

Gases & Welding Vacation Destinations: **UP, UP AND AWAY!**



Photos courtesy of Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta, Inc.

Who wants to take their work along with them when they're on vacation? Well, if you work in the welding and gases industry, it may be hard to avoid! This summer in *GAWDA Edge*, we're highlighting vacation spots where a gases and welding professional will feel right at home, even while kicking back and leaving the office far, far away.

As summer begins to draw to a close, *GAWDA Edge* takes to the skies for the third and final spot in its series on gases and welding vacation destinations.

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The Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta, which takes place this year on October 6-14, is the largest ballooning event in the world. Since the event first began in 1972 with a mere 13 balloons, it has grown to encompass 700 balloons taking flight from the fiesta's 78-acre launch field.

The event plays host to both hot air balloons and gas balloons. Hot air balloons take flight with the help of heated

air: As air inside the balloon is heated, the balloon rises; as the air cools, the balloon descends. Before launching, fans fill the balloon with cold air, which then is heated through the use of propane (supplied at the Albuquerque event by **Airgas Southwest**). Sport hot air balloons typically will carry 20 to 45 gallons of propane in aluminum or stainless steel tanks, which are kept on the floor of the basket. When the valves are opened, the propane vaporizes and is ignited by a pilot light in the burners.



BALLOONS BY THE NUMBERS

- Hot air balloons hold between 19,000 and 211,000 cubic feet of air.
- A racing gas balloon holds about 35,000 pounds of helium.
- Depending on the weight capacity, hot air balloons may be as tall as 100 feet. Most are 50 to 90 feet tall.
- A hot air balloon typically travels about 15 miles in an hour of flight.
- In flight, a typical hot air balloon travels anywhere from tree level to about 3,000 feet above the ground.
- A skilled ground crew can inflate and launch a hot air balloon in 15 minutes or less. A gas balloon can take hours to inflate.

Gas balloons, by contrast, achieve their lift by means of a lighter-than-air gas, such as helium or hydrogen, which is provided at the fiesta by **Matheson Tri-Gas**. The balloon is inflated through a tube called an appendix, which stays open during flight to let excess gas escape. To allow the gas balloon to rise, pilots drop weights (called ballast); to descend, they allow gas to escape through a valve at the top of the balloon. Helium traditionally has been the most popular gas used for gas balloons in the United States because it isn't flammable. Hydrogen is a less-expensive, although potentially riskier, alternative.

A typical hot air balloon flight lasts from one to two hours, but a gas balloon flight can last for days. In either case, the balloon pilot must have a pilot's license and the balloon can be "steered" only by catching the best wind currents.

While the Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta is the biggest and most well-known event of its kind, it is by no means the only one. To catch a glimpse of the welding and gases industry in the skies above your region, look no further than events like the Adirondack Balloon Festival (September 20-23 in Glens Falls, New York), the Gatineau Hot Air Balloon Festival (August 31-September 3 in Gatineau, Quebec), or the Wah Chang Northwest Art & Air Festival (August 24-26 in Albany, Oregon).



Where else can the intrepid traveler go for an exciting welding-and-gases-related vacation? Visit www.gawdaedge.org to read the first two parts in GAWDA Edge's three-part series, *Under The Sea and In The Bleachers*, to learn all about SCUBA diving in exotic locations and how the gases industry keeps the fizz in your outing to the ballpark.

What are some other great spots for a gases and welding-related vacation? Tell us by [clicking here](#).

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