General Guidelines for Canyoning

1. Canyoning

Canyoning is the descent of gorges. Obstacles are overcome by climbing, abseiling, jumping, sliding or swimming. Specific techniques and equipment are required depending on the terrain and the water level.

2. Purpose of the guidelines

The guidelines set out the requirements for running commercial canyoning trips and govern the training of full-time and part-time canyoning guides at different levels. They also regulate how nature and the environment are treated.

The guidelines thus also enable untrained tourists to go canyoning properly equipped, under expert leadership and in an orderly setting with the greatest possible safety.

Terms used in these guidelines such as guide, operator etc. refer to persons of all genders.

3. Classification of canyoning trips by difficulty grade

Canyoning trips are classified by difficulty grade (according to the SAC) as follows:

- Grades: in capital letters (original in French):

  Grade 1 F easy (facile)
  Grade 2 PD not very difficult (peu difficile)
  Grade 3 AD fairly difficult (assez difficile)
  Grade 4 D difficult (difficile)
  Grade 5 TD very difficult (très difficile)
  Grade 6 ED extremely difficult (extrêmement difficile)

- Character: in lower-case letters:

Swiss Outdoor Association
Hermetschloostrasse 70
CH-8048 Zürich
+41 44 515 02 41
mail@swissoutdoorassociation.ch
www.swissoutdoorassociation.ch

a difficulties due to water b difficulties with abseiling and rope handling c difficulties with climbing

• Commitment: exit options and escape routes:

I not committing (exits available everywhere)
II slightly committing (sections of more than 1/4 hour without an escape route)
III committing (sections of more than 1 hour without an escape route)
IV very committing (sections of more than 2 hours without an escape route)

The classification by difficulty grade assumes normal conditions. Increased water flow, for example during snowmelt, thunderstorms or reservoir releases, can change the difficulty grade significantly within a very short time.

4. Training and further training of canyoning guides

1. The following levels of canyoning guide training are distinguished:

- Canyoning Guide 1 assistant
- Canyoning Guide 2 group leader
- Mountain guide with special canyoning training

2. The structure of the training, the admission requirements and the training content are set out in the canyoning training guidelines (see appendices).

3. Canyoning guides must undertake further training regularly. This is to maintain the level of knowledge and skills acquired and adapt it to new developments.

4. FOSPO (BASPO) decides on the recognition of training courses and the classification of guides. The lists of recognised Swiss and foreign qualifications published on the FOSPO website and any supplementary rulings are decisive.

5. Rights and duties of canyoning guides

1. Canyoning Guides 2 are entitled to lead canyoning trips of all kinds in canyons they know. A Guide 2 may lead a maximum of 10 participants and supervise a maximum of 4 Guides 1

. In total, a Guide 2 with TL may not be responsible for more than 24 guests per trip.

Canyoning Guides 2 who completed their Guide 2 course from 2015 onwards, and guides with qualifications classified as equivalent by FOSPO, also need the SOA Tripleader module.

2. Under the supervision of Guides 2 or mountain guides with special canyoning training, Guides 1 are entitled to lead groups of no more than six participants on canyoning trips in canyons they know, up to medium difficulty (up to grade 3 and commitment III). In exceptional cases, deploying a Guide 1 as assistant to a Guide 2 in canyons up to grade 4 is conceivable as training, after the canyon has been done several times.

3. The group sizes stated in sections 5.1 and 5.2 are figures proven in practice. They must be reduced depending on conditions, the difficulty of the trip and the participants' level of training, but may be increased slightly in particularly favourable conditions.

4. Mountain guides with special canyoning training are entitled to lead canyoning trips of all kinds.

6. Rights and duties of operators

1. An operator is anyone who decides to run canyoning trips, advertises them, makes the necessary preparations, determines the schedule, deploys the responsible canyoning guides and is in charge of the organisation.

2. Anyone acting as an operator must employ either a Guide 2 or a mountain guide with special canyoning training as technical manager or hold the corresponding qualification themselves.

