



- The Ballooning World - What it's all about? -

The Balloon Ride Business

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Ballooning for everybody. – It is now possible for most people in many countries of the world to take a Hot Air Balloon flight without ever owning a balloon, becoming a pilot or ever planning to become one. Whether they are a visiting tourist or a local resident, this opportunity is open to all if they have sufficient money to purchase the ride. This is due to the considerable growth in the balloon ride sector of ballooning worldwide coinciding with the general growth in the sports and leisure industry. The growth in the balloon ride business has also been due to the general public's insatiable appetite for the adventure and romance of hot air balloons.

For many people, their first flight in a balloon may be to celebrate a special occasion or anniversary where with others it is to fulfil a lifetime ambition. In all of these cases that first flight is a memorable occasion and the flight is provided by somebody supplying a very special service – the Balloon Ride Operator. Ride operations are now active in every continent in all types of terrain, whether it is the “Outback” of Australia, the “Game reserves” of Africa or the city outskirts of Europe and North America.



How does the Balloon Rides Business work?

For the Passenger - Obviously operations can vary from country to country but they all have one thing in common. The operation is based on a qualified balloon pilot flying passengers on the adventure of a lifetime lasting for a period of one to one and a half hours for an agreed price. In most cases this takes place in a balloon purpose built to take fare-paying passengers. Some operations may be run on a part time weekend basis whilst other will be large commercial organisation run on similar lines to a small airline company. However the big difference to an aircraft flight is that you are never quite sure as a passenger where you will end up! Maybe this is part of the attraction. The one thing as a passenger you can be sure of is that you will be flying in one of the safest forms of aircraft.



Ultramagic as one of the world's largest Hot Air Balloon manufacturers has specialised in the design and manufacture of special ride balloons for many years. We cater for small operators flying maybe just 4 passengers right up to baskets with many compartments carrying 4 passengers in each compartment! Because of our expertise, Ultramagic has been a major contributor to the successful and safe growth of the ride business. Having the right equipment is just one very important requirement of a number necessary to operate a successful ride business.

For those who want to find out more about purchasing a balloon ride in their area a good place to start is the local telephone yellow pages as most operators use this service. Obviously this will not apply if you are travelling to far away places. In these cases an experienced travel agent will be able to help. Many ride operators can of course be found on the World Wide Web.

How do I Start a balloon ride business?

Location, Location, Location – This statement is used many times relating to setting up a business, particularly a retail one and not surprising it applies very much to the balloon ride business even more so.

The first requirement of a ride business is having a good supply of potential passengers either by having a large population close by or by being in an area where tourists regularly visit. This is why the location of your ride operation is very important. It is possible in many countries to fly from the centre of cities depending on air traffic regulations. This may well appeal to you as the operator. Alternatively you may wish to base your operations in a very picturesque area regularly visited by tourists. Do your research well and take your time making the decision on the location. Eventually you may choose to have more than one location depending on climate conditions and availability of passengers. Small tourist operations can be operated almost anywhere in most parts of the world using exotic locations. Carry out research on the local weather conditions to ensure your business can work there. It is no good having a ready and eager supply of passengers if it is too windy to fly for 90% of the time!



Large or Small – The size of the business is up to you. There are many considerations to be made here. Like other forms of business, it is possible to start up with a small

operation, even working part time and then slowly develop the business to enable it to be a larger operation. Alternatively you could choose by making a larger initial investment to operate a much larger balloon or balloons and quickly penetrate the market in the area in which you intend to operate. Ultramagic offer the largest range of balloon options available and your local dealer or Ultramagic customer support will be able to offer additional practical advice. We know the ride business very well and you can be sure we will recommend what is right for you rather than pushing a sale at any cost.

Number of Passengers – With fares paid varying worldwide from \$100 to \$400 per passenger, the number of passengers flown in each flight can have a dramatic effect on revenue. A smaller operation with a 105 (105,000 cu ft or 3,000m³) balloon can be viable but this type of business is very often combined with other forms of making an income. A 180 (180,000 cu ft or 5,100 m³) balloon is recognised as a good size to work for a normal ride operation. Again the more passengers you fly the greater the revenue so one could increase the size up to 250,000 cu ft and fly many more. However one needs to consider local terrain and weather conditions, as it may be that the 180 would be able to make more flights than the 250 by being smaller and slightly easier to operate. Availability of passengers on the day the weather is good, the number of flyable days and the areas suitable for landing will all have to be considered when choosing the size of your ride balloon.

