

Not just hot air

Whether it's sunrise view over the desert or wildlife spotting on safari, incredible experiences can be had around the world at these seven premier locations for ballooning

CAPPADOCIA, TURKEY

As ballooning locations go, Cappadocia is the perfect spot. With weather conditions that are consistent year round, allowing for the best balloon flights, this trip provides views of the magical fairy chimneys, ancient cities and rolling hills of the region.

While the consistent flying weather allows for wonderful trips year round, the best time to visit Cappadocia for balloon rides is between April and November, when the weather is warm or mild

and the winds are gentle. There are many ballooning companies operating in Cappadocia, but hot air balloon trips in the region cost around US\$150–200 per person, including transport to the launch location and breakfast before the flight.

Below: Dawn above the Ancient city of Myanmar where 13,000 temples were constructed between the 9th and 13th centuries Right: Flying over Cappadocia, Turkey

BAGAN, MYANMAR

Ballooning in Bagan offers breathtaking views of the ancient temples across the countryside, one of the most iconic air balloon views in the world. Along the way are pagodas dating back to the 11th Century and incredible views of the Ayeyarwaddy River, as the balloons drift on gentle winds, at sunrise or sunset when the balloons launch.

Between October and March is when the weather is at its best for ballooning in Bagan, with

temperatures between a balmy 25°C and 30°C and low chances of rain. While cost varies depending on the kind of balloon ride, the time of day and the location, balloon trips start at around US\$60 per person.

LUXOR, EGYPT

On the east bank of the Nile River, the city of Luxor is one of the largest in Egypt and the hot air balloon rides showcase the beautiful scenery, particularly the architecture of the ancient temples and tombs. Sunrise flights over the Nile will allow unparalleled sights of the Temple of Karnak, Hatshepsut's Temple, the Colossi of Memnon, the Valley of the Queens and the Temple of Ramses.

When it comes to weather, Luxor is another location where the weather is stable year round,



without high winds or rainy conditions, but the best time of year to visit is between June and August. A balloon ride in Luxor starts at around US\$80, but longer and more luxurious trips are also available.

ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO

As home to the International Balloon Fiesta each year in

October, Albuquerque is one of the most well-known locations for hot air balloon rides. Because of its desert climate, the area around the city makes for a perfect spot to balloon all year. There's no particular season for ballooning in Albuquerque that's better than any other time, so for gorgeous views over the desert, whether for sunrise, sunset or a night time flight under the stars, Albuquerque

is the place to go. During the fiesta, there are many different companies that offer flights over the desert, and the views of hundreds of colourful balloons in the sky for the celebrations are as good as any of the other sights. While there is likely to be more variety in trips during the fiesta, year-round costs for a balloon ride in Albuquerque start at around US\$200.

SERENGETI NATIONAL PARK, TANZANIA

Known for more than just hot air balloon rides, Serengeti National Park is a huge tourist destination that people travel to see from all around the world. Part of the draw is the presence of what is often known as 'Africa's big five', the most popular animals of the safari: lions, leopards, elephants, rhinoceroses and buffalo. ➤





Left: Hot air ballooning enables a completely unique experience, with access to views at unparalleled altitudes in unreachable places, such as the Serengeti at sunrise or Colossi of Memnon in Luxor in Egypt

For this reason, ballooning in the Serengeti promises incredible sights of the animals throughout the park. Early morning tends to be the best time for balloon rides, so as to see the animals at their most active. The views of the UNESCO heritage are beautiful and the flights generally offer better opportunities to see the wildlife than the on-the-ground safaris.

Between May and July, the incredible migrations of the wildebeest herds can be seen as they make their way to Maasai Mara in Kenya, so though weather isn't a factor in terms of the best season to visit, this can be an exciting time to go. A balloon safari costs between US\$300 and \$600 per person.

NAPA VALLEY, CALIFORNIA

Napa Valley tends to be known for its wine, but the rolling fields of vineyards make for quite a view from the basket of a hot air balloon. With rolling hills and perfect weather, a balloon ride promises views of mountain vistas as well as the grapevine-filled valleys. Avoiding the traffic of Route 29 is a bonus advantage to seeing the area from balloon, and the best time for flights in

this beautiful region is just after sunrise, when the winds are calm and the temperature is cool. Between August and October is generally tourist season in Napa, and the weather is best for ballooning during this time. Flights usually cost around US\$400 per person.

WADI RUM, JORDAN

Often referred to as the 'Valley of the Moon', this incredible desert has a lot to show off. The weathered terrain, strange

rock formations, huge dunes and alien-like crop circles made from irrigated desert farms.

Ballooning as the sun rises or sets really lights up the landscape in Wadi Rum, giving it the Mars-like quality that makes the experience feel celestial. Early sunrise flights tend to be the calmest, taking advantage of the weather that early in the day, meaning an overnight stay in the launch camp before the flight. Costs for these flights tend to start around US\$200 per person. ■

