

up, up and away

GETAWAY | trent dalton

The woman buttoned up her nightgown, yawning, then waved at the hot air balloon floating over her backyard at Sam. Graeme Day's balloon is a familiar sight in the Scenic Rim, outside Ipswich.

"Morning," Graeme said, brushing along the tall treestops nearby. The woman smiled and walked back inside her house, while her dog barked merrily.

Judging from the reactions of other four-legged friends in the area, dogs don't seem to share their owners' enthusiasm for hot air balloons. According to Graeme, it has something to do with the high-frequency sound (inaudible to people) emitted from the burners.

But we - 10 slightly scared, largely elated first-timers squeezed into an oversized picnic hamper - were loving it.

Graeme learned to fly balloons in France, the home of ballooning. He's been flying for 14 years and has worked in Europe and Canada.

In 2001, he discovered the Scenic Rim and claimed it as his aerial playground, where every morning, and some afternoons in late autumn, winter and early spring, he goes sky high.

I must admit I was dubious at first. I've never enjoyed getting up at dawn - usually the domain of bakers, milkmen and dishevelled nightclubbers.

But, thanks to a few tips from our captain, I quickly warmed to the finer points of ballooning.

Which way do you go? Release a helium balloon and watch where the wind blows it. Where do we land? Ask a farmer if we land in his backyard. Is it safe? Hey, nothing can harm you up there. Except for power lines, thermal air pockets, electrical storms and balloon-puncturing birds.



Flight of fantasy ... quietly floating a long, high above the rooftops and trees of Ipswich

Takeoff just keeps going up and up, and the green ground gets further away.

You can see a lot from 1000m above Ipswich, and not just a staggering amount of swimming pools and multi-coloured washing pegged out on clothes lines.

There's the fog that hangs metres over the Brisbane River, making it look like a steam train puffing its way through bushland out to sea.

There's the grandeur of Pine Mountain and Flinders Peak, and the patchwork quilt of adjoining farms.

There's the D'Aguilar Range, Wivenhoe Dam, Fassifern Valley and, when Graeme is flying with great stealth, a few koalas asleep in trees.

I've stood at my backyard before, watching a hot air balloon soar through the sky. "I'll have to do that one day," I'd promised myself.

Now I have fond memories, and the certificate: "Certified by Pilot in Command - G Day."

Graeme Day's Floating Images balloon flights operate year-round. Prices start at \$230 for adults and \$190 for children. Ph: 3294 8770