

Hot Air Ballooning



The U.S. is home to some of the most picturesque hot air ballooning locations in the world. From the rolling Rockies to the glowing sandstones of Red Rocks, come out and watch these gentle giants take flight in breathtaking settings.

The U.S. hosts hot air balloon festivals and private flights from coast to coast. No matter where you live, there's a good chance that there's a hot air balloon festival near you.

Here are nine places to hot air balloon in the United States.

Letchworth State Park, New York

Letchworth State Park is thought to have some of the most beautiful scenery in the country. What better way to take it all in than from the nest of a colorful balloon as the Genesee River rumbles through the park's gorge below? Ballooning at Letchworth State Park can be as thrilling as it is tranquil. Ride and your seasoned captain will guide you gracefully over the park's three major waterfalls.

When you're done with your ride, Letchworth State Park is a playground for outdoor activities. You'll have a hard time choosing between guided nature walks, camping in the forest, or going horseback riding. With beauty galore, it's no wonder many consider Letchworth State Park to be the most romantic ballooning location in the country.

The Rocky Mountains, Colorado

The air is clear and bright high above the Rocky Mountains outside of Denver, Colorado. The area's high elevation — the highest of any major U.S. city — lends itself to ideal hot air balloon weather. May through November is the best time to go if you'd like to take to the skies. The Colorado landscape is especially breathtaking in the fall when the leaves are changing. That's when you want to hop in a balloon and soar high above Rocky Mountain National Park. You'll have a view of alpine lakes, mountains, and forests. If you get bored of the rugged mountain terrain, simply direct your gaze east over to the High Plains.

There is one of several hot air balloon companies in the Denver area. It's located in the town of Lafayette, just north of Denver proper. Plan your flight to coincide with one of the city's annual festivals, like **the Dragon Boat Festival**, **the Chinese Mid—Autumn Festival**, and the **Great American Beer Festival in September**.

Napa Valley, California

Napa Valley offers gorgeous scenery of its own — not to mention abundant wine. The best time to visit is March through May, when harvest season is in full swing, but expect to pay higher prices for lodging.

Plenty of operators offer hot air ballooning in Napa Valley, so you'll have a choice of experiences. Yes, you came for the wine

and the food, but experiencing the rolling beauty of California's wine country by air will leave you with memories that will last forever.

Gliding above the rolling hills of Napa Valley can be a refreshing way to start your day, as hot air balloon flights in the Napa Valley launch in the morning, when the winds are calmest. Ballooning is a weather-dependent activity, but if the cards are in your favor, you'll at least be treated to a serene sunrise.

Red Rocks, Sedona, Arizona

Sedona has plenty to offer to nature lovers. The scenery is some of the most unique in the country. Sedona sits at the mouth of Oak Creek Canyon and is in the most popular area of Red Rocks. The windswept canyons are shaped in deep red sandstone and shale. The way the light casts on the slivers of slender rock formations is a sight to behold, especially during sunrise and sunset.

The best hot air balloon flights at Red Rocks take place in the early morning, for sunrise. Morning is when the winds are mild and ideal for ballooning. Some Sedona hot air balloon companies offer rides at sunset as well. Allow three to four hours for the entire journey and end your ride with a gourmet champagne brunch among the backdrop of the famous Sedona red rocks.

Lake Tahoe, California

Lake Tahoe straddles the border of California and Nevada, and its cobalt blue waters attract approximately 3 million visitors a year. The surrounding peaks of the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range make Lake Tahoe a truly idyllic spot for a hot air balloon ride.

Lake Tahoe is home to one of the most unique hot air balloon experiences in the world. At the far southern tip of the lake, An operator sends passengers up for the scenic tour of a lifetime.

They're the only company in the world that launches and lands from a boat! Lake Tahoe has a wide variety of restaurants, too, and tons of recreational opportunities when your air-bound adventure is complete. Wildflower season is in full swing come mid-July, and several trails wind through fields painted with purple yarrow, Columbian monkshood, horsemint, and orange agoseris. The Taylor Creek area of South Lake Tahoe is home to several hiking trails.

Nashville, Tennessee

Soar above the Appalachian Mountain range and Cumberland Plateau region of Tennessee with finest operator in Nashville.

Middle Tennessee is one of the most verdant and outdoorsy states in the U.S., and Middle Tennessee alone has 10 state parks and eight national parks, scenic byways, and historic battlefields to explore.

After soaring above the mountains and waterfalls of the area, take a little time to explore Nashville and its music-saturated history. Nicknamed "Music City," Nashville has plenty of adventure that centers around music, culture, arts, food, sports, and shopping. Fans of the TV show *Nashville* can visit the Bluebird Cafe, where up-and-coming and famous songwriters perform in an intimate setting. Families can explore the award-winning Nashville Zoo to watch the cloud leopards, giraffes, and spider monkeys.

Albuquerque, New Mexico

Home to the largest hot air balloon festival in America, Albuquerque offers flights above the Rio Grande Valley.

However, the biggest draw to ballooning in this state is the famous Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta.

For nine days in October, the Albuquerque International Ballooning Fiesta attracts thousands of hot air balloon enthusiasts to view hundreds of special-shaped balloon rodeos, twilight balloon glows, and blue skies filled with the vibrant colors of balloons.

If you miss the festival, don't worry. Hot air balloon rides are offered through an operator which hosts sunrise flights over the Sandia Mountains. After your flight, celebrate your experience with the traditional champagne toast, light snack, and a commemorative flight certificate.

While in Albuquerque, don't miss out on another high-skies adventure. The Sandia Peak Tramway takes you up to the 10,378-foot peak of the Sandia Mountains on a gondola-style ride. It's a beautiful way to catch those famously gorgeous New Mexico sunsets.

St. Augustine, Florida

People escape to the whimsy of Disney World in Orlando or to the cool waves of the Atlantic Ocean in St. Augustine, Florida, but a hot air balloon ride over both is an experience most tourists to Florida miss out on.

Operators in Jacksonville, St. Augustine, and Orlando offer hour-long flights that bring you over the orange groves, Disney World, and the Atlantic Ocean. The company can pick you up at your hotel in Orlando or can leave from a meeting stop in St.

Augustine. While the flights are an hour, you should allow at least three to four hours to enjoy the experience, including helping the flight crew prepare the balloon.

While most people are familiar with the tourist mecca that is Disney World, St. Augustine is a charming Florida town that offers up its own brand of adventure, culture, and history. It's the oldest city in America, founded in 1565.

After soaring above the city in a hot air balloon, take in the living history museums like the Castillo de San Marcos and Gilded-Age hotels, tours of the historic district, or a sampling of fine spirits at St. Augustine Distillery.

Austin, Texas

For an adventure as big as Texas, the operator offers soothing and awe-inspiring flights over the Texas Hill Country. Flights take you over Lake Travis and the local landscape, but this company offers specialized custom flights, adventure tours, and even wedding flights.

Once you have taken in the beauty of the Texas Hill Country by air, venture into the “Keep Austin Weird” vibe of one of Texas’s most popular towns. Satisfy your sweet tooth at Austin’s Museum of Ice Cream, roar with the lions at the Austin Zoo, or hike through a Texas Hill Country landscape of limestone cliffs and stone river beds at Pedernales Falls State Park.

You don’t want to miss the beer scene here in Austin. Explore Austin’s Beer Trail and be sure to sample the legitimate Tex-Mex cuisine at places like Mi Madre’s or Trudy’s.