

awesome people, places & spaces

inspo

3 places to go ballooning

Ready to let your adventurous spirit soar? Ride the wind around the world with this trio of amazing up-in-the-air experiences. BY KIT BERNARDI



If you're worried about crashes, balloon trips are a statistically safe form of air travel, thanks to intense regulation.

Bagan, Myanmar

BALLOONS OVER BAGAN

As dawn spills over Bagan's sacred Buddhist temples, spellbound balloon passengers feel like they've discovered a lost civilization along the fabled Irrawaddy River. A new UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Bagan Archaeolog-

ical Zone is home to 2,000 temples and pagodas that dot the dusty plain stretching into distant mountains. "Marco Polo said that Bagan's temples were one of the finest sights in the world—if he'd flown in a balloon, he'd have said they were

the finest," says Cary Crawley, a founder of Balloons over Bagan, the first balloon tourism company in Myanmar operating in 21 years. Flights run from October to April and start at \$350 per person. balloonsoverbagan.com



THIS PAGE, FROM FAR RIGHT; RICK REMINGTON; NOBBY SIMMONS/BALLOONS OVER BAGAN; OPPOSITE: ED SAGON.

Santa Fe, New Mexico

SANTA FE BALLOONS

There are no roads, telephone wires, or signs of humanity in sight. Just a peregrine falcon hunting for rabbit, a lone coyote trotting toward nowhere, and a whole lot of quiet at 1,000 feet drifting high above the desert. "Gently floating at dawn over

this untouched place is simply magical—you hear only the *oohs-ahs* of passengers till I hit the burner," says Johnny Lewis, owner and chief pilot of Santa Fe Balloons. His company is the only balloon operator licensed to fly over the

uninhabited, ravine-cut U.S. Bureau of Land Management terrain called Palacio Arroyos. See all the picturesque orange-red vastness yourself on your own hot-air flight, available from May to October at \$285 per person. santafeballoons.com

Galena, Illinois

GALENA ON THE FLY

During sunset, balloon flights float 3,000 feet over rural Jo Daviess County, and a kaleidoscope of colors bathes the rolling hills, fertile farmland, and mighty Mississippi River valley. Passengers aboard Galena on the Fly balloon rides enjoy trisrate vistas of Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin. "When you're a mile up in the air, there's no wind or sound interference," says Galena on the Fly owner and chief pilot Andy Williams. "It's so serene and peaceful, it seems like it's not real." Launched from Eagle Ridge Resort & Spa (the site of the annual Great Galena Balloon Race, from June 19 to 21), flights run from May to October and cost \$200 per person. buyaballoonride.com



I went ballooning in Africa, and it was absolutely incredible. The way the balloon would skim the treetops and then go down to 10 feet off the ground as massive herds of animals rushed along the plains... It was breathtaking. Exciting and peaceful at the same time.
—JONATHAN

