



World's Scariest Bridges

Lyndsey Matthews

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Rotting wooden planks, held aloft by rusty bits of wire, stretch out in front of you. You reach for a railing to steady yourself, but all you find are two threadbare ropes. The howling wind blows the rickety footbridge from side to side. Somewhere below you lies the forest floor—you don't even know how far.

All bridges serve a purpose, whether utilitarian or inspirational. And some of them, like Musou Tsuribashi—this shaky, 50-year-old crossing in southern Japan—add a distinct element of fear. But you don't have to be in a remote part of the world: scary bridges exist everywhere, in all shapes, sizes, and heights. And crossing over them can be the ultimate in adventure travel.

Surprisingly, not all of these bridges are old and dilapidated. Take the Mackinac Bridge, which connects Michigan's Upper and Lower peninsulas. The wind here can reach speeds of 30 mph, leading to white-knuckled drives across its five-mile-long span. It can be so scary that some people simply won't go. So the Mackinac Bridge Authority will drive your car for you...for free. In the past year, it has assisted almost 1,400 drivers—and plenty of similar programs exist around the country.

Is this an irrational fear? Not necessarily. Gephyrophobia—the fear of bridges—is an accepted psychological diagnosis. Dr. Michael R. Liebowitz, founder of the Anxiety Disorders Clinic at the New York State Psychiatric Institute, told the *New York Times* that the fear of crossing bridges is very common (if not as well known as, say, the fear of flying). It also “carries a stigma,” says Liebowitz, even though bridges have been known to collapse, like the interstate highway bridge in downtown Minneapolis in 2007.

But unlike geophobes, many courageous (or foolhardy) travelers seek out hair-raising bridges just for the thrill. The bridges along the route to Colombia's National Archeological Park of Tierradentro are a good example. Though there are safer routes via bus from La Plata, some thrill-seekers choose to ride motorcycles over slippery bamboo crossings deep in the mountains, where one wrong move could mean plunging into a turbulent river.

So get ready to face your fears—or maybe find your next adventure—with our list of the world's most petrifying bridges.

Aiguille du Midi Bridge, France

Don't look down. At this height, you'll want to keep your eyes locked on the panorama of the craggy French Alps. Fortunately, the bridge itself is short, making for an easy escape if acrophobia sets in. But those truly afraid of heights probably won't even see the bridge; getting here requires taking a cable car that climbs 9,200 vertical feet in just 20 minutes.

Where: The summit of Aiguille du Midi in the Mont Blanc massif near Chamonix.

Stats: 12,605 feet above sea level.

Royal Gorge Bridge, Colorado

America's highest suspension bridge may be breathtaking for some, but those scared of heights may be left gasping for air as they stare straight down nearly 90 stories at the Arkansas River below. Completed in 1929, the bridge didn't have stabilizing wind cables until 1982.

Where: Royal Gorge, Colorado, over the Arkansas River.

Stats: 969 feet above the gorge; 1,260 feet long.

Trift Suspension Bridge, Switzerland

One of the Alps' longest and highest pedestrian suspension bridges, Trift was built in 2004 to reconnect hikers to a hut made inaccessible by a retreating glacier. A replacement in 2009 gave this bridge higher handrails and stabilizing cables to prevent it from swinging violently in the wind. But it still provides an adrenaline rush.

Where: Trift Glacier, near the town of Gadmen in the Swiss Alps.

Stats: 328 feet high; 558 feet long.

Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge, Northern Ireland

First things first: nobody has fallen off this bridge. However, many visitors who walk across simply can't handle the return and have to go by boat. It used to be even scarier. Erected by fishermen who went to the island to catch salmon, the original bridge had only a single handrail. The rope bridge eventually became popular with tourists seeking a thrill, and the National Trust replaced it with a sturdier structure with two handrails.

Where: Near Ballintoy in County Antrim, Northern Ireland.

Stats: 65 feet long; nearly 100 feet above the rocks below.

Capilano Suspension Bridge, Canada

Originally built in 1889, this simple suspension footbridge surrounded by an evergreen forest is very high, fairly narrow, and extremely shaky—the cedar planks bounce on their steel cables as you walk across them. If the bridge doesn't scare you, wait until the spring of 2011; the Cliffhanger attraction will allow visitors to climb across a series of suspended walkways attached to a cliff.

Where: North Vancouver, British Columbia, across the Capilano River.

Stats: 450 feet long; 230 feet high.

