



## Tethered Hot Air Balloon Rides

**Council Approval:** Required. **This is a vendor provided activity.**

**Certificate of Insurance (COI):** Required from vendor providing this activity for Council Approval. Visit [GSNI's webpage](#) for information on requesting a COI from the venue.

If participating in this activity as part of a trip, troops must complete the [GSNI Troop Trip Travel Request Form](#).

**Activity Permitted for:** J C S A

### About Tethered Hot Air Balloon Rides

Hot air or helium balloons that remain tethered to the earth provide a new perspective and exciting experience. The balloons are attached to ground-level anchors while passengers ride in a basket or gondola under the balloon. Riders must be Juniors and above and must be taller than the basket (their head above the basket, which is typically 3.5 feet high).

Look for well-established amusement parks, zoos, and similar facilities that might offer helium balloon rides. Some hot air balloon operators can set up temporary tethered rides in a suitable place. Contact local vendors.

**Note:** *Untethered hot air balloons, blimps, helicopters, and small private planes are not permitted.*

### Learn More

- [Tethered balloon basics](#)

**Include Girl Scout Members with Disabilities.** Talk to Girl Scout members with disabilities and their caregivers. Ask about needs and accommodations. Always be sure to contact the balloon ride operator or location in advance to determine any safety steps that need to be prearranged and ensure they are able to accommodate those with disabilities. For more information, visit the [U.S. Access Board](#) for transportation resources and information to support people with disabilities.

**Equity.** Consider the history, culture, and past experiences of the Girl Scout members in your troop that could affect their ability to equally participate in an activity. Work with members and families to understand how an activity is perceived. Ensure that all Girl Scout members and their families feel comfortable and have access to whatever is needed to fully participate, such as proper equipment, prior experiences, and the skills needed to enjoy the activity. See the Equity section of the [Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints](#) for general advice about expense,

**Emergency Action Plan (EAP).** Review and document your Emergency Action Plan (EAP) before starting any activity and review it so all are prepared. Think through scenarios of what can go wrong such as an accident, physical injury, missing person, sudden illness, or sudden weather or water emergencies.

Troops must provide one adult certified in Adult and Pediatric CPR/First Aid/AED.

## Tethered Hot Air Balloon Ride Checkpoints

**Select a qualified operator.** Ensure operators have liability insurance and are licensed through the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). Pilots must be currently licensed. Here are some questions to ask of an operator you are considering:

- Do you comply with the Envelope of Safety or FAA Wings programs? (These voluntary programs, promoted by the FAA, indicate an operator or pilot is willing to achieve a high level of preparation and training.)
- How long have you been flying/operating in this area?
- Do you have a commercial pilot's FAA certificate?
- What is your safety/accident record?
- What insurance coverage does your company carry?
- Will you be flying or piloting our ride, or just booking it for another pilot?
- Do you have a business license for flying in this area?
- How will the balloon be tethered? (See Safety Gear section, below, for acceptable options.)

**Choose a balloon that meets Girl Scout standards.** The balloon must be certified and registered with the FAA for passenger use.

- **Helium balloon rides** are likely to be permanently installed and inflated with helium, a gas lighter than air. They can carry many riders in a donut-shaped gondola below the balloon. A single cable runs from the balloon to the ground through the hole in the gondola. The operator controls the rise and descent of the balloon with the cable.
- **Tethered hot air balloons** use heated air to inflate a large, colorful envelope. Because heated air is less dense than ambient air, the balloon rises. A passenger basket or gondola is suspended below the balloon. To rise and descend, a licensed pilot carefully manages the heated air with fuel—typically propane. The aircraft is tethered by ropes or straps to three heavy or fixed items (anchors) on the ground. The pilot and ground crew monitor wind direction and speed and anchor placement. A crew member manages any riders waiting for a turn.

**Know the local laws.** Many other countries do not maintain the same strict flight standards as those in the United States. Research the standards and enforcement practices of the country you will visit. Ride only in countries with firm safety standards. Contact your Girl Scout council for guidance.

### On the Day of Riding

**Get a weather report.** Be prepared to postpone or cancel rides in case of poor weather. Check [Weather.com](https://www.weather.com). There should be no lightning storms predicted within a 50-mile radius of the site. Strong winds or lightning are especially dangerous, but even winds of over 5 miles per hour can be too much. Contact the balloon operator or pilot for guidance.

### Observe general safety rules:

- Follow pilot and crew instructions about getting into and out of the basket or gondola.
- Listen to the orientation and follow the rules mentioned.
- Never lift someone to see over the edge of the basket.
- Use the buddy system and adult supervision, always.
- Follow instructions in an emergency.
- Do not play on or around the ground anchors or tethers.

**Address motion sickness.** Suggest that those who get motion sickness consider taking a remedy in advance. Other tips:

- Bring mints, ginger candies, gingersnaps, or plain crackers to settle queasy stomachs.

- Have motion sick persons stay in the fresh air. Have them keep their eyes on the horizon.

### **Safety Gear**

- Tethers for hot air balloons may be ropes or straps, which must be in good condition. Operators should inspect them before each use and monitor them throughout the ride(s). Hot air balloons should use a three-point tether. Helium balloons may use a single tethering cable.
- Rescue and safety gear, according to industry standards for the aircraft type, including fire extinguishers and weights.
- Layered clothing, according to the weather and no loose or dangling items
- Motion sickness remedies (see above) if needed.