3. Operators and responsible canyoning guides (group leaders and mountain guides with special canyoning training) have the following tasks:

- Selecting the canyons for canyoning trips
- Obtaining any necessary permits for the descent
- Selecting and, where necessary, training the responsible canyoning guides and assistants
- Reconnaissance, including determining the entry and exit points
- Setting the meeting points, including parking for participants

- Checking the meteorological and hydrological conditions
- Establishing a safety plan
- Respect for nature and the environment when organising and running canyoning trips
- Taking out the necessary insurance for the company and the canyoning guides
- Instructing and equipping participants
- Briefing, including information on the risks of the planned trip and the requirements for participants
- Deciding whether the trip goes ahead

7. Requirements for participants in canyoning trips

1. Canyoning requires participants to be in good health. People with health problems should seek medical advice or refrain from canyoning trips.

Basic fitness and sure-footedness on pathless terrain are also required. The operator is entitled to have participants confirm in writing that they meet these requirements.

2. Participants must take out their own accident insurance.

3. Participants in canyoning trips must follow the instructions of the operator and the canyoning guides.

4. After being briefed on the risks of the trip, every participant in a planned canyoning trip is entitled to withdraw from the contract with the canyoning guide or operator.

8. Safety plan and rescue

1. Every guide knows the safety plan for the canyon to be descended and has taken the planned measures (preliminary checks, equipment, information).

2. Every guide is entitled to end the further descent at the nearest exit point if difficulties arise.

3. Every guide carries a waterproof first aid kit and any further rescue equipment required by the situation and administers first aid in the event of accidents.

4. The responsible canyoning guide decides whether outside help is to be requested (air rescue, doctor, hospital). The legitimate wishes of an injured person are to be taken into account.

5. In the event of an accident, the operator must be notified as quickly as possible.

6. In the event of serious accidents, the police must always be informed.

9. Nature and the environment

1. Operators and canyoning guides protect nature and the environment. They work together with nature and environmental protection organisations. In particular, they ensure environmentally friendly entries and exits at the canyons used, considerate behaviour towards nature along the way and good relations with neighbouring landowners and other canyon users.

2. Operators and guides promote canyoning participants' understanding of nature and the environment through good organisation and targeted organisational measures.

10. Further development of the guidelines

These guidelines were drawn up by a FOSPO project group for the 2000 season, first revised in February 2001 and have been implemented since then.

The following organisations/institutions were represented in the project group (PG):

- Federal Office of Sport (FOSPO/BASPO, PG chair), Switzerland.
- Swiss Council for Accident Prevention (BFU)
- Swiss Outdoor Association (SOA), Swiss Mountain Guides Association
- (SBV), Swiss Trend Sports Association (STV), Société Suisse de Spéléologie / Spéléo-
- Secours (SSS); legal advice: Dr. iur. Hans-Kaspar Stiffler

Since autumn 2006, the implementation of the guidelines has been accompanied by the Swiss Canyoning Expert Commission SFKC, which was made up of representatives of the Swiss Outdoor Association (SOA), the Swiss Trend Sports Association (STV) and FOSPO (BASPO).

Since the merger of SOA and STV in 2009, these guidelines have been reviewed periodically by the SOA and adapted where necessary. The most recent amendments were made in 2016, 2021, 2023, 2024.

Swiss Outdoor Association
Hermetschloostrasse 70
CH-8048 Zürich
+41 44 515 02 41
mail@swissoutdoorassociation.ch
www.swissoutdoorassociation.ch

Appendix 1:

Canyoning guide training: structure (summary of the training guidelines)