Going bigger and making more profit? - When going larger than a 250 one needs to consider the ground logistics involved with passenger vehicles and crew. You will probably need two rather than one vehicle. Road transport regulations may also apply depending on the number being carried in each vehicle. Very large balloons (bigger than 250) can work really well for people who have gained experience of all the conditions in the area that they will fly. – passenger numbers, flight days and landing sites. However the larger the balloon, the heavier it becomes, the more people it requires to handle on the ground. In general, the larger the balloon is, the greater will be the initial capital expense.

Very often local market conditions will determine what size of operation you can have and how much money you will make. In all cases the amount that you will make will ultimately depend on you the operator and how you run your business.

As one can see there is no clear cut answer to what is the correct size to start a ride business with, as each case will be different. Local operating costs, which would include premises, pilot and crew, will also be a deciding factor. If in doubt, the usual safest option is to start with what works best for people operating in a similar area. Starting small may be easier with less risk. You can always go bigger later if that is what is required once you become more experienced and successful. You will also have generated the extra capital required for a larger balloon.

Extra revenue. – Because you will be operating regularly in an area with a large balloon, this gives you the ideal opportunity to offer some or all of the space on your balloon for advertising a local company. This space can be sold either at an annual charge with banners on the balloon or as a one off payment where the company sponsors the purchase of the equipment in return for their name remaining on the balloon for the life of the equipment. In either case one can be talking about a significant amount of money. In many cases this contribution can make a big difference to the operation costs of the business.



What other points do I have to consider?

Do I have to be the pilot?

Many balloon ride operations are set up by people who are already pilots. However this does not have to be the case. You may choose to run the business and employ a pilot. There are many experienced pilots worldwide and some of these are happy to be employed as commercial pilots dependent on different type of contracts. For further information and help on this subject contact your local Ultramagic dealer or Ultramagic Customer Support.

What are the Licence and Insurance requirements?

Licensing and regulations vary from country to country. Please check this out with your local aviation authority.

Like with any business, insurance is important. Due to the very special nature of the service to passengers that you are offering, special aviation insurance is required. This is normally greater than with private flying and one should be sure that one always has adequate cover. We have already said how safe ballooning can be however insurance is for that one time when things do not go as planned. You as the operator are personally liable as in any business so do not cut corners on insurance. By insuring correctly you can then operate and enjoy your business with complete peace of mind.

What about operations on the ground?

Moving About.

As with all types of Hot Air Ballooning, you will require a vehicle with a tow bar and a trailer to transport and retrieve the balloon. The size and type of vehicle will vary from country to country as well as being dependant on the number of passengers that you will have to carry. However most operators prefer to use a 4-wheel drive vehicle where landing and launch field conditions require this. A flatbed trailer with built in rollers is best used with passenger balloons as this makes things easier to handle. With larger balloons you may wish to consider having a winch fitted to the trailer as well.



Managing you passenger flight bookings.

You will require some form of office space to receive and manage your bookings. This can be managed by you manually, controlled by a computer system or contracted out to an agency such as a holiday or hotel company. If you are operating in a tourist area then you may choose to work closely with local tour operators building in a commission for them to ensure they sell your rides to their regular clients.

Balloon crew and drivers.

These can either be people that you train up yourself in the basic skills required or you may choose to employ people who regularly take up this work on a seasonal basis. What you definitely need are people who are keen, strong, enthusiastic and good at dealing with people. Costs will vary depending on the area that you operate in and what level of involvement the crew will have in the flying side. Your Ultramagic dealer may be able to help you find people in his area. The number of crew that you require will depend on the size of your balloon operation and also whether you involve your passengers in the ground preparation and packing up of your balloon. Many people enjoy this level of involvement but a lot will depend on the age and fitness of the passengers.

Tell me more about the balloon equipment I will need?

Ultramagic has many years experience of designing and manufacturing balloons for the ride business. We have one of the largest ranges of equipment in the world. We specialise in offering a dedicated personal service catering for everybody's individual requirements. By looking at the equipment WebPages you can gain a taste of what is available.



Please allow us to help you custom design the exact package that suits your requirements. Please contact your local dealer or Ultramagic Customer Support.