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Safety is paramount

Naturally the first question on a beginner's mind is, "Is it safe?" A climber wears a harness clipped to a lifeline along the route of the via ferrata, so you don't have to worry about slipping or falling. You are also tied to the trainers and other participants with climbing ropes.

"Of all the mountaineering sports around, via ferrata (routes secured by hand rails, ladders, cables or lifelines) is one of the safest," says founder and director of Adventure Factors Mountaineering Centre (AFMC), Wilfred Tok.

The steel cables that line the route can hold up to 3,000kg of weight. The ladder rungs and palettes (footholds) can withstand up to 300kg of weight. At one time, AFMC imported the technology and equipment from one of the biggest via ferrata builders in France.

It has also been awarded a certificate of compliance based on European safety standards. Every three years, the routes have to go through a full maintenance check.

AFMC also practises minimal environmental impact by avoiding vegetation in setting up the routes. Visitors only step on rock surfaces and the equipment is camouflaged to blend in with the surroundings — no unsightly cables or ugly structures.

The company only takes on a maximum of 30 guests per day. The ratio is one trainer to 10 guests (Walk the Torq), and one to six for Low's Peak Circuit.

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