Level	Title: role Admission test	Admission requirements	Outline content	Duration
	for Guide course 1	- 18 years - proof of First Aid Level 1 IAS (IVR) (or separate first aid and BLS/AED) or equivalent, not older than 2 years - practical canyoning experience (at least 10 descents of medium difficulty in at least 5 different canyons) - attending a preliminary course is strongly recommended	- knowledge of the most important knots - climbing: master grade 4 in alpine terrain - abseiling - set up, demonstrate and dismantle a fixed and a releasable system - max. 2 1/2 minutes for 100 m swimming - tow a dummy 25 m while swimming - diving and orienting yourself under water	1 day
1	**Canyoning Guide 1 guide assistant:** supports Guides 2 or mountain guides with additional canyoning training on descents with groups	- as above - passed admission test	- basic knots, abseiling techniques, canyoning-specific rope techniques, climbing/moving in the canyon, rescue manoeuvres, rope knowledge - river hydrology, hydrology, whitewater swimming as well as walking and diving in water, sliding and jumping, rope technique in water, rescue manoeuvres in water - introduction to group communication and sign language, equipment, first aid in canyons, environment, canyoning regulations, weather - trip preparation, safety management, teaching methods	7 days incl. exam
2	**Canyoning Guide 2**	- passed leader course 1 (or another training recognised as equivalent by the head of training, or	- in-depth knots and abseiling technique, moving on terrain and in the canyon, rope knowledge	7 days incl. exam

	Group leader: leads a group independently (alone or with assistants)	several years of experience in leading commercial canyoning trips) - proof (by signatures) of at least 1 season of experience, including at least 30 descents in 10 different canyons of all difficulty grades, of which at least 10 each must be private and commercial - whitewater rescue course (e.g. Rescue 3 or comparable) - proof of First Aid Level 1 IAS (IVR) (or separate first aid and BLS/AED) or equivalent, not older than 2 years	- in-depth water technique, hydrology - sign language, general equipment knowledge; in-depth rescue technique, environment and canyoning regulations; legal basis and insurance cover, weather - in-depth trip preparation, safety management, teaching methods - group leadership - first aid in canyons	
TL	**SOA Tripleader module**	Tripleader training is offered by the SOA in a separate module, which covers all activities and is therefore not described in detail here.		

Appendix 2a:

Guidelines for Canyoning Guide courses 1

Admission requirements for leader course 1	According to Appendix 1		
Course goal:	A Guide 1 should be able to **instruct** guests on canyoning trips and assist the responsible guide/leader.		
Topic	***Training goals:*** *A Guide 1 should*	***Outline content***	***Evaluation*** *(in addition to course grades)*
Rope and climbing technique			
Knots	- be able to use the basic knots (see admission test) purposefully and efficiently - know further canyoning-specific knots and be able to use them correctly	- practice and use in a wide range of situations and in difficult circumstances	tasks integrated into the exam course
Abseiling technique	- be able to set up abseil systems suited to the situation and operate them independently in easy situations, or assist the responsible guide/leader in difficult situations, and dismantle them	- rig on existing anchors - active and passive abseiling	Part of the final exam
Various rope techniques	- know the various rope techniques important for moving through the canyon and be able to assist when they are used	- handline - tyrolean - guide rope	
Climbing, moving on terrain and in the canyon	- be able to move safely in the canyon - be able to climb up to stations and climb back down to provide help	- climbing up to grade 4 - direct application in training tasks, partly under difficult conditions	

Rescue manoeuvres	- be able to react independently in easy situations or assist the responsible guide/leader in difficult situations	- rescue from above, rope ascent	
Rope & equipment knowledge	- get to know the structure of rope material and be able to use and care for it correctly	- structure, use, transport, protection, care and marking of ropes, accessory cords, slings - rope types, forces	Part of the written exam
Water technique			
River hydrology, whitewater swimming, walking and diving	- be able to read and interpret water currents correctly - be able to assess various water-related situations correctly and take the appropriate measures	- theoretical basics, case studies in practice and theory - water features, forces, obstacles, problems under water, whitewater swimming and diving (with and without mask)	Timed course with various tasks (possibly split), part of the written exam
Sliding and jumping	- know the relevant hazards and - be able to derive the right measures from them	- checking slides and plunge pools - jumping and sliding in different situations and positions	Exam questions
Rope technique in water	- master specific rope handling in moving water	- traversing and swimming on a rope - know the forces and hazards - be able to release yourself at the right moment.	
Water rescue manoeuvres	- be able to rescue people from the current	Rescue exercises with throw bag and direct rescue	

