

Tethered Hot Air Balloon Rides

Council Approval: Required

High Risk

Tier 1

Activity Permitted For: J C S A

About Tethered Balloon Rides

Hot air or helium balloons that remain tethered to the earth provide a new perspective and exciting experience. The balloons are attached to ground-level anchors while passengers ride in a basket or gondola under the balloon. Riders must be Juniors and above, and must be taller than the basket (a head above the basket, which is typically 3.5 feet high).

Look for well-established amusement parks, zoos, and similar facilities that might offer helium balloon rides. Some hot air balloon operators can set up temporary tethered rides in a suitable place. Contact local vendors.

Note: Untethered hot air balloons, blimps, helicopters, and small private planes, are not permitted.

Learn More:

- Suggestions for riders and more: [Balloon Federation of America](#)
- About complying with rules for pilots: The Federal Aviation Administration's [Balloon Flying Handbook](#)

Include Girls with Disabilities

Talk to girls with disabilities and their caregivers. Ask about needs and accommodations. Connect with the balloon ride operator to determine any access or safety steps that need to be arranged in advance. The [United States Access Board](#) has transportation resources and information to support people with disabilities.

Safety Activity Checkpoints

Select a qualified operator. Ensure operators have liability insurance and are licensed through the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). Pilots must be currently licensed. Here are some questions to ask of an operator you're considering:

- Do you comply with the Envelope of Safety or FAA Wings programs? These voluntary programs, promoted by the FAA, indicate an operator or pilot is willing to achieve a high level of preparation and training.
- How long have you been flying/operating in this area?
- Do you have a commercial pilot's FAA certificate?
- What is your safety/accident record?
- What insurance coverage does your company carry?
- Will you be flying or piloting our ride, or just booking it for another pilot?
- Do you have a business license for flying in this area?

Choose a balloon that meets Girl Scout standards. The balloon must be certified and registered with the Federal Aviation Administration for passenger use.

Helium balloon rides are likely to be permanently installed and inflated with helium, a gas lighter than air. They can carry a large number of riders in a donut-shaped gondola below the balloon. A single cable runs from the balloon to the ground through the hole in the gondola. The operator controls the rise and descent of the balloon with the cable.

Tethered hot air balloons use heated air to inflate a large, colorful envelope. Because heated air is less dense than ambient air, the balloon rises. A passenger basket or gondola is suspended below the balloon. To rise and descend, a licensed pilot carefully manages the heated air with fuel—typically propane. The aircraft is tethered by ropes or straps to three heavy or fixed items (anchors) on the ground. The pilot and ground crew monitor wind direction and speed and anchor placement. A crew member manages any riders waiting for a turn.

Know the local laws. Many other countries do not maintain the same strict flight standards as those in the United States. Research the standards and enforcement practices of the country you'll visit. Ride only in countries with firm safety standards. Contact your council for guidance.

On the Day of Riding:

Get a weather report. Be prepared to postpone or cancel rides in case of poor weather. There should be no lightning storms predicted within a 50-mile radius of the site. Strong winds or lightning are especially dangerous, but even winds of over 5 mph can be too much. Contact the balloon operator or pilot for guidance.

Observe general safety rules:

- Follow pilot and crew instructions about getting into and out of the basket or gondola.
- Listen to the orientation and follow the rules mentioned.
- Never lift someone to see over the edge of the basket.
- Use the buddy system and adult supervision at all times.
- Follow instructions in an emergency.
- Do not play on or around the ground anchors or tethers.

Address seasickness. Suggest to parents and adults that girls and adults who get motion sickness consider taking a remedy in advance. Other tips:

- Bring mint, ginger candies, gingersnaps, or plain crackers to settle queasy stomachs.
- Have seasick persons stay in the fresh air. Have them keep their eyes on the horizon.

Safety Gear

- Tethers for hot air balloons may be ropes or straps, which must be in good condition. Operators should inspect them before each use and monitor them throughout the ride(s). Hot air balloons should use a three-point tether. Helium balloons may use a single tethering cable.
- Rescue and safety gear, according to industry standards for the aircraft type, including fire extinguishers and weights
- Layered clothing, according to the weather and no loose or dangling items
- Seasickness remedies (see above) if needed