

Adventurous outdoor activity is synonymous with adrenaline, extreme peaks and thrilling valleys. However, adventure can be very risky, and not all activities are created equally. When wanting to engage in outdoor recreation it's important to understand not just the risks but also the benefits of your chosen activity. So, what are the potential benefits of "Adventure"?

What is Adventure?

Before engaging in an adventure, it's important to know what exactly "Adventure" is. Cambridge Dictionary describes adventure as an "unusual, exciting, and possibly dangerous activity, such as a trip or experience, or the excitement produced by such an activity" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024). In more colloquial terms; Adventure is when one chooses to partake in an activity or engage with an environment that contains risk, uncertain outcomes, and has the possibility of developing adverse consequences.

Adventure is not limited by location or activity. It is common for people to fall into the trap of believing that some activities are not adventurous enough, or at all. However, it is important to recognize that adventure can be found whenever one chooses to intentionally engage with an environment or activity that has risks that our outside of what the average person would meet in their day-to-day life. Adventure can take place anywhere and is not limited to "extreme environments". Common adventurous environments would be mountain peaks, gorges and canyons, forests and deserts, but they are not the epitome of adventure, they are just the venue. Adventure can be had in urban, sub-urban, and rural environments as much as natural ones. Whether you are summiting one of the Scottish Cairngorms, hill walking in Bannau Brycheiniog National Park, "full sending" on a Brechfa black raven trail, or engaging in urban exploration; you are on an adventure all the same.

What are the risks of adventure?

Knowing that adventure involves risk is only part of the equation. You must be able to identify the risks that come with adventure and adventurous activities. What most people consider to be risk are two separate factors; "the hazard" and "the risk". A hazard is "anything with the potential to cause harm (loss or injury)" (Barton 2007: 12). A risk is the outcome of meeting a hazard and how likely it is to cause you harm. Put simply, a hazard is the cause, and risk is the likelihood of the effect.

A demonstration of this can be shown in the following scene.

The Level 4 Outdoor Education and Adventure Film students participated in a practical lecture where they went coasteering. The seas were particularly rough, with strong winds and a prevalence of whitecaps along the rocky St Non's coast. Most would consider the rough conditions and rocks to be a risk.

Using the prior definition, we can identify the hazards from the risks.

The hazards while coasteering that day would have been;

- The high winds
- The rocks
- The cold temperatures of both the wind and water
- The waves
- Any resulting currents from the environment.

These hazards are the environmental factors that you can interact with. They are what create risk. Thus, the resulting risks from the hazards would have been;

- Loss of balance resulting in injury
- Slipping on rocks resulting in injury
- Hypothermia
- Drowning
- Injury from blunt force trauma
- Being swept out to sea

All of these are the risks. The potential outcomes of interacting with the listed hazards. Risk is an inherent part of adventure, and you cannot have one without the other. There is also

nothing you can do to eliminate hazards or the resulting risks, but there are things you can do to mitigate these risks through risk management.

Risk management is an integral part of adventure and is key in ensuring that you can enjoy the activities that you participate in. There are various risk management strategies (also called control measures) that one can employ to keep risks at a minimum (or as low as possible). Control measures can range from individual to group based, and even legislative.

According to the National Coasteering Charter (NCC) lists the following control measures when out coasteering.

- Where possible, eliminating reasonable risk.
 - Avoiding the risk (e.g., by using alternative areas or venues for an activity).
 - Using appropriate group management strategies (e.g., safety briefings, setting up areas of safety on a route).
 - Having appropriate training and competence of the activity leaders, this may also include external input from a technical advisor or expert (as per AALA guidance).
 - Issuing appropriate PPE (e.g., wearing a PFD to reduce the risk of drowning).
- (Safety-Advice-for-Coasteering-Providers-V4-Feb-2024)*

It is important for all adventurers to remember that risk is unavoidable and that a certain level of risk is required in adventure. Risk itself should not be shunned but simply controlled and mitigated to safe levels. After all, "The aim is to keep people alive not to stop them from living" (Rees, 2007)

What are the Benefits of Adventure?

Risk is not the only aspect of adventure. Adventurers do not go seeking risks for risk-sake. Instead, adventurers engage with the risks to reap the benefits of the activities that they participate in. There are numerous social, physical, mental, and emotional benefits to partaking in adventurous activities, many of them overlapping.

It should go without saying that physical activity leads to physical fitness, and there are studies as well as anecdotal evidence to prove that. A study in 2020 analyzed the perceived physical benefits of mountain biking. The results found that, while in varying

degrees, both men and women found an increase in perceived physical condition and preventing future conditions and illnesses. They also found there to be a correlation between mountain biking and the improvement of psychological wellness. (Hill, Gómez 2020)

As mentioned above, physical and adventurous activities can also improve mental and emotional well-being. Studies show that taking part in adventurous activities is important for a child's emotional, mental, and social development. A study taken in 2019 showed that outdoor Adventure programs push adolescents to develop social connections and sense of belonging by emphasizing teamwork, shared experiences, and group identity. This bolsters communication skills, emotional support, and mental health. They also nurture personal and social responsibility through structured tasks, instilling a sense of accountability, agency, and initiative. Adolescents who take part in these activities develop leadership skills and resilience by overcoming challenges at their own pace. These programs empower children by enhancing self-esteem, confidence, and emotional regulation, offering growth opportunities that extend beyond the outdoor setting. (Down, Picknoll et al. 2024) Inversely children raised in risk averse environments can have their growth stunted with the chance of developing antisocial behavior and being unable to handle themselves in dangerous or risky environments and situations. (*Gill; No Fear EBook*)

Risk vs Benefit

As mentioned above, there are both potential risks and potential benefits that come with participating in outdoor adventurous activities. While adventurous activities offer numerous benefits, such as improved physical, mental, and emotional health, it begs the question. Is every adventure a risk worth taking when the dangers can sometimes outweigh the rewards?

The following story can be used to better understand this dilemma.

Caving is a popular activity in Wales. However, it is one that I am not particularly fond of. Under most circumstances I would not go out of my way to take part as to me the perceived risks do not outweigh the benefits. However, in this circumstance there was one benefit and one risk that compelled me to take part. The benefit was gaining new experience in a foreign country and the risk was potentially being seen as lesser amongst

my peers. In the end I chose to take part despite knowing it was not an activity that I would find enjoyable. In this situation there was both a perceived risk and benefit that compelled me to take part, but there were other students who chose not to take part for parts of, or the entire experience. To them the perceived risk did not outweigh the benefit.

There is, unfortunately, no cut and dry or correct answer to this question. Risk is very real, but not all risks or benefits are perceived equally and how much risk the benefit is worth varies between individuals. While control measures can be employed to manage risk, and adventure leaders can do their best to calm participants or make the activity seem less risky, some individuals simply do not see the benefits of adventure or consider them to be worth the risk.

Conclusion

So, what are the potential benefits of adventure? Both the quantitative and qualitative data show that engaging in adventurous activities improves physical, mental, and emotional well-being and is integral to healthy development in adolescents and adult health. From this we can conclude that not only is adventure beneficial but that encountering some degree of risk is essential to being a happy, healthy, and functioning human being. To put it simply, adventure is most certainly a risk worth taking.

Gill; No Fear EBook.

Safety-Advice-for-Coasteering-Providers-V4-Feb-2024.

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