Canyoning-specific additions, equipment, theoretical basics			
Group communication and sign language	- know the sign language used in canyoning, introduce it in the group and use it as appropriate to the situation	- theoretical basics - exemplary teaching in the guide course and analysis with the participants	Part of the written exam
Equipment	- have suitable canyoning equipment and be able to use and care for it correctly - be able to put together the right equipment for each descent	- harness systems, helmets, footwear, karabiners, descenders, fixed abseil stations, ascenders; wetsuits and neoprene parts, buoyancy aids, waterproof containers, mask; rucksack, knife/cutter, safety lines, lamps, food/ drinks, ... - guide equipment: first aid kit, radios, topos, ...	ongoing checks during the course and exam questions
First aid in canyons	- know in particular the specific types of accident and incidents and how to treat them	- first aid under difficult conditions - measures for the group	Part of the written exam
Environment	- know the environmental factors that influence canyoning and adapt your safety behaviour accordingly - know the effects of canyoning on the environment and behave in the most environmentally friendly way possible	- basics of geology, hydrology and meteorology; examples of local particularities, sources of information; observing water and weather developments - botany and zoology of canyons and their surroundings; dealing with locals and other canyon users, markings, transport	Part of the written exam
Canyoning regulations	- know the most important regulations and developments in canyoning	- canyoning guidelines - rights and duties of the canyoning guide - regulations of the Confederation, cantons, associations (incl. RiskG and RiskV) - training and further training opportunities	information only, possibly part of the written exam
Leadership / teaching methods			

Trip preparation	- get to know the factors and measures needed for successful trip preparation	- using maps, route guides, topos; orientation on terrain - regional and local sources of information	daily, exemplary implementation in the leader course
Safety management	- get to know aspects and measures for optimal safety in canyoning	- knowledge and implementation of safety plans - the role of the 1st guide; leader behaviour along the way	assessment of a case study in groups
Teaching methods	- be able to instruct guests competently and as appropriate to the situation, in line with their role	- exemplary teaching in the guide course and analysis with the participants: information before the entry and in the canyon, route choice, pace, rest stops, assistance - short teaching exercises by leader course participants	

Course duration and weighting of the training parts

Leader course 1 lasts a total of at least 7 working days. These are made up as follows:

- 3 days: training in rope/climbing technique, water technique and canyoning-specific additions
- 3 days: descending three different canyons, applying and deepening the topics above, and training in leadership/teaching methods
- 1 day exam.

Grading and requirements for passing Guide course 1

● For all the topics above, course grades are awarded during the course (usually by 2 trainers). The average of these course grades must be sufficient to be admitted to the final exam. If this average is insufficient, the whole course must be repeated.

● The final exam consists of three parts: practical exams in rope/climbing technique and in water technique, and a theory exam. To pass the final exam and thus the course, each of the three parts must be sufficient. Insufficient exam parts can be repeated in a subsequent leader course 1 or in a resit organised via the SOA, provided the average course grades are at least good.

Appendix 2b:

Guidelines for Canyoning Guide courses 2

Admission requirements for leader course 2	According to Appendix 1		
Course goal:	As the person in charge of canyoning trips, a Guide 2 should have the knowledge and skills to lead guests safely through canyons and, where applicable, deploy the accompanying guide optimally.		
Topic	***Training goals:*** *A Guide 2 should*	***Outline content***	***Evaluation*** *(in addition to course grades)*
Rope and climbing technique			
Knots	- be able to use all knots common in canyoning purposefully and efficiently	- practice and use in a wide range of situations, above all in difficult circumstances (weather, wet, time pressure, dusk)	tasks integrated into the exam course
Abseiling technique	- be able to set up abseil systems suited to the situation and operate them independently	- techniques from leader course 1 and extensions (incl. improvised systems) - practice and application under difficult conditions - setting up new anchors	tasks integrated into the exam course
Moving on terrain and in the canyon	- be able to move safely in any canyon as the responsible guide	- use of the various rope techniques from leader course 1 as appropriate to the situation, and instructing Guide 1 - climbing up to grade 4, moving on difficult terrain - direct application in training tasks under difficult conditions	

