

Balloon experience like

BY TOM THREADINGHAM



SLOWLY floating high up above the world to glide through the morning sunrise is an experience exclusive to only one thing: the giant hot air balloon.

With my alarm set for an ungodly hour, this would be a trip I would soon experience firsthand.

Arising before the sun, the cool crisp morning air was a refreshing change compared to the late hot summer mornings which usually greet me.

Walking towards the launch zone where I would soon be lifted 2000ft above the earth, suspended by a mere pocket of hot air, I was admittedly nervous.

However, in the early morning light, a team effort from all involved in the trip quickly saw the balloon unpacked and stretched out in its full 30m length across the ground.

Two fans blew the cool morning air into the balloon and quickly saw the flat sheet of fabric expand, similar to that of a backyard tap, to slowly take shape.

With the balloon safely secured to the basket, the pilot turned on what I had been eagerly looking forward to, the burners.

Shooting jet-like flames into the balloon, the scorching burners were the final ingredient in the hot air balloon mix, with the balloon lifting itself into the upright position.

Sitting there in all its colourful glory, the deceptively huge balloon was ready to take me and five others on the trip of a lifetime.

Now ready, everyone clam-



Reaching heights of 2000ft there were amazing views of the Ipswich, Somerset and Lockyer regions.



After being filled with hot air, the balloon slowly turned upright.

bered into the wicker basket with a few final bursts of flame added to give the balloon the final lifting power required to take us up.

With the early morning light softly touching the exterior of the balloon, looking up to see the red, yellow and blue circle patterns covering a vast empty space was an amazing sight to my still bleary eyes.

Nervous as to what to expect, I grabbed the basket as the balloon was prepared to be set loose from its anchor on the ground.

To my surprise, the balloon rose steadily without any feeling of movement, with objects on the

magic



The early morning sun shone through the clouds to give an amazing view from the balloon.



An array of colourful views could be seen from the comfort of the balloon.



FLOATING HOME: Descending to land, the balloon's shadow spilled out onto the ground.

ground growing ever smaller.

As we reached the peak of our climb at about 2000ft, beams from the morning sun shot through the clouds and over the ground to provide an incredible view of which is hard to fathom for those who shy away from such an experience.

With an amazing bird's eye view of the Ipswich-Somerset region and out towards the fertile Lockyer Valley, we floated slowly over the earth while the pilot gave an insightful commentary on the history of the region and on specific landmarks not normally seen from the ground.

With earlier nerves now

quashed by the smooth drift of the balloon through the still air, it was easy to relax and embrace the amazing experience and unique views of the countryside.

Drifting over the patchwork designs of the land, the hour-long trip seemed to fly by, sadly drawing to a close as we slowly descended back towards the ground.

Even with an exciting rough landing, any nerves or doubts on the trip were easily overcome by what was truly an amazing experience and one which I would not hesitate to do all over again.

Hot air balloon ride courtesy of Floating Images, Ipswich.

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and will reopen at
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We would like to wish all a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year