James Canyon Hot Air Balloon Festival

See the Canyon From On High!

May 25-26, 2016

The James Canyon Hot Air Balloon Festival, presented by New Mexico Explore Outdoors, welcomes more than 65 hot air balloonists from across the country. One of the largest free hot-air balloon festivals in the Southwest, the event features hot air balloon races, a key grab, tether rides, and our always well-attended Ballumination! Tour Point Shepherd Park, enjoy a free arts and crafts show, visit the multiple food vendors, and get up close with antique cars and tractors. As the sun sets, you can settle back for musical entertainment and the always fabulous fireworks show over the canyon!

Saturday’s events feature a 6:30 hare and hound race in which balloons try to follow a hare, ultimately attempting to land on beanbags. A balloon flight flight at dusk, and a balloon glow beginning at 8:00 p.m. round out the day. Get to the park by 6:30 a.m. on Sunday to watch balloons fly into the field while passengers try to grab a ring from a tall pole. Ask a balloon owner for a free tethered ride on Sunday evening. Kids will enjoy the balloon themed play area, with fairground type games including balloon pops and water balloon toss!

As for entertainment, you’re in luck! Spread out your blanket, grab a cold drink, and enjoy a variety of live music daily, from country to rock and roll. With activities for the kids, shopping and entertainment for adults, and plenty of photo ops, this is a festival you won’t want to miss!

This year’s music acts include EZ Star, Black Dog, Rachel Mac, and the LLC Five Star Jazz Orchestra. Plenty of others will be on hand, as well. Stroll the park, visiting each live music stage, to enjoy just about any type of musical act on your playlist. Be sure to bring a lawn chair and cooler (although be aware that glass bottles are not allowed in the park).

As for the kids, hold on to your hat! Your children can pet a baby alligator, dance like a butterfly to fun tunes, get their faces painted with balloon art, and try a little limbo. At the children’s village, they can enjoy John Drake as he performs his magic show. In the next booth, they can catch storytelling and puppet shows sponsored by the Williams Basin Library.

And don’t forget the dogs! In a special enclosure, well-behaved dogs can participate in the Stay Connected K-9 Frisbee Toss. Dogs can splash in pools, chase toys, and dig for buried treasure. Adult supervision required, of course!

We guarantee you’ll be hungry! Grab an ice cream cone or snack on popcorn as you stroll through the vendors and hot air balloons. The barbecue cook-off is sure to be a stellar attraction, as well. With food vendors scattered throughout the park, you’re never too far from your next meal.

All balloon flights and displays are weather permitting. Winds must be less than 5 mph to safely inflate balloons on the festival grounds.

**Frequently Asked Questions**

When is the best time to see balloons?

The best time to view balloons and get great pictures is early morning. Flights begin at approximately 6:00 a.m. each morning. It’s definitely worth getting up early to see balloons grace the early morning sky. Balloons also fly at dusk (approximately 7:00 p.m. on Friday and Saturday night).

Please be aware that ballooning is extremely weather dependent. Winds must be less than 15 mph for balloons to fly. Listen to WHTQ 1350 AM or 92.5 FM for the latest on flight information.

Where are the balloons and pilots during the day?

High canyon winds make it impossible to inflate balloons during the day. Pilots and their families enjoy the same things that you do at the park—live music, quality arts & crafts, and local cuisine.

Can I purchase a hot air balloon ride during the Festival?

Due to the overwhelming demand for balloon rides during the festival, rides are not available. However, most pilots will give tether rides on Saturday and Sunday mornings. Rides can be purchased before or after the festival from Sky Glide Hot Air Balloon Company, a member of the James County Chamber of Commerce.

What can my children do while visiting the festival?

Children can enjoy inflatables, children’s interactive entertainment, reptile displays, and face painting, just to name a few! These fun activities are located in the free, gated Children’s Village open 1 p.m. - 8 p.m. on Friday, and 8 a.m. - 8 p.m. on Saturday.

Is smoking permitted on the festival grounds?

Smoking is not allowed on the festival grounds while the balloons are present. Please be courteous of other festival patrons.

Can I bring a cooler with beverage and food into the festival?

You can bring a cooler with snacks and plastic or aluminum containers. However, no glass bottles or alcohol are allowed at the festival. We do provide an assortment of unique foods at our food vendor stands.

What are my camping, RV, or lodging options?

While you cannot camp or park an RV on the festival grounds, there are camping options nearby. Check with the James County Chamber of Commerce for a complete list of camping facilities.

How can I plan for the best experience?

Although there is no perfect formula, the following tips should insure that you have all the bases covered!

Wear good walking shoes. The park encompasses 15 acres, so hiking is a strong possibility.

Bring sunscreen. There is very little shade.

Get to the park early. When the balloons inflate, long lines form.

Wear comfortable, cool clothing. If you take tether rides, the flame does make it hot in the basket.

Bring a camera and tripod. The ballumination at dusk is a beautiful photo opportunity, but the low light makes a tripod a necessity.

Bring lawn chairs and/or blankets.

Bring, or prepare to buy, plenty of water.

Bring Frisbees or balls for children to play with in the large open field while you wait for a show to begin.

**Event Schedule**

**Saturday (5/25/16)**

6:00 AM (Saturday Morning) Pilots Briefing

6:30 AM Hare and Hound Race

5:00 PM Pilot Briefing

5:30 PM Fun Flight

6:30 PM Tethers

8:15 PM Balloon Glow

**Sunday (5/26/16)**

6:00 AM Pilots Briefing

6:30 AM Lynn Layton Key Grab

5:00 PM Pilot Briefing

5:30 PM Fun Flight

6:30 PM Ballumination