

The Boston Globe

AeroBalloon dreams take flight amid glee Bird's-eye view pleases riders



FLIGHT OF FANCY Five-year-old Mason Schimmel peered down on the city yesterday during a 10-minute AeroBalloon ride that took off from Boston Common. The balloon was tethered to a wooden platform. (Globe Staff Photo / David L. Ryan)

By April Simpson, Globe Correspondent | August 20, 2005

At just over 48 inches tall, Mason Schimmel is used to people towering over him. But yesterday, the 4-year-old played the role of giant. He looked down at the city from 350 feet

Through Sept. 5, AeroBalloon USA and the Boston Parks and Recreation Department are offering a bird's-eye view of Boston from a giant helium balloon tethered to a wooden platform on Boston Common.

Dozens of visitors stumbled upon the ride, which opened yesterday, and patiently waited to soar above the State House and to see the city from the sky.

"We've lived in Boston all our lives, but it's nice to get it from that vantage point," said Linda Goodrich, 35, after exiting the balloon with her son, Phillip, 16. "It was like sailing in the sky. I wish I could have dinner up there."

Mason Schimmel just made the 48-inch height restriction. His mother lifted him inside the brown wicker basket and Schimmel immediately stood on the tips of his toes to see the world below. When the white balloon reached its peak, Schimmel and his family played "I spy."

They spotted the rooftop gardens of affluent homes along Beacon Street, the Cambridge courthouse, dozens of white sailboats sprinkled in the Charles River, the Tobin Bridge, and a shipyard in Quincy.

"You get up here and the trees look like the ones they plan on model railroads," said John Schimmel, Mason's grandfather.

A cool breeze softly spun the basket, allowing a panoramic view.

"This motion all day long would probably make you a little queasy," said Noreen Schimmel, Mason's mother.

Mason, though, seemed pleased with himself after the 10-minute ride.

"I thought I was a plane up there," he said. "I saw my cousins' house."

Well, not quite. "They live in California," his mother said.

After its stint on Boston Common, the AeroBalloon will be tethered at the Franklin Park Playstead, by the rear entrance of the Franklin Park Zoo between Sept. 6 and 23.

AeroBalloon will fly daily, weather permitting, between 8 a.m. and 11 p.m.

Tickets cost \$12 for ages 13 and older. Adults may accompany up to two children 12 and younger for free.

The balloon looks a little different than a typical hot air balloon. Powered by helium, it's shaped more like a ball than a teardrop.

"The target audience is, frankly, people looking for a new adventure," said Douglas Hase, AeroBalloon USA founder. "Life is a new adventure or it's nothing at all."

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