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'A fresh look at our changing world'

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local departures daily for balloon business things are looking up

COMMON VIEW: Dan Finegold of Boston takes in the view 300 ft. above Beacon Hill, Boston, Massachusetts.

A Unique Place High Above It All

By MARTIN FOX
Epoch Times Boston Staff

Looking for that special place to pop the marriage question... "will you...?"

Maybe you need a 360-degree perspective to sort out your feelings?

Or maybe you just want to get away from it all?

Up, up, up and away...

And even though it's only 300 feet up, lots of folks like what they see and feel.

In case you have not been looking up lately, a unique adventure might be waiting for you on the Boston Common and at Lake Winnepesaukee.

It's the AeroBalloon.

Similar technology that helped carry Steve Fossett around the world is now available on a much smaller scale and without any real danger, yet with a level of excitement that has riders coming back for more. Doran Donovan, owner of AeroBalloon New Hampshire, recalls one young lady going up four times in the same day.

Technically, Fossett used a Roziere balloon—a hot-air flame under the helium shell. The AeroBalloon does not use hot-air technology. Instead the balloon is filled with 100 percent helium, an inert lighter-than-air gas. Doug Hase, president of AeroBalloon, likened it to the familiar Hood blimp. "It's just like that except it is tethered



READY TO LAND: Young girl peers down as the balloon prepares to return to earth.

to a 40-foot cable," he said.

The balloon, simple and majestic in its appearance, is highly engineered. It comprises an outer skin, an internal ballonet, and a fan. Simply defined, it is a sphere-shaped blimp. Its outer fabric is identical to the skin of the blimps seen flying over sporting events. The ballonet is filled with the inert helium gas.

The ballonet dynamically expands and contracts with changes in altitude, barometric pressure, and/or temperature. The fan regulates this internally displaced air so that the balloon maintains its shape. The balloon is always tethered or moored to the ground with a cable and winch system and is never in free flight. AeroBalloon passengers are always in contact via radio with a certified AeroBalloon operator on the ground.

Each flight last 10 minutes and passengers ascend 300 feet in roughly 2 minutes. The actual balloon is 47 feet in diameter and holds five standing adults in a rectangle basket of 4 by 5 feet. All ages find the flight fun and as Hase likes to say, "They just love it; they are beside themselves." The ride appeals to all ages and children must be 46 inches in height for take-off. Rides are \$15 for adults (12 and over) and \$10 for kids.

Weirs Beach Waterslide next to the Volcano in Laconia, New Hampshire, kicked off its flying adventures around the time of Bikers Week in June and has been going strong all summer. "The views of the lakes, mountains and attractions are stunning," said Donovan. "It's a unique opportunity to see this beautiful area from a brand-new perspective—make sure you bring your

camera."

And they do. Snapping away and filling an entire roll or digital card with breathtaking images of scenes only previously enjoyed from two-dimensional terra firma.

Maybe the lift up has some magic about it. Riders at first do not realize they are up 300 feet until they look down. Once they do, they typically give a "sigh or gasp" says Donovan. Probably they are too enchanted by the 360-degree views, 20 miles in all directions—unfolding before their eyes.

Trips from the Boston Common started Aug. 17 and will be going on through Sept. 12. Doug Hase, president of AeroBalloon, started selling franchises six months ago. For all practical purposes this is a brand-new business concept in its launch phase—no pun intended. On a perfect day, with no

serious wind, Hase has done as many as 96 flights between 7 a.m. and 11 p.m.—roughly six flights an hour.

"The biggest headache," says Donovan, "is wind." As the sun heats the earth, the heat rises and creates afternoon breezes or low wind currents. Usually the summer heat results in keeping the balloon earth-bound from around 12 noon or 1:00 till 4 or 5 o'clock in the afternoon before flights can resume. Flights are always based on weather and wind conditions.

Currently, AeroBalloon operates in Atlanta and Las Vegas in addition to Massachusetts and New Hampshire. According to Hase, you can be up and flying for around \$150,000 with your own business.

The next time you look up in the Boston sky, the large glow you see might be from the AeroBalloon's internal lighting system. From afar, many believe they are "seeing the biggest full moon they've ever seen," says Hase.

If you go...

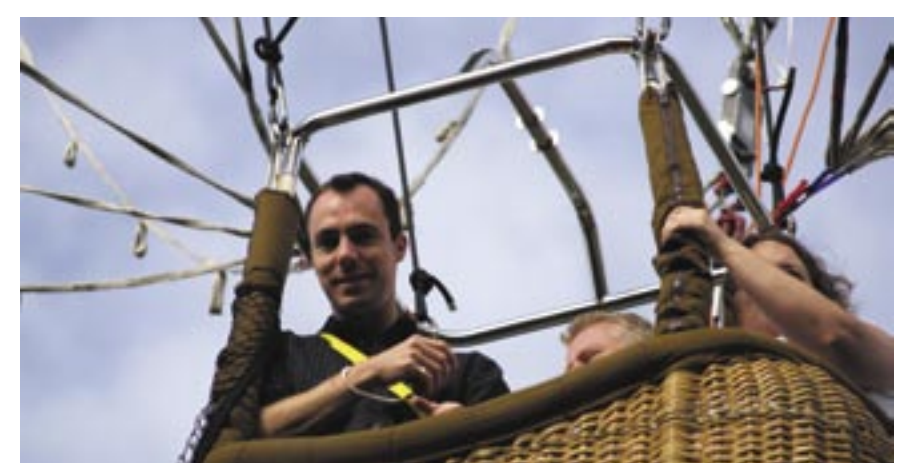
Boston Common

- Hours: 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. (typically shuts down from 1 to 4 p.m.).
- Lines can be long and reservations are available.
- For weather update: Call 617-848-8153
- Last day of operation is Sept. 12.

Weirs Beach

- Hours after Labor Day: Fri. afternoon; Sat. & Sun. till 8 p.m.
- Call 603-556-7919 to make sure they are flying.
- Last day of operation is Oct. 9.

www.aeroballoon.com



GREAT RIDE: Several AeroBalloon patrons overlooking Boston Common.