

A Different Perspective

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Hang gliding has been in existence since the 1970's. Today it has evolved into an exhilarating, yet safe adventure sport. Typically when one hang glides for the first time, they do it tandem with an experienced pilot to guide the sail. This is advantageous because the first time rider is able to simply relax and enjoy the scenery below without having to worry about the technicalities of the flight. Having an experienced pilot will also take charge during the landing process and increase the chances of a successful landing.

The actual hang gliding equipment is rather simple, yet as time goes by it is becoming increasingly more high tech. The frame is made of a lightweight aluminum material and the sail is made of a fabric composed of carbon fiber and high tech sail products. Typically, this equipment and attending a certification hang gliding school will cost upwards of \$5000, but if one were to shop around and find used equipment in good condition it could drop the cost to approximately \$2000.

Before one can run off the mountain and begin their true hang gliding experience, they must don the appropriate equipment. Each person hang gliding must wear a special harness that will support the front of themselves and attaches behind them to the frame of the sail. A helmet is a necessary piece of equipment as well.

Anybody can hang glide. The majority of equipment is built for people weighing within the range of 90- 250 pounds. It is possible to hang glide out of this weight limit, but finding the proper equipment may be more difficult. There are also no height restrictions for hang gliding, although, typically hang gliding equipment is designed for people between 5 feet and 6 feet 4 inches. Once again equipment can be found for people outside these margins. Since hang gliding relies more on balance than strength, men and women do equally well piloting. Some core strength is required for longer flights and the pilot must be able to jog down the platform carrying 50- 70 pounds of weight on their shoulders, the weight of the equipment. Not a great deal of strength is required since the pilot's body weight is held up by the harness.

Hang gliders can launch off any slope that is relatively clear, faces into the wind, and has a 6 to 1 slope ratio. The pilot, or if it is a tandem ride the pilot and rider, run down the slope and will take off when the wind reaches between 15 and 20 mph. If gliders are located in an area without any slopes, trucks can be utilized to get the glider into the air. The duration of the flight depends on the weather conditions, but on a high altitude flight, the hang gliding flight can last for several hours. How high and how far the hang glider goes depends on weather conditions as well. Pilots over the summer in the western United States will fly over 100 miles and gain altitudes between 5,000 and 10,000 feet.

The hang glider is steered by the shifting of the pilot's weight with respect to the sail. Since the pilot is suspended from the harness attached to the gliders frame, a minimal amount of strength is needed to steer. This leaves the pilot with a great deal of mobility. The pilot is able to move forward, backward, and side to side which result in a change of the center of gravity of the hang gliding equipment. This causes the glider to move in the direction of the pilot's weight shift, which allows the pilot to turn the glider and control the speed as well. The landing process depends on the experience of the

pilot. A pilot with greater experience would be able to land in a smaller area. The wind and terrain play a large role in where a hang glider can land.

The safety of hang gliding depends on the individual pilot. People do make bad judgment calls and can be careless. Unfortunately, sports such as hang gliding is not so forgiving to these mistakes, but in most cases pilots will not sustain any serious injuries throughout their career of hang gliding. To limit the amount of injury incidence in the United States, pilots are required to be certified. During the certification process, there are standardized tests and only certified instructors teach the pilots through an intensive training program.

While in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the majority of the class decided to try the hang gliding experience. We drove up to the launch area and one by one met our pilots. I was paired with a man named Oswaldo. He helped me into my harness and taught me that on the count of three we start running side by side and not to stop at the end of the platform. After a practice run we got our harness strapped to the glider and made our way to the platform. Before running off the side of the mountain strapped to this Brazilian stranger, he explained in broken English not stop running once we reached the edge and he would explain the landing process once we were in the air. Not once was I ever asked to sign a release form or show identification. I was told payment was not necessary until landing. The most thrilling part of the ride was running off the platform, but once we were launched into the air the view was breathtaking. My ride lasted about 20 minutes and it was worth every penny. We flew over the favelas, resorts and the beach and I even got to fly with a hawk. We landed smoothly to finish off my great hang gliding ride from the summit.

Brazil is a country still developing, but in order to continue to do so, money is a very important factor. The lack of money is what holds Brazil back. Tourism is a big way for Brazil to capitalize on their natural resources and show off their vibrant culture, colorful architecture and exquisite landscapes. It is reported that 71% of the visitors in Brazil are there for the purpose of tourism and those people spend an average of \$83.38 per day. (Masiero) While visiting another country, extra activities such as hang gliding, are a great way to support the local economy as well as getting the treat of being able to experience the country in a way different than most other tourists.

Resources:

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<http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~drclas/publications/revista/Tourism/masieropictures.html>