime climbing.
- 4.5.16. **Ascending & descending gear:** (figure of eight, gigri, grillon, jumar, Air Traffic Control (ATC or belay plate etc.)
- 4.5.17. **Rope bags:** specialized containers designed to store and transport climbing ropes. They serve several purposes to maintain the integrity and longevity of the rope while facilitating easy deployment and management during climbing activities.
- 4.5.18. **Safety line & lanyards:**

These items are essential for ensuring safety, comfort, and efficiency while engaging in rock climbing and abseiling activities.

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4.6. Other Items That are Commonly Needed;

- 4.6.1. *Field first aid kit
- 4.6.2. *Maintenance tool kit
- 4.6.3. Training equipment's
- 4.6.4. Anchors and support structure
- 4.6.5. Bulldog clip, thimble, turning buckle, D-shackle, steel wire rope etc.
- 4.6.6. Extra abseiling ropes
- 4.6.7. Other ropes (Manilla rope, PP rope, tiger rope, nylon rope)
- 4.6.8. Cotton gloves

4.7. Important Practices

- 4.7.1. *As some of the Rock Climbing, Abseiling could be sensitive bio-diversitically or geologically, obey the Leave No Trace (LNT) principles and existing rules and regulations of respective authorities.
- 4.7.2. The operator shall have the awareness of general weather condition patterns of the relevant area/locations. (lightning & thundering).
- 4.7.3. *The appointed safety auditor shall be empowered throughout all activities to provide effective supervision of preventive and corrective measures.
- 4.7.4. Implement a system for continuous monitoring of rock climbing, wall climbing, and abseiling activities through regular inspections and maintenance. Encourage the use of video surveillance or staff patrols to track participant progress and promptly address any safety concerns.
- 4.7.5. Adhere to international safety standards for Rock Climbing, Wall climbing & Abseiling.
- 4.7.6. Regularly inspect and maintain all Rock Climbing, Wall climbing & Abseiling equipment, including harnesses, helmets, carabiners, pulleys, and ropes.
- 4.7.7. Follow the manufacturer's guidelines for equipment maintenance and retirement schedule.
- 4.7.8. Qualified staff at designated points shall be deployed throughout the course to oversee participant activities and offer assistance when required. Furthermore, a buddy system shall be established to reinforce safety measures.

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- 4.7.9. Establish weight and age restrictions based on equipment specifications and safety considerations to ensure participants meet the physical requirements for the specific Rock Climbing, Wall climbing & Abseiling elements.
- 4.7.10. *Doctor or paramedic officer on call facility shall be available.
- 4.7.11. Clear signage indicating safety guidelines, rules, and emergency contact information shall be installed. Effective communication systems shall be provided between staff members and participants.

5. Pre-Activity Check-Ups

5.1. Participant Check-Up

- 5.1.1. **Medical History:** Ensure participants fill out a detailed medical form. Check for any pre-existing conditions such as heart problems, vertigo, asthma, or joint issues that may hinder their ability to participate safely.
- 5.1.2. **Physical Fitness:** Verify that participants meet the required fitness level for the specific activity. Ascertain that they are in good health and physically capable of handling the activity's intensity.
- 5.1.3. **Age and Weight Verification:** Ensure that participants meet the age and weight requirements as per the equipment's safety limits.
- 5.1.4. **Indemnity Form:** Ensure all participants sign a waiver of liability and an indemnity form acknowledging the risks involved and agreeing to the operator's terms.
- 5.1.5. **Briefing Acknowledgement:** Confirm that participants have attended the pre-activity briefing and understand the safety procedures, signals, and risks involved.

5.2. Equipment Check-Up

5.2.1. For all activities (Rock Climbing, Wall Climbing, and Abseiling):

5.2.1.1. Harness:

- Check that harnesses fit properly, with all straps secured and snug but not restricting movement.
- Inspect harnesses for any signs of wear, fraying, or damage to buckles and stitching.

5.2.1.2. Helmet:

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- Ensure helmets are adjusted properly, covering the forehead, and that chin straps are fastened securely.
- Inspect helmets for cracks, dents, or any compromise in the integrity of the material.

5.2.1.3. **Ropes:**

- Examine climbing and abseiling ropes for fraying, cuts, or excessive wear.
- Confirm that the ropes used are appropriate (dynamic for climbing, static for abseiling) and of the correct length for the course.

5.2.1.4. **Belay Device & Carabiners:**

- Inspect belay devices for wear and proper functioning.
- Check all carabiners to ensure they are locking, free of cracks, and properly functioning.

5.2.1.5. **Shoes & Gloves:**

- Verify that climbing shoes fit well and are appropriate for the surface.
- Ensure gloves (for abseiling) are in good condition with no tears, offering adequate protection against rope burns.

5.2.1.6. **Anchor Systems:**

- Confirm that anchor points are securely installed, and bolts, cams, and nuts are correctly placed.
- Inspect for rust or deterioration, especially in outdoor rock-climbing settings.

5.2.1.7. **Chalk & Chalk Bags:**

- Ensure each climber has a functional chalk bag and enough chalk for the duration of the climb.

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5.2.1.8. Other Equipment:

- For abseiling, check descenders and ensure they function smoothly.
- Inspect all quickdraws, slings, and Prusik cords for wear and correct attachment.

5.3. Environmental Check-Up

5.3.1. For outdoor activities (Rock Climbing & Abseiling):

5.3.1.1. Weather Conditions:

- Check weather reports for the day to ensure it is safe for the activity. Postpone activities if there are risks of thunderstorms, high winds, or extreme temperatures.
- Assess the risk of rockfalls or avalanches depending on the location and season.

5.3.1.2. Rock Integrity (Rock Climbing & Abseiling):

- Check the climbing surface for loose rocks, unstable sections, or any hazards that could endanger participants.
- Ensure the climbing area is clear of debris or other obstacles that could create a hazard during the climb.

5.3.1.3. Artificial Wall Inspection (Wall Climbing):

- Ensure that the wall holds and panels are securely fastened and free of cracks or wear.
- Check that there are no sharp or protruding parts that could injure climbers.
- Regularly inspect indoor walls for wear due to use, especially on frequently climbed routes.

5.4. Operational Check-Up

5.4.1. Instructor & Staff Readiness:

- 5.4.1.1. Verify that all instructors and facilitators are present, well-rested, and ready for the activity.

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5.4.1.2. Ensure that belayers are trained and positioned for the climb, with backup staff available for emergencies.

5.4.2. **First Aid and Emergency Readiness:**

5.4.2.1. Confirm that first aid kits are accessible and stocked.

5.4.2.2. Ensure emergency communication devices (radios, mobile phones) are working and available.

5.4.2.3. Identify emergency evacuation routes and procedures, and make them known to the staff.

5.4.3. **Participant Orientation:**

5.4.3.1. Ensure that all participants have received a comprehensive briefing on climbing commands, proper use of equipment, and what to do in case of an emergency.

5.4.3.2. Run through a practice session where participants demonstrate proper belaying and climbing techniques, ensuring they understand the instructions and can operate the equipment.

5.4.4. **Emergency Drills:**

5.4.4.1. Conduct emergency drills with the staff to ensure they are prepared for rescue or evacuation situations.

6. ***Participant Feedback:** Encourage participants to provide feedback on their experience, including safety concerns or suggestions for improvement. Use feedback to continually enhance safety and the overall participant experience.

7. ***Post-Activity Debrief:** Conduct a debriefing session with participants to discuss their experience and address any concerns. Use debrief sessions to reinforce safety guidelines and gather insights for future improvements.