Mackinac Bridge, Michigan

Some drivers get so nervous about crossing this five-mile-long bridge that they don't even go. And this happens so often that the Mackinac Bridge Authority will drive your car or motorcycle for you (and for free). The biggest fear is the wind, which often exceeds 30 miles per hour on the bridge.

Where: Between Michigan's Upper and Lower Peninsulas.

Stats: 5 miles long; 199 feet above the water.

Puente de Ojuela, Mexico

This bridge leads to a ghost town, but it's the squeaky wood floor that makes it scary. Fortunately, steel cables suspended from two towers bring a greater feeling of safety. Still, steel is a relatively recent addition: when German engineer Santiago Minhguin built this bridge in the 19th century, those towers were made of wood.

Where: The ghost town of Ojuela, an old mining settlement in the northern state of Durango, Mexico.

Stats: 1,043 feet long; 2 feet wide; 360 feet above a gorge.

William Preston Lane, Jr. Memorial Bridge (Bay Bridge), Maryland

Drivers are notoriously afraid of this bridge, as it's subjected to frequent—and often violent—storms. And when the bad weather hits, forget about visibility: get to the middle of this five-mile-long bridge and you can barely see land.

Where: Spanning the Chesapeake Bay to connect Maryland's eastern and western shores.

Stats: Nearly 5 miles long; 186 feet high at its highest point.

Monkey Bridges, Vietnam

It may seem that only monkeys could make it across traditional monkey bridges—after all, they're typically made of a single bamboo log and one handrail. However, the name comes from the stooped monkey-like posture you have to maintain when crossing, so as not to plunge into the river below.

Where: Various points across the Mekong Delta at the southern tip of Vietnam.

Stats: These bridges are built by hand by local residents and vary from town to town. Newer ones are made of concrete

Hussaini Hanging Bridge, Pakistan

Massive gaps between the planks, a wild side-to-side swing: there are reasons this is considered one of the world's most harrowing suspension bridges. While rickety cable and wood bridges are common in this area, crossing this bridge over the rapidly flowing Hunza River is particularly frightening, as the tattered remains of the previous bridge hang by threads next to the one currently in use.

Where: In the village of Hussaini in Northern Pakistan, crossing the Hunza River.

Stats: Floodwaters reportedly submerged the bridge in May 2010. However, due to its draw as a popular adventure-travel activity, the bridge is likely to be rebuilt.

Sidu River Bridge, China

When this bridge opened in November 2009, it was the world's highest bridge, rising more than 1,500 feet in the air. The span is so high that Shanghai's Oriental Pearl Tower could fit underneath it.

Where: High above a river gorge in China's Hubei Province

Stats: There are 1,550 feet from the bridge's roadway to the valley floor.

Seven Mile Bridge, Florida

Besides being seven miles long, the bridge itself doesn't seem that scary. But its position in the Florida Keys makes it a prime target for the region's many hurricanes. In fact, the current bridge is the second iteration. The newer bridge scrapped the swing span concept of the original in lieu of a sturdier 65-foot-high arch to allow boats to pass by. While it may be sturdier, we still wouldn't want to be on it during a storm.

Where: The Florida Keys, connecting the Middle and Lower Keys.

Stats: 7 miles long; 65 feet high.

U Pain Bridge, Myanmar

With no handrails, you'll want to be extra careful crossing this bridge, especially in the dry season—there's no lake below to soften the fall. And it's not exactly brand-new; this 3/4-mile-long teak bridge was built more than 200 years ago. More than 1,000 wooden posts (read: logs)—with roughly four or five feet between each—hold it up.

Where: In Mandalay, connecting opposite banks of Taungthaman Lake

Stats: 3/4 miles long; 15 feet high.

Deception Pass Bridge, Washington

If the drive over this foggy strait in the Puget Sound isn't particularly scary to you, try walking over the narrow pedestrian lane at the edge of the bridge. That's where you'll find especially hair-raising views of the rushing water directly below.

Where: Connecting Whidbey Island and Fidalgo Island, in Deception Pass State Park.

Stats: Combined, the two spans are 1,486 feet in length; 180 feet above the water.

Iya Valley Vine Bridges, Japan

Shikoku, the smallest of Japan's four main islands, is home to three vine bridges. The originals were built with slats of wood placed between 7 and 12 inches apart, secured in place with two single vines. While the new bridges are reinforced with wire and hand rails, they're still not for the faint of heart.

Where: Tokushima, over the Iya-gawa River

Stats: 148 feet long; 46 feet high.

