

Goliard Scholarship for International Travel Proposal
View from the Top: Ballooning around the World

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“Suddenly the wind ceased. The air seemed motionless around us. We were off, going at the speed of the air-current in which we now lived and moved. Indeed, for us there was no more wind; and this is the first great fact of spherical ballooning. Infinitely gentle is this unfelt motion forward and upward. The illusion is complete: it seems not to be the balloon that moves, but the earth that sinks down and away...

Villages and woods, meadows and chateaux, pass across the moving scene, out of which the whistling of locomotives throws sharp notes. These faint, piercing sounds, together with the yelping and barking of dogs, are the only noises that reach one through the depths of the upper air. The human voice cannot mount up into these boundless solitudes. Human beings look like ants along the white lines that are highways; and the rows of houses look like children's playthings.”
— *Alberto Santos-Dumont, My Air-Ships, 1904*

I think all travelers like to say that they “go wherever the wind takes them,” but hot air ballooning takes this philosophy to a whole new level. One of the purest forms of travel, hot air ballooning is determined by air currents, rather than the pilot. Your destination, your speed, everything—it all falls in the hands of the current. I’m mostly drawn to hot air ballooning because of the simplicity. You literally just pump some hot air into the balloon, and off and away you go. You’re free to go anywhere the wind may take you. There are no complicated engines or spinning rotor blades. You just go.

All my life I’ve been driven to be this hyper-organized, hyper-everything person who always had a plan. For a long time (ever since I was in first grade, to be exact) I always had to know what I was doing, where I was going, and how I was going to get there. Yeah, I was *that* annoying little kid who planned her summers meticulously: soccer camp, lacrosse camp, 3D art classes. Then came this year. I’m going through some sort of quarter-life personal and career crisis, and while this isn’t as dramatic as it sounds, it’s very real to me. It’s real in the sense that I’ve never experienced this abrupt feeling of “not knowing” before. I don’t know what I’ll be doing after graduation, or where I’ll be. I no longer want just another summer internship or research fellowship that will put me on the fast track to... nowhere. I realize that I have my whole life ahead of me to do the “daily grind,” so to speak. I apologize for the cliché— but clichés wouldn’t be clichéd if they weren’t true.

So I here I am, without any plans set for the summer. My friends are competing for research positions at Baylor, fellowships from Leadership Rice, consulting jobs at Bain, prestigious-fill-in-the-blank-here-at-even-more-prestigious-fill-in-the-blank-there. These things are all okay, but they’re not what I want to do. This summer I just want to get out and do something different. I want to feel something special, taste something new, and experience something wild. I want to see the world, and I want to see the world from the top. Seeing the world from the top is important to me, because it will help put a lot of the things going on in my life right now in perspective. Hot air ballooning is a great way to gain perspective with a view from the top. Check out the quote I’ve put at the top of this proposal—“Human beings look like ants along the white lines that are highways; and the rows of houses look like children's playthings.” This quote really captures why I want to go ballooning this summer. Ballooning will free my mind of all the stress and pressure of school, friends, family, and everything in between by allowing me to see that hey— my

problems look like ants from up here. Ballooning is so different from anything I've ever wanted to do before. I'll be giving up all control. I'll be sailing through the skies. I'll be coasting. I'll be letting go for the first time in a long time, and it will be awesome.

I remember watching the Disney/Pixar movie *Up* when I was a junior in high school. If you've never seen *Up*, I'll try to give a quick synopsis. It's about a 78-year old man who's always dreamed of voyaging to Paradise Falls with his childhood sweetheart. When his sweetheart dies, he becomes too cynical to ever make his voyage a reality – until he wakes up one day, firmly decides he's going to keep his promise to see Paradise Falls, and turns his house into a makeshift airship with the help of thousands of helium balloons. When I was watching this movie three years ago, I thought to myself, "I need to find a way to do that!"

Now I finally have the opportunity to do this, so to speak. I would really love to explore hot air ballooning with help from the Goliard Scholarship. There are so many festivals celebrating this form of travel over the summer, and I want to take part both as a spectator and a participant. These festivals will be a spectacular way for me to immerse myself in the culture of ballooning. Hundreds of thousands of people come out to support the colors, sport, and competition of ballooning every summer. The festivals I'm proposing to attend allow spectators the opportunity to ride on the balloons with the pilots, so I will actually have the opportunity to ride balloons in flight. I'