

## **Experiencing Hot Air Ballooning in Southern Utah**

### **Introduction**

Ballooning is not only the oldest form of aviation; it is also the most unique aerial experience imaginable. Unlike any other form of aviation, you are not sheltered by a cabin, you are not bothered by engine noise. Most importantly, you are not bound to any airport, runway, or other suitable landing field. A balloon can basically launch and land wherever the chase vehicle has access.

Setup and inflation typically takes not more than 20 minutes. After a short safety briefing, passengers are asked to board the basket. The pilot will then actuate the burner, which will generate the temperature inside the envelope to lift the balloon off the ground. This is where passengers' amazement begins. The gondola in flight is so stable that often they do not even know they are already in the air. This characteristic allows all passengers, even those who are anxious or fearful of heights, to forget those unpleasant feelings almost immediately.

Like an elevator, the balloon climbs to anywhere from a couple of inches to a couple of thousand feet off the ground. With nothing but a wicker basket between you and the scenery, incredible aerial views start to expand as the balloon ascends. Floating in serenity leaves plenty of time to take in the vast beauty, and although photos can only grasp a fraction of the experience, the unrestricted exposure gives any photographer the opportunity to take pictures from a point of view only birds can normally enjoy.

Another benefit of a balloon flight is that most flights are taking place early in the morning, due to the fact that this is the time of day where the winds are the calmest and the most stable. Morning light typically illuminates any landscape like no other time of the day. Rock formations start to glow and constantly change colors, and clear morning air draws shadows that are often pitch black and full of contrast.

Balloons are steered by utilizing winds coming from different directions at different altitudes. By adjusting the balloon's altitude the pilot is able to provide the best vistas possible and to navigate to a suitable landing area.

### **Southern Utah: The best imaginable backdrop for a balloon flight:**

Utah is one of the most diverse states in the United States. Northern Utah's landscape is dominated by the majestic Rocky Mountains. What makes Utah so special is the fact that the Rockies merge into high desert landscapes, starting about only 150 miles south of its capitol, Salt Lake City.

The geological history of Southern Utah dates back 2.3 billion years. The very oldest rock layers on this planet are exposed in the Grand Canyon. The Colorado Plateau, an area today encompassing Utah, Arizona, Colorado, and New Mexico, displays 130,000 square miles (337,000 km<sup>2</sup>) of the most rugged, bizarre, unique, and beautiful landscapes on Earth.

During its hundreds of million of years of existence, the Colorado plateau was covered by a shallow ocean and has seen several uplifts and depressions,

accelerating erosion like nowhere else. The rapid erosion, along with the deposit of marine sediments, volcanic activity, and considerable fault activity have left us with places like Zion National Park, Capitol Reef National Park, Arches and Canyonlands National Parks, the Grand Canyon, and within Utah, many other places that depict this rapid geological change.

When flying in a balloon in the Bryce Canyon region, passengers may view the San Rafael desert areas near Moab and other very scenic places in Utah., Floating anywhere from 300 feet to 900 feet above the ground puts the balloon near the level of the ocean that covered this area so many millions of years ago. Being airborne can be compared to being in a boat a 100 million years ago, with unrestricted views to the bottom of that ancient ocean.

We get to see the region's geological history and unsurpassed beauty in an absolutely unique way. While most of these natural wonders are accessible by roads and trails, the amazing 720 degree vistas we get from a balloon make us aware of the vastness and beauty of Mother Nature. Looking out from a balloon basket lets you view about 4000 square miles (estimated), but it is looking straight down from the balloon's basket that gives you vistas that are out of this world.

Unique rock formations viewed from high up defy any description or any view that you can get from the ground. Places like Kodachrome State Park, Goblin Valley State Park, the beautiful and rugged scenery near Moab, with its resemblance to the Grand Canyon and nicknamed Utah's "Little Grand Canyon," become scenery that you would expect to see on another planet.

You have to experience this for yourself to see the BALLOONING UTAH DIFFERENCE. After your flight you will be left with mind boggling impressions, with images that are out of this world, and with a better understanding of how our planet and Mother Nature work.

While floating high up gives you the best possible overall view, on most flights the pilot will, at some point, go low to the ground, floating only a few feet between bizarre rock spires and goblins, and close to cliff walls and colorful rock formations. Now you are where the bottom of this ancient ocean was, floating in the air like marine life forms used to float in the water that covered and shaped this area so many million years ago.

It is the experience of being airborne yet unconfined, combined with the area that is so rich in geological history, which makes flying in southern Utah so special and unique. Passengers are stunned by the impressions they get. If you take only 10 pictures with your camera, you will leave your friends amazed and envious of what they see, and you will have millions of pictures in your head.

What you have experienced will leave you richer; you will look at many aspects of life from a different point of view, and the balloon adventure will stay with you for the rest of your life.

With a unique aerial adventure behind you, the after-flight champagne celebration catered out in the wilderness shall not be omitted as a historical part of flying in a balloon. Ballooning is the oldest form of aviation known to mankind, and to this day,

the physics behind ballooning have not changed since the first flight in France in 1783.

More information about the author and flights in Southern Utah can be found at:  
<http://www.skywalker.at>