Captain William Moore Bridge, Alaska

True, earthquakes don't happen all the time, but this bridge isn't where you want to be during one: it crosses an active earthquake fault. Engineers, aware of the potential for disaster, anchored only one end of the bridge securely, so when the ground below shifts, the bridge isn't torn apart.

Where: Along the South Klondike Highway near Skagway

Stats: 110-foot-long cantilever bridge finished in 1976

Cikurutug Bridge, Indonesia

Most of the three-hour trip on the Argo Gede train is packed with gorgeous views of green mountains and river valleys. But the ride turns from scenic to scary once you get to the Cikurutug Bridge, where the train slid off its tracks in 2002. Though nobody was hurt, authorities have elevated security precautions to protect their passenger's safety since the accident.

Where: On the Argo Gede train from Jakarta's Gambir station to Bandung

Stats: About 200 feet above the valley floor.

Canopy Walk, Ghana

These footbridges soar above the forest floor in Ghana's Kakum National Park. Sure, there are hand rails and net walls that rise up on either side of you—about three-and-a-half to four feet high, anyway—but you're still walking on a plank of wood no more than one foot wide. Oh yes, and you're 100 feet off the forest floor.

Where: Kakum National Park

Stats: 1,000 feet long; 100 feet high.

Lake Pontchartrain Causeway, Louisiana

This bridge rises just 16 feet above the waters of Lake Pontchartrain, but the real fear factor is that it never seems to end—it spans nearly 24 miles from Metairie to Mandeville, LA. (Once you reach roughly the eight-mile mark, say goodbye to land visibility.)

Where: Across Lake Pontchartrain between the towns of Metairie and Mandeville.

Stats: 24 miles long; 16 feet above water.

Millau Viaduct, France

Looking down on clouds is to be expected from an airplane, but it's a bit more unsettling in a car. Yet that's often the sight when driving across this bridge, which is taller than the Eiffel Tower at its highest point. In fact, when it opened in 2004, it claimed the title of the world's tallest vehicular bridge.

Where: Crossing the Tarn Valley, near Millau in southern France.

Stats: Less than 2 miles long; 1,125 feet from the valley floor to the peak of its tallest mast.

Musou Tsuribashi, Japan

Bring a balancing pole—the only railings you'll find on this 50-year-old bridge are two thin barely-there ropes. That's a bit disconcerting considering the dizzying heights reached by this bridge, especially when the winds begin to howl over the forest below.

Where: In the remote wilderness of the Southern Japanese Alps (also known as the Akaishi Mountains).

Stats: The bridge is so remote that not much is known about its length and height.

Vitim River Bridge, Russia

Surviving this bridge crossing is considered such an accomplishment that the 34 people who have done it created their own Facebook page. The old railway bridge is only 50 feet above the water, so what makes it scary? Well, it's barely wide enough for one car, and it's iced over for much of the year—oh, and did we mention that there are no railings to catch your fall?

Where: Crossing over the Vitim River, a tributary of the Lena River, in eastern Siberia.

Stats: 1,870 feet long and 50 feet above the water.

Road Between Tierradentro to La Plata, Colombia

This mountain road is littered with simple bamboo bridges that wobble violently as you cross, with water rushing mere inches below you. The slickness caused by frequent torrential rainfall increases the danger quotient even more. Daredevils brave this road to see the massive underground tombs in the National Archeological Park of Tierradentro. A better option, perhaps? Taking the bus.

Where: On the road between Tierradentro to La Plata in southern Colombia.

Stats: Because it's so remote, there are no official stats.

Volgograd Bridge, Russia

This bridge is practically brand new, but it's amazing it hasn't been shut down. During a violent storm in May 2010, the roadway began to shake and oscillate, in a similar manner to the Tacoma Narrows Bridge before it collapsed in 1940. The rippling roadway caused cars to be thrown into the air and careen into the opposite lane. Authorities blamed it on an earthquake, but seismologists disagreed. The safety investigation is ongoing, even as cars still drive across.

Where: In the southern Russian city of Volgograd, crossing the Volga River.

Stats: 4.5 miles long.

Quepos Bridge, Costa Rica

Known as the "Oh My God" bridge, this crossing is so narrow that cars can travel only in one direction. After waiting your turn, you pile onto the bridge with many other cars (including heavy trucks). The loose slats of the roadway clank loudly while the bridge shakes under the weight of all the vehicles.

Where: On the road from Jaco to Quepos on Costa Rica's central Pacific coast.

Stats: No official stats.

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