

## Balloon Tourism



Large balloons flying in the sky, carrying people in a round, open container – it is a picturesque scene that can be observed in many parts of the world under suitable weather conditions. Balloons consist of four main important parts: an envelope, a basket, burner system and fuel tanks. For sport and recreational purposes, balloons are filled with hot air. Hot air balloons usually take off at dawn or before sunset. It means an increased level of noise in otherwise quiet moments. Their launch depends on weather conditions, including wind strength, thermals, visibility and so on. Subsequently, good weather makes it easier to find a safe landing point. To ensure passengers' safety and product quality, balloon manufacturers must meet the required manufacturing standards and technological parameters. These standards are

governed by national authorities, European legislation, or federal jurisdiction. Cameron is the largest brand of hot air balloons in the world. Cameron Balloons' US factory is situated in Michigan, whereas Cameron Balloons Ltd. is located in Bristol, UK. This global brand is represented by more than 160 dealers in more than 45 countries around the world. The Czech Republic is also very close to the world giants. The Czech Kubicek Balloons company belongs among the top manufacturers in the global market competition. This company is ranked among three most significant producers of hot air balloons in the world. Hot air balloon operators and commercial balloon pilots are regulated by different institutional and legal instruments. Some operators who ensure hot air ballooning for passengers are

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family businesses. Some businesses were founded by small groups of enthusiasts organised in sports clubs. Privately owned balloons prevail over those commercial operators of sightseeing balloons.

Balloon flights can be considered as a type of air transport. This type of transport is also categorized as non-scheduled private and commercial civil flight. Balloons can be used as an effective marketing tool. They can be attached to the ground for special occasions and events. Their envelopes are ideal for advertising. There are different colours as well as various shapes of envelopes that can attract a wider audience. More or less regular outdoor events, such as balloon fiestas or festivals, are organized around the world. Examples include Taiwan International Balloon Festival, Bristol International Balloon Fiesta in the UK, European Balloon Festival in Spain, and Canberra Balloon Spectacular in Australia. Balloons often float = over popular tourist areas with concentrated natural or cultural-historic attractiveness.

Hot air ballooning, alternatively also hot air balloon flying or riding, can be defined as a form of a non-standardized and unusual tourist activity (Novotná et al., 2019). These alternative forms of tourism attract a limited number of visitors, compared to mass tourism (Novelli, 2018). Ballooning in a smaller balloon with a capacity of about six seats can be associated with more sustainable forms of tourism (Novotná et al., 2019). In a broader context (see Figure 1), balloon tourism can be defined as a segment of niche tourism. It is set into the macro-niche category of nature-based tourism or adventure tourism. Adventure tourism activities can take place in the air, water, land, or mixed environment (Pomfret, 2006). Balloon flights are part of aerial tourism activities. Ballooning itself can be combined with other additional activities of an adventurous nature such as bungee-jumping or skydiving from a hot air balloon.