Rope and equipment knowledge	- know the developments in rope material	- latest developments in the rope sector and their use in canyoning	Part of the written exam
Water technique training goals			
Behaviour in canyons with high water flow	- know the characteristics and hazards of moving water and be able to instruct their group correctly accordingly	Organising the group when - descending a canyon with high water flow, various water features and under difficult conditions - walking/moving in water	Part of the written exam
Sliding and jumping	- know the opportunities and hazards of jumps and slides and be able to use them sensibly	- prior checks - instructions for jumping and sliding in different situations and positions	Exam questions
Rope technique in water	- master specific rope handling in moving water	- sensible use of the rope and efficient rope handling under current pressure and in delicate situations	
Rescue technique	- master canyoning-specific rescue techniques.	- safe rescue techniques adapted to different situations	Part of the practical exam
Canyoning-specific additions, equipment, theoretical basics			
Sign language	- know and be able to use the sign language common in canyoning	- exemplary teaching in the guide course and analysis with the participants	Part of the written exam
General equipment knowledge	- be able to put together the right equipment for each descent - be informed about the latest developments in the equipment sector	- basic equipment and canyon-specific items for the participants - special leader equipment: first aid kit, radios, safety plan incl. topos, equipment for improvised belay and abseil systems, ...	ongoing checks
Rescue technique	- know canyoning-specific injuries and how to prevent them	- preparations before and measures during the descent	Part of the written exam

	- know the safety plan for the canyon to be descended and have taken the appropriate measures - be able to organise and lead improvised rescues as appropriate to the situation	- case studies: rescue procedure in a wide range of situations - deployment of assistants; measures for participants - cooperation with the responsible rescue organisations	
Environment	- know the environmental factors that influence canyoning and adapt your safety behaviour accordingly - know the effects of canyoning on the environment and behave in the most environmentally friendly way possible	- in-depth geology, hydrology and meteorology; correct interpretation of sources of information - environmental protection; dealing with locals, other canyon users, authorities, associations; markings, transport	Part of the written exam
Canyoning regulations	- know the most important regulations and developments in canyoning	- current canyoning guidelines - requirements for operators (certifications etc.) - regulations of the Confederation, cantons, associations (incl. RiskG and RiskV) - training and further training opportunities	information only, possibly part of the written exam
Legal basis and insurance cover	- know the most important rights and duties of the canyoning guide	- liability as a guide, entrepreneur - accident insurance - nature conservation regulations - legal basis for commercial activities	Part of the written exam
Leadership / teaching methods:			
Trip preparation	- know the factors and measures needed for successful trip preparation for groups of different sizes	- using orientation material - regional and local sources of information	daily, exemplary implementation in the leader course

		- suitable equipment as well as time planning and organisation - informing participants and contact persons outside the canyon	
Safety management	- know aspects and measures for optimal safety when canyoning with groups	- drawing up a safety plan - the role of the overall leader; deployment of assistants - cooperation with authorities and other institutions concerned	assessment of a case study in groups
Teaching methods	- be able to instruct their guests and any assistants competently and as appropriate to the situation	- procedures, methodical options: exemplary sequences in the leader course with subsequent evaluation - repeated short teaching exercises by leader course participants	
Leadership	- be able to give their guests a sense of safety while accompanying them - be able to deploy their assistants according to their abilities, the situation and the group - contribute to a positive image of canyoning towards the outside world	- leadership styles and their effects - from the welcome to the farewell - practical leadership case studies with subsequent joint analysis - behaviour during the leader course as a future responsible leader	Exam sequence; assessment of - deployment of assistants - instructing participants

Course duration and weighting of the training parts

Leader course 2 lasts a total of at least 7 working days. These are made up as follows:

- 2 days: training/deepening in rope/climbing technique and canyoning-specific additions

- 4 days: descending four different canyons, applying the topics above, and training and deepening in leadership/teaching methods

- 1 day exam.

Grading and requirements for passing Guide course 2

- For all the topics above, course grades are awarded during the course (usually by 2 trainers). The average of these course grades must be sufficient to be admitted to the final exam. If this average is insufficient, the whole course must be repeated.

- The final exam consists of three parts: practical exams in rope/climbing technique and in water technique, and a theory exam. To pass the final exam and thus the course, each of the three parts must be sufficient. Insufficient exam parts can be repeated in a subsequent leader course 2 or in a resit organised via the SOA, provided the average course grades are at least good.