

BODY LANGUAGE
FOR YOU

Hanging out

Words Lucy Olden

If you yearn to feel both incredibly adventurous and just like a big kid, then indoor climbing is the sport for you

Close your eyes (if you dare) and you'll feel like you're climbing a rugged rock face.

In reality, indoor climbing is more like scrambling around on the ultimate jungle gym and offers a safe environment within which to learn the skills required to tackle the real thing.

The class

The best way to start is with an introductory course where you'll find your way around a climbing harness and get to grips with the figure-of-eight knot and safety check. This is also the time to master your belaying skills – not naughty Shakespearian speak, but the rope technique used to secure you so you won't fall even if you lose your grip mid-clamber.

Basically, rope climbing is about partnership – the climber has one end of the rope securely tied to a harness, and a second person (the belayer) stands on the ground with the other end of the rope locked into a belay device, which looks like a big

clip and hangs off the harness. As the climber ascends, the belayer feeds the rope through the belay device, making sure it is never slack.

At your second class, you will complete a short belay test where an instructor monitors your technique and certifies you ready to belay another climber.

As for actual climbing technique, I'm told the strength comes from your legs and central stabilisers, which is good news for women who are naturally strong in these areas. But as a beginner I hung on for dear life, so I felt the work-out more in my fingers and forearms. The good news is that as your 'power-weight ratio' improves, you develop more muscle power in the right places to hoist yourself up or around the wall.

Who's it for?

You don't need to be young or fit to try indoor climbing, although a bit of upper-body strength will come in handy. But even if you have no intention of ever letting just a single

rope tempt your fate in the great outdoors, wall climbing will encourage you to use your body innovatively and efficiently. This sport combines flexibility, balance, grace and strength – the sort required for ballet, yoga and gymnastics. It also offers the benefits of teamwork if using the top-rope-and-belaying system, and it's a good mental work-out too – ultimately, your strategy will determine the success of your climb so your full concentration is required.

If you're into health and fitness, the vibe at an indoor-climbing gym is easy-going and welcoming, making it a great place to meet like-minded people. You'll laugh at yourself

and stand in awe of others. And who knows, maybe in time others will stand in awe of you.

What you'll need

- Comfortable, nonrestrictive clothing that doesn't gape when you're ten-feet up
- Short nails
- Shoes, a harness and a belay device are usually provided for the duration of the course. Thereafter, all gear is available for hire or purchase
- A friend comes in handy as a belay partner, but arriving on your own is also okay as you'll be matched up with another climber
- Determination and a sense of adventure

Who to contact

- **Western Cape** CityRock 021-447-1326; www.cityrock.co.za
- **Gauteng** SA Climb Inn 072-632-4676; www.saclimbinn.co.za
- **KwaZulu-Natal** The Rock at Gateway shopping centre 031-566-4955; www.180.co.za
- Visit www.climbing.co.za for a complete list of venues.

SPECIAL OFFER CityRock is offering all *Marie Claire* readers a two-hour introductory course for just R69 upon presentation of this article. This offer is valid until 31 October 2004.