

adventures

Soaring Without a Parachute Indoor Skydiving Kathy McKinney

I've always wanted to try skydiving, but the idea of jumping out of an airplane thousands of feet in the air is a hard "no" for me. Indoor skydiving is much more my speed, so this month's adventure took us to iFLY in Union City. There, we experienced the thrill of flying for a few minutes, without the parachute and the horrifying (to me) fright of an airplane exit.

The vertical wind tunnel at iFLY is a large chamber that blows a smooth cushion of air upward at high speed, strong enough to support your body weight in mid-air. This creates a freefall sensation similar to that of skydiving, but in a relatively safe, controlled indoor environment.

We arrived a few minutes before our flight time, which gave us an opportunity to watch other fliers and get an idea of what to expect. Our session began with a short orientation. Our instructor explained the basics of body



posture and showed us hand signals he would be using to direct us in the wind tunnel. We were each fitted with a flight suit, helmet, goggles, and ear protection.

Our group of eight flyers ranged in age from 10 to 65. We entered the wind tunnel one at a time, with our instructor guiding our movements and helping us achieve a stable flying position. Getting in the air was as easy as leaning forward. The 80- to

175-mile-per-hour winds generated by four powerful fans did all the heavy lifting.

Depending on the package you purchase, flights are between 60 to 80 seconds. We opted for a total of four minutes of flight time, which we did in three 80-second flights. That doesn't sound like a lot of flying time, but it's fairly strenuous. Most beginners opt for two 60-second flights.

While our flights hovered six to eight feet above the netted floor of the wind tunnel, the youngest person in our group opted to purchase a high flight. Our instructor flew with the child to the top of the wind tunnel, and while it looked like fun, there was quite a bit of spinning involved. A couple of people in our group were experienced fliers, and it was fun to watch them demonstrate flips, dives, and other maneuvers during their flights.

Who Can Fly? Flyers can start as young as three years old. There's no upper-age limit, as long as participants meet health guidelines and weight restrictions. Participants with a hard cast or hard prosthetic that cannot be removed are not permitted to fly. People who are pregnant or with current or prior head, neck, back, or shoulder injuries should not fly.



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The iFLY experience may not boast the spectacular views provided by jumping from a plane, but it does allow you to "fly" without having to worry about a parachute. It's the perfect introduction to skydiving, even if you're afraid of heights.

iFLY is located at 31310 Alvarado-Niles Road in Union City. Depending on traffic, it's about an hour's drive from Summit. They are open Tuesdays through Sundays. Ticket packages start at \$93 per person. Hours, tickets, and more information are at www.iflyworld.com.

