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Hot Air Balloon Ride with Rainbow Ryders in Scottsdale, Arizona

by **Mary Chong** on September 23, 2013 in **Reviews, United States**

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There truly is only 1 thing that will encourage me to wake up at 4 am – TRAVEL.

Plane, train or automobile but new on the list...HOT AIR BALLOON!

I'll even wake up at 3 am for that!

The reason?...No FEAR!

I'm terrified of heights, speed and anything that isn't lounging pool side, or sitting in front of a computer/tv. I even get the shakes on escalators at the mall and yet my entire experience with [Rainbow Ryders](#) was very calm and relaxing. For once, I didn't feel

scared at all and at one point we were at a height of approx. 3,000 feet!

I received a handy “what to wear” list and waiver forms via email a couple of weeks before my flight to Phoenix. This allowed me ample time to pack accordingly, review the forms thoroughly and stay stress-free. Something that this Calculated Traveller loves!

The Research

Taking a page from [Adventure Kim's safety first handbook](#), I borrowed “logic angel” and “danger angel” and I did some research before making my decision to fly:

- Rainbow Ryders has been flying the skies of Arizona for 30 years and have an excellent rating
- Generally speaking, hot air balloons are the oldest and safest forms of aviation
- You can see the biographies of the pilots on their website and they each have 1,000's of hours of “air time” and are all FAA certified
- The sport is not something to take lightly. A balloon and basket can cost more than \$100,000 each!
- Each balloon gets inspected by the FAA every 100 flight hours – which is more often than a plane gets checked
- Weather is checked prior to flight. They will not fly in the dark, rain, or high winds.

The alarm goes off and we are up and at ‘em. I don’t want to be late and Matt from the Chase Crew will be at the door at 4:50 am to drive us to the office to meet up with Captain Mark, the team and the rest of the 12 passengers.

Look up in the sky....It's the meeting of the Captains!

To further reassure me that they just don't launch us all up into the sky willy nilly – once we arrived at the edge of the desert near the launch site, we were joined by other Balloon Captains. As Matt explained, *“it is quite the brotherhood among Balloonists regardless of what company you work for and everyone is quite friendly and cooperative.”*

Together, a “pilot balloon” is launched into the sky and the Captains all watch and discuss the direction of the wind current and air loft. The balloon is similar to a party balloon. *“It looks like they are just pointing up to the sky, but they are really trying to find the best place to launch, fly and safely land”.*



Somewhere over the...Rainbow Ryder Hot Air Balloon style



We arrive at our launch site and it's all hands on deck as the Captain and crew unpack



the balloon and start the inflation process. It's filled with cold air via the fans and as it gets full, the gas burner/propane tanks takes over the rest.

Once the balloon is full and upright we are instructed to climb in quickly. There is no graceful way of doing this. You just have to put your feet in the holes along the side of the basket and jump over the edge.

(Sorry for the rear view – as you can see, travel writing is not always glitz and glamour)



Before you know it the basket is off the ground – you don't feel any motion. It wasn't until Captain Mark said we were off did I even realize that we were no longer ON the ground.



