

Climb with Kids





Kids are very keen to try out new physical activities and often, the more of an adrenalin rush an activity gives a child; the keener they are to have a go themselves. Last month, my friend and his wife were visiting me in Ao Nang and were looking for some safe adventure for the whole family. I took them climbing...

Rock climbing is an exhilarating, challenging, healthy and fun activity unlike any other, and an alternative activity to make your holiday more valuable, especially if you are with kids. Eventually, with this in mind, I convinced my friends Sergio and Antonella to take their kids climbing. "Is it dangerous?" they naturally asked. When approached in the correct way, climbing is nowhere near as dangerous as many people think. I made sure I chose the most reliable climbing school in the area for our adventure of course.

We met our instructors Jane, Thailand's top ranked female climber and part of the Thai National Team, and her colleague Nut in Hot Rock Climbing School shop, and started the gearing-up ceremony: we were fitted with harnesses tight enough not to slip down the hips, snug climbing shoes and Chalk bag. As we reached the climbing spot, in Railay East, and looked up at the rocks we were going to climb, the kids seemed slightly concerned, as this was their first climbing experience on real rock. Nut then laid the root using the locking carabiners while Jane explained the kids what to do once they reach the top. The truth is most kids are more afraid of coming down than going up.

Antonella was astonished to see 9-year-old Stefano climb with real confidence. He quickly gained a good foundation, trusting his harness and bending knees, switching hands, shifting left to right under our instructions shouted from the ground. Once he reached the top and was ready to come down, Nut tightened up the belay and told him to sit in the harness. Stefano was comfortable and



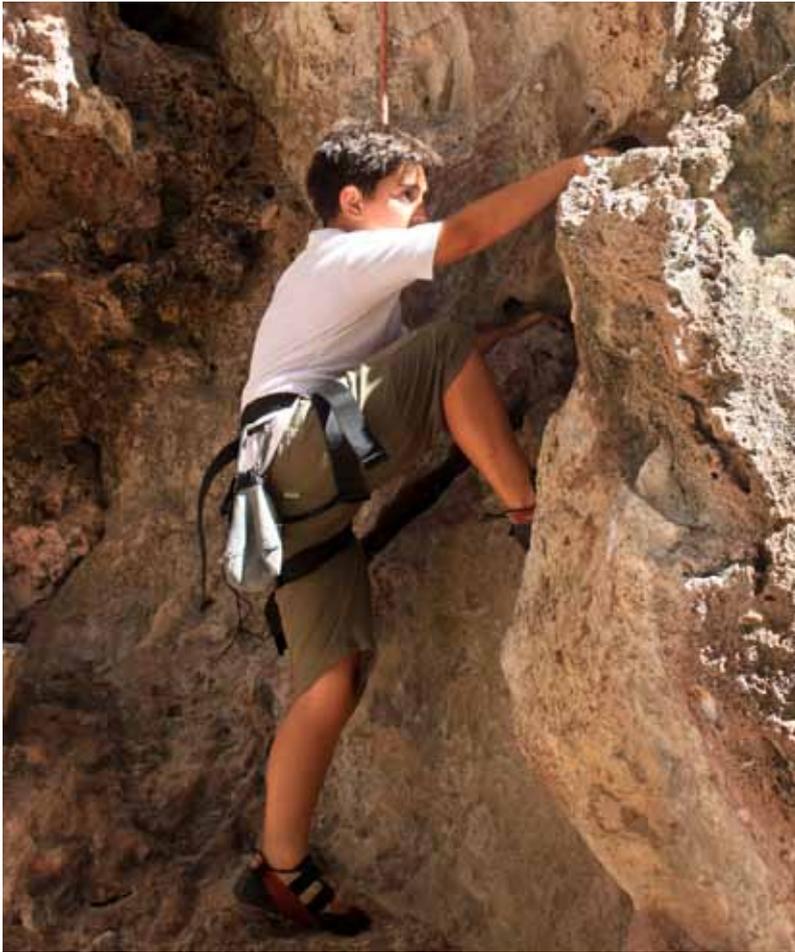
pushed off the rock doing little hops. It looked as if he had always climbed! After that it was 12-year-old Silvia to attempt the climb, after being prepared on what to do at the top. In fact, a new climber can get nervous and unknowing at the very top of a climb. Up there, she was instructed to unclung from the rock, she spread feet wide, bent the knees and was gradually lowered down. We adults followed suit, reaching the ring and enjoying the magnificent views from the top.



After the first few climbs, and as the tide was raising and leaving little space at the bottom of the cliff, we packed our bags and trekked to the end of Phranang Beach and through a steep and dark cave to reach a cave window perched at 50 meters from the foot of the cliff from where we enjoyed amazing views of the Railay Bay. We needed to descend that route in order to return to our starting point. Nut and Jane explained to the kids that the main feature of the abseiling technique is to hold the rope and slowly slide it in a controlled way, keeping the legs stretched and well apart at all time while dropping back to the void, with body weight serving as a puller. A challenge the kids took on with real courage. We encouraged them to have hands out and ready to push off from the rock, in case they began to roll from one side or the other. More often than not a new climber will feel more comfortable hanging onto the rope, and the kids did just that. This is okay, but care should be taken of small overhangs or other outcroppings that climbers can bonk their heads on. Eventually they reached the foot of the cliff where Jane was waiting. The kids looked relieved and contempt for the achievement. Overall, getting a new climber used to being next to the rock, hanging in their harness and protecting themselves at the same time is the key.

