

# Spa Climbing Programs

## Green Valley Spa & Resort — St. George, Utah

Located in stunning southern Utah, Green Valley Spa & Resort has offered rock climbing since 1994. The program, operated by Paragon Climbing, is held twice weekly at various world-class climbing destinations near St. George, including Snow Canyon State Park and Crowdad Canyon Rock Climbing Park, the only private climbing park in the United States. Equipment is provided. As Green Valley's Marc Hansen says, "All you need to bring is water and a good attitude."

Within a 100-mile radius of St. George, approximately 45 developed climbing areas offer more than 1,500 climbs on seven types of stone. Groups get free transportation to the rock Monday and Friday at 8 A.M., returning around noon, at a cost of \$69 per person. Call (800) 237-1068, fax (435) 673-4084, or visit [www.greenvalleyspa.com](http://www.greenvalleyspa.com) or [www.paragonclimbing.com](http://www.paragonclimbing.com)

## The Boulders — Carefree, Arizona

The Boulders is named after the huge granite dome formations that surround this world-class resort and spa. In recent years, the resort has made the most of its setting's potential as a climbing site. Not only are the climbs within walking distance of guest rooms, but the resort employs its own private guide — Kerry Ecker — for the guests.

After a briefing, climbers are introduced to the equipment on a practice boulder. Then they are encouraged to attempt an 80-foot climb. Cost for the three-hour class is \$85. Private classes are also available. Call (480) 488-9009, or fax (480) 488-1845.

## Sky's the Limit — Red Rock, Nevada

Sky's the Limit is a private guide service that contracts with many of the top hotel spas in Las Vegas, including the Regent, Venetian, Bellagio, Mandalay Bay, and Four Seasons. The outfit is based in Red Rock Canyon, a landscape so beautiful you'd never guess it was less than a half hour from the Vegas Strip.

Climbers must arrange their own transportation to Sky's the Limit, but once there, all equipment is taken care of, including shoes, harness, helmet, etc.

Most spa-goers choose the Discover Climbing course, a total immersion experience in which they learn knots, the fundamentals of belaying and rappelling, the climbing rating and grade system, and rope signals. They then take a series of "real-life" climbs.

The four-hour course costs \$189. The fee for half-day private instruction (no equipment included) is \$180; a full day is \$280. Call (702) 363-4533, fax (702) 363-0038, or visit on the Web at [www.skysthelimit.com](http://www.skysthelimit.com)

## Wintergreen Resort — Wintergreen, Virginia

Wintergreen Resort offers golf, tennis, and hiking, and is the headquarters for a nationwide rock climbing/adventure guide outfit named the Outdoor Wilderness Leadership School, or OWLS. Certified guides from the school take resort guests on granite and greenstone climbs on the resort property or in nearby George Washington National Forest. Safety, technique, equipment identification, belaying, rappelling, and basic knots are among the many skills taught.

Wintergreen offers a two-day clinic for \$160, everything included. It also offers three-hour classes for \$52. Five-hour classes cost \$88. Call (800) 266-2444, or go to [www.wintergreenresort.com](http://www.wintergreenresort.com)

Mainstream popularization of the sport has followed. Ten years ago, gyms began erecting indoor climbing walls, and more and more women began to enjoy the sport.

Rock climbing can take a number of different permutations — bouldering, indoor wall climbing, scrambling, and free climbing.

Some climbers just can't resist rappelling off office buildings, bridges, clock towers, and dams — they call it "building." Other climbers spend three days ascending 10,000-foot peaks, sleeping in hammocks strung right to the rock face, and then, after struggling all that way to the top, turn around and jump into thin air. Three seconds later they pull the rip chord and float back down under their parachute.

We're not talking about any of that here.

Scores of spas and gyms across the country offer indoor wall climbing, but we're not being as tame as that either. Nothing compares with the intensity that true outdoor rock climbing with ropes and a harness can offer.

Within this category, there are basically two ways to ascend the rock. One is with someone leading the climb and inserting protection gear along the way, which holds the ropes that will hold your body if you fall.

The other, and the one preferred on virtually all spa climbs, is called a "top rope climb." The rope is strung through an anchor at the top of the rock.

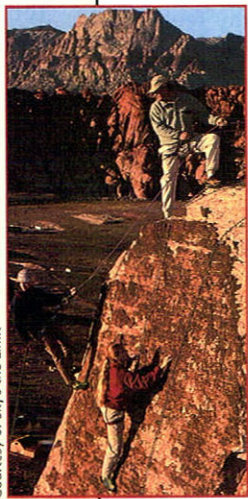
Your guide at the bottom belays as you climb — if you slip, you simply sit back into your harness.

Some spas offer a combination of hiking and climbing, or hiking and rappelling down rocks using ropes, without the difficulty of having to climb up in the first place. But what fun is that? The utter sense of accomplishment that comes with having made it up the rock is the essence of climbing.

Ecker said he routinely deals with spa-goers who, when they first look at the rock face they're expected to climb, think they could just as easily win the Indy 500.

"When they say, 'I can't do this; I have a fear of heights,' I tell them that they actually have a respect for heights, and that means they are sane," Ecker says. "It's a good thing."

Ecker lets climbers try out first on a practice boulder. Almost everyone eventually climbs, and almost all surprise themselves by actually reaching the top.



Courtesy of Sky's the Limit

Chris Noble/Stone