

City folk get wild 'n' woodsy

Adventure, courses in the 'wild' teaches kids, adults about risk, independence

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An adventure course deep in a forest at the foot of Mt. Fuji was packed with families all summer long as children and parents alike crossed rope bridges and swung through trees like Tarzan.

The first La foret de L'aventure — or "forest of adventure" — opened in France in 1997, and the concept came to Japan in August last year.

"It feels great to spend time in the forest, and moving through the trees gives me a real thrill," said a 21-year-old man who had come to Forest Adventure Mt. Fuji with his friends.

Beginning swingers

Located in Yamanashi Prefecture, the approximately 1-hectare (2.47-acre) park offers three beginner and four advanced courses, with the seven courses together stretching for about 880 meters.

Participants traverse platforms more than 3m high to tackle 41 high-wire activities, such as a Tarzan swing and a 90m zip slide from a 14m-high point, in which they slide on a cable and jump onto a vertical scramble net. It takes an hour



and a half to two hours to complete the course.

Age, height and weight restrictions are placed on the courses, with the beginner, or discovery, courses requiring the minimum age of 5 years old and height of 110cm, while the

minimum height and maximum weight for the advanced, or adventure, courses are set at 140cm and 130kg. The under-18s must be accompanied by an adult at all times.

"Ordinary outdoor obstacle courses are not as exciting as this," said a 38-year-old man. "My kids begged me to bring them here," he added, as he went through all of the courses' 35 trees with his son and daughter.

The apparent risks add to the appeal and novelty of play in a natural environment far removed from anything urban.

Safe as houses

Of course, the park observes strict safety standards. To prevent falls, visitors wear a safety harness attached to overhead wires, which are in turn attached to a fall-prevention device. Working like a car seat belt, this device locks when the wire is suddenly pulled.

All devices are checked every morning to confirm they are functioning properly, and the trees are examined by an expert once a week.

Instructors play an important role as well, giving safety instructions to visitors before they start and showing them how to wear the harness. They also monitor visitors throughout their adventure, assisting where necessary and cautioning or even ejecting those who break the rules.

Many parents bring their children to the forest park to teach them the importance of conforming to rules to avoid danger and help them nurture a spirit of independence.

For children to learn to deal with risks, they need to actually experience them and



The parks have several courses, for beginners, youngsters and adults, and include zip slides, Tarzan swings, rope bridges and scramble nets.

be given the chance to take control, rather than be permanently under the wing of a parent.

"Natural environments have disappeared from daily

The apparent risk adds to the appeal of play in a natural environment

life after decades of urbanization," said Fumitoshi Hosoe, a professor at Tokyo Gakugei University, who studies play space design. In seemingly wild surroundings, "experiencing risk offers an opportunity to learn about safety."

Safety is also well-ad-

ressed at a similar park that opened in Chiba Prefecture in July. At Tarzania, a 1-hectare site that offers nine courses and 56 activities, safety nets are positioned underneath platforms. The park became an instant hit, attracting as many as 340 visitors a day during the summer.

Pacific Network Inc., which operates Tarzania on its owner's behalf, has already received several inquiries about creating similar parks, said a senior executive.

In addition to families, the park attracts students and other young adults who want to experience thrills in a natural environment. As their popularity grows, more parks may spring up.



Each visitor wears a safety harness attached via a wire to a seat belt-like safety device. If the person slips, the device breaks his or her fall.