As we were trekking the verdant foothill forest going back to the meeting point I was proud to have pushed my friends and their kids to this unique invigorating experience. Now they all know what rock climbing entails and that it is a sport that anyone reasonably fit and of nearly any age can embark upon. ✂

Guide



Introducing Your Kids to Climbing

There are no restrictions on the age you should begin to take your kids climbing. For the most part, common sense and your own climbing knowledge (if you have any) as well as understanding your kids will determine the moment you feel comfortable in taking them out climbing. However, especially for non-climber parents, it's often better if you introduce them to the world of climbing gradually and in a nice setting as Railay is. Beginning with the very basics in a stunning place in order that they can gain a sense of confidence in themselves before moving on to more challenging climbs later on. One of the best ways to introduce your kids to climbing is to take them along to an indoor climbing wall where they'll be instructed in the basics and taught all about safety. However, Railay's several easy climbing routes make the area perfectly suited for parents wanting to get their kids to try this experience.

What Will They Learn?

In addition to being taught the basics of the importance of safety, a typical kids' class will focus primarily on how to find the easiest routes up a climbing wall, manoeuvring techniques, understanding and following basic commands and how to grip holds correctly. As they gain more confidence, they'll be instructed in all of the different types of climbing gear and devices and learn skills such as how to belay, tie knots and fit harnesses correctly.

Family Fun

Climbing is a good way to bond as a family. Parents quickly discover the climbing isn't always the highlight of their adventures. Sometimes finding lizards and other fauna along the way or looking at the stunning views from up there is. You should also not push them to new climbs. It seems kids' natural curiosity takes over and they'll find their own enjoyment on climbing outings after a while.

Keep Them Interested

Talk to them, teach them things. Many times a kid suddenly loses interest 7 or 8 feet off the ground. This can be frustrating when you just spent 15 minutes on shoes, harness, and tying in. Bouldering is a great alternative to climbing routes with kids. Friends are key. A big group is the antidote to short attention spans, and makes the time between routes less tedious.

Be Realistic

Your kid will probably not be the next top world climber. You take your kid climbing to develop a love of the sport and the outdoors.

Facts



Hot Rock Climbing School

Our climb was kindly sponsored by Hot Rock Climbing School, established in 1994, one of the most reliable climbing schools in Railay offering an array of courses to suit your needs; they are TAT registered, have full insurance for their customers and can arrange accommodation in one of the few resorts of the area, with prices to suits all budgets. They are the local experts of climbing with kids. Their instructors are professional and likeable, guide you with patience and safety, and this makes the whole experience easy and fun. You can climb in many different areas and only in small groups of up to 3 guests on 1 instructor. Small groups mean better safety, more climbing and better instruction. You choose what skills to learn and how fast to move on to new skills or new climbing techniques. Check Hot Rock Climbing School website, www.railayadventure.com or call Saralisa on 08 56419842.

Geography

Laem Phranang is a kingdom of spectacular clear bays with lush limestone cliffs that drop right into the blue sea. The peninsula is made up of a huge headland that separates three main bays, Railay West, Railay East and Phranang Bay, each with its respective beach. West Railay is the beach buzzing with life (restaurants, bars, etc) but the area to go for climbing and other nature activities is situated between Tham Phranang cave and East Railay.



Get There, Around & Back

If you are holidaying in Ao Nang, catch a longtail boat at any end of Ao Nang beach (100 thb per person), or at Ao Nam Mao pier (60 thb per person). The sun sets at around 6.15pm and by 6.45pm it is already dark. Try to get back to Ao Nang before 7pm as it may be difficult and much more expensive to get a boat back after this time. From Railay West to Railay East is a 5 minutes walk, and 10 minutes more along the cliff base to reach Pra Nang Beach. There you can find vendors selling shaved ice with a choice of native fruits or beans and melon syrup, pineapple, bbq chicken.

Phra Nang Cave

At the far end of Phra Nang beach you will find a small cave with a shrine notable for its phallic statues. The shrine is dedicated to a deity known locally as Sri Kunlathewi who, according to a legend, was an Indian princess wrecked on this coast in the 3rd century BC and has been called upon by fishermen ever since to provide them with a good catch.

The Lingo

Belaying is the technique of controlling the rope so that a falling climber does not fall very far. While this task is typically assigned to a belayer, self-belaying is also possible as an advanced technical climbing technique. The term belay is also used to mean the place where the belayer is anchored; this would typically be a ledge, but may instead be a hanging belay, where the belayer is suspended from anchors in the rock. Quickdraws are used by rock climbers to connect the climbing rope to bolt anchors or other protection while lead climbing. ✂



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