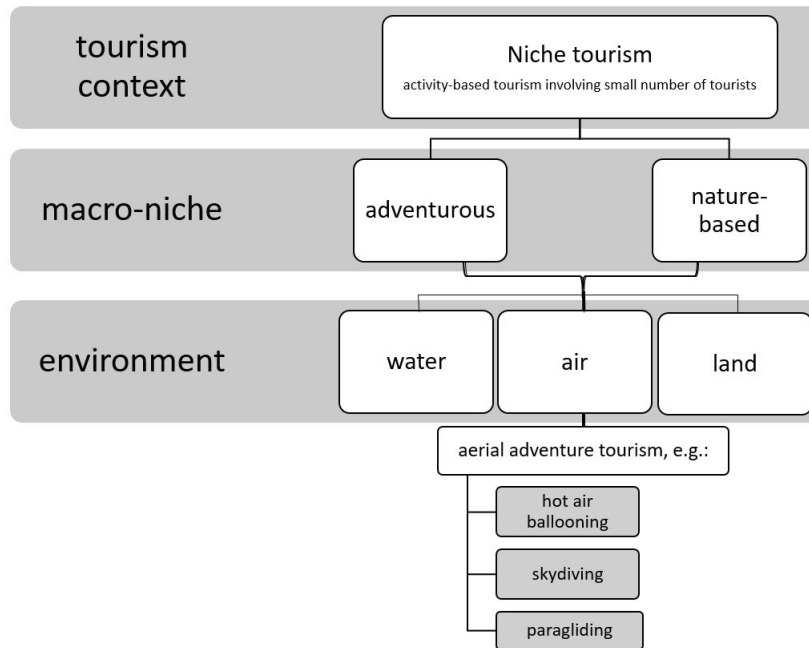


Figure NOVOTNÁ.1 Setting balloon tourism in a broader context of niche tourism

The long history of ballooning has brought with it a number of traditions that also enrich this activity. There are various customs before

as well as after the flight. A champagne toast or balloonist’s prayer are among them. Passengers can enjoy diverse foodie experiences – for

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example, celebratory breakfast, romantic dining and wine tasting. The accompanying culinary programme during ballooning contributes to value co-creation in tourism services (Bertan, 2020).

Hot air ballooning takes place in various places throughout the world. It is realized mostly in the vicinity of popular tourist regions – for example, in European and Mediterranean space. Hot air balloon operators offer unforgettable experiences during flights in Marrakech, Morocco, as well as in Loire Valley, France. There is a possibility of ballooning over World Heritage cities, such as Prague, Barcelona, Vilnius, and so on. Ballooning in Australia provides breath-taking views of the vineyards, hills and coastlines. Winter ballooning can be taken in the snowy mountain landscape of the Alps or the High Tatra Mountains in Slovakia. Balloons abundantly float in the region of Cappadocia in Central Turkey. Balloon rides in Egypt include the view of the Pyramids of Giza or the Palace of Luxor. Ballooning in these popular destinations is becoming a mass affair. This is also shown by the take-off of large-capacity balloons with seats for up to 24 people (Novotná et al., 2019).

The motivation for this form of tourism is connected to behavioural transformation and emphasis on experiences. This transformation relates to global megatrends that affect consumers' needs and attitudes (Buckley et al., 2015). The emergence of new trends places increased demands on the change of tourism products and their adaptation to current requirements (Hudson and Hudson, 2017). Consumers desire to broaden their perspectives and enrich their overall experience. It also impacts on their spending level (Bertan, 2020). The growing popularity of gaining new experiences can lead the segment of wealthier tourists to perform extraordinary adventurous activities (Smith, Macleod and Robertson, 2010). It provides space for alternative forms of tourism, based on highly individualized services (Benur and Bramwell, 2015). Consumers move from commodified mainstream types of tourism to tailor-made and unique activities. Similar niche tourism forms contribute to diversification and create a competitive advantage for destinations (Novelli, 2018). This advantage can significantly contribute to destination development (Novotná et al., 2019).

Ballooning is very popular with individuals, couples, families, or staff members. This is a

tourism product that is sold by providers and consumed by a third party. It means that flights are very often received as a gift in the form of a voucher. Flights are taken on the occasion of various celebrations – for examples, wedding anniversaries or birthdays. The aspect of luxury is beginning to disappear with its growing popularity. It is also possible to record the gradual change of the clientele. A few decades ago, ballooning was available to an affluent clientele. Nowadays, it is more attainable for the masses. The interest in ballooning can be observed in the older population. Discovering regions of their origin from the balloon is popular with this elderly market segment. The so-called silver generation is relatively healthy and financially secured. They prefer controlled adventure experiences (Pomfret, 2006). The soft-adventure activities such as ballooning make them feel young. The younger generation tend to engage in high risk-taking activities. Ballooning is not seen as such an exciting activity like bungee jumping or white-water rafting. The question arises whether this technology-dependent generation will share the same values and seek the same experiences. Ballooning must go through a lifecycle restart if it is to stay competitive in the virtual world. It is necessary to provide balloon operators with an effective tool for the identification of specific types of consumers. They must develop a marketing strategy to attract young people and meet their needs (Hudson and Hudson, 2017).

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