The grey blob is our shadow

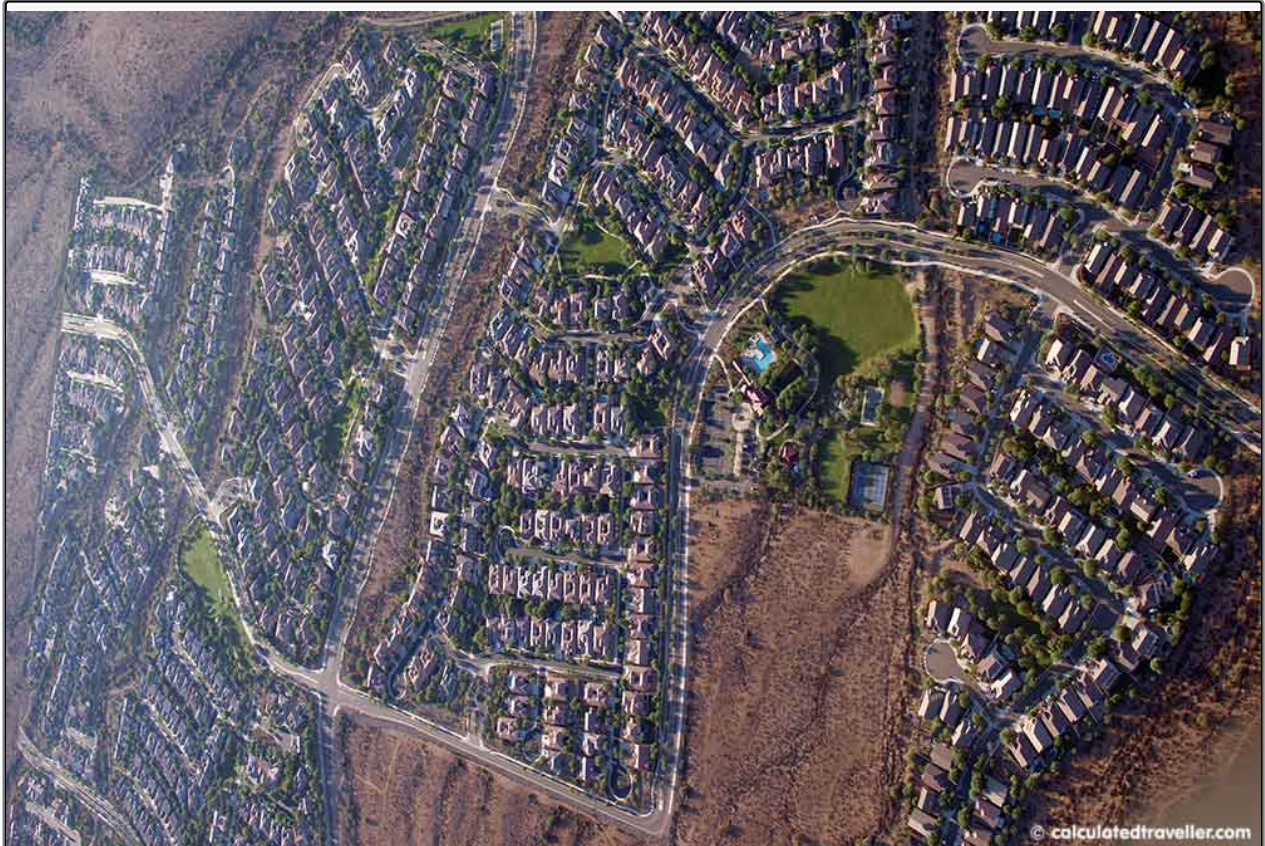
The feeling of hot air ballooning is pretty incredible as you just float in the air. There is no motion as you are only moving about 2 miles per hour. At times, it doesn't feel like you are moving at all. It's difficult to describe fully, you just have to experience it for yourself.

Don't expect to be travelling great distances. Captain Mark explained while flying that *"you are at the mercy of the wind current"*. No current means the balloon will stay perfectly still so, don't be surprised if you don't go anywhere but up and down or to find you moving in a square configuration called "boxing". The gas/burner propels the balloon upwards via hot air and to move downwards, the Captain opens the baffles in the balloon by pulling on various cords to release out some of the hot air and cold air comes in.

If you are interested here is a series [on How Stuff Works about the science of hot air balloons](#).

Return to Earth

With the ride over, we start our descent, Captain Mark radios to the Chase Car of where he's planning to land.



The view below



One thing I didn't realize is that it's virtually impossible to launch and land in the same place – hence the need for the Chase Car to follow.



our Chase Crew Team waiting...

As we get closer to the ground, Captain Mark instructs us to face away from the direction of our landing, grab hold of the handles that line the basket and to brace ourselves. The crew is ready to grab hold of the drop lines and rein us in...

Incidentally, this is where things can potentially go wrong. The basket can land on its side or flip or it can hit a cactus...

Also, we were warned that the basket doesn't just land flat on the ground – it's more of a bumpy skid to a stop...

I was holding on tight and ready for a rocky landing but it was pretty smooth. A testament to the skill of Captain Mark.

(No cactus' were harmed in the writing of this article)

Celebration

This was the icing on the cake but, immediately afterwards as the crew did the heavy lifting packing up the basket and the balloon we enjoyed champagne, orange juice and pastries. We were presented with souvenir pins and certificates of our flight and toasted to the Irish Balloonists' Prayer.

The winds have welcomed you with softness.
The sun has blessed you with his warm hands.
You have flown so high and so well that
God has joined us together in laughter and set us
gently back into the loving arms of Mother Earth.

A fabulous morning adventure floating in the sky 3,000 feet UP!



So, would I do it again?

...just give me time to set my alarm clock!

Tips:

- Use the restroom before you go. Once you are on the road, you are in the desert with no facilities (*unless you want to use that cactus in the corner*).
- You will be asked your weight at the time of booking. Don't lie!
- You must be physically able to climb into the basket and be able to stand unassisted for 1+ hours.
- Dress accordingly. Closed-toe shoes, sunscreen, sunglasses and a hat. Wear layers the temperature on the ground is much warmer than in the sky.
- Bring a real camera with a strap versus taking photos on your phone.
- Children younger than 5 and pregnant women are asked not to fly

Info:

To make phone reservations call 1-877-771-0776 the call center is open from 7AM – 7PM

For web reservations go to www.rainbowryders.com.

Note: Thank you to Captain Mark, Matt, Eric and Chris (Chase Crew) of Rainbow Ryders Inc.

and Scottsdale Convention and Visitors Bureau. This was a complimentary tour in exchange for this review. The opinions expressed, positive and/or negative, are entirely that of the author and are not a reflection of the compensation received.

Check out our [youtube channel for a video](#) showing additional photos of our adventure in the sky

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