

Business Standard

Steve Trieber: Passionate balloonist who's in love with India (IANS Profile)

IANS | Agra November 18, 2015 Last Updated at 15:02 IST

Steve Trieber has been reaching heights in different locations for last four decades - even in India. Yet, each time seems a new adventure for him.

"Everytime I flew in India, it felt like the first time I ever flew a hot air balloon. The excitement is overwhelming," Steve Trieber told IANS here.

For Trieber, it's sheer passion which makes him go on and on. He helps lend a different perspective to tourism and sight-seeing -- instead of viewing places of interest at ground level he provides viewers a chance to observe these from the skies suspended in a balloon gondola at a height of at least 1,000 metres.

No stranger to India, Trieber who hails from Maine in the United States has been piloting his hot-air balloon here since 2009 when he was invited by India's biggest commercial hot air balloon tourism company, Sky Waltz.

The 58-year-old has flown across the US, Europe and Turkey -- but he finds India "truly incredible."

When he came to India, it was to help Sky Waltz's founder-director Samit Garg in his venture, then fell in love with the country. "The opportunity to fly balloons in this beautiful country has been like a dream come true," he said.

Trieber began flying hot air balloons in 1978. He is not only a balloon pilot but also flies and repairs airplanes, sea planes, gliders and helicopters. He is also a flight instructor and an aircraft inspector.

Something that began as a hobby for this balloon veteran, gradually turned into a full time profession.

"I was introduced to hot air balloons by a friend of mine who organised the first balloon flight across the Atlantic. This episode inspired me to learn how to fly these balloons and there has been no looking back ever since."

In 1989, Trieber was offered a full-time job by the US Airlines which he refused to pursue his hobby.

"It was difficult in the beginning, but following a passion has never been more fulfilling. I have been very fortunate to earn from something that makes me very happy"

Trieber has been a part of the Pushkar International Balloon Festival, also organised by Sky Waltz . In India, he has also flown in other parts of Rajasthan, Hampi and Goa.

In the first edition of the Taj Balloon Festival that kicked-off last weekend, Trieber piloted a balloon measuring

10,000 cubic metres.

"Flying in Agra has been phenomenal. Although the Taj was hardly visible, but the overwhelming response from tourists and locals alike has been very encouraging," he said.

"Hot air ballooning in India is certainly a boost to its tourism sector. It will give people the opportunity to view things differently which will be etched in their memories for ever," he said.

Trieber looks forward to flying again in Agra and said "everytime I get a chance to fly a balloon in India, I will pack my bags and grab the very first flight."

The three-day Taj Balloon Festival included free and tethered flights. Balloonists from 12 countries, including the US, Britain, the United Arab Emirates and Spain, participated in the event.

Of the 15 balloons that participated, three were provided by Sky Waltz. The rides by Sky Waltz are priced at \$250 (Rs.16,000) per person.

(Karishma S. Kalita was invited to the festival by Sky Waltz. She can be contacted at karishma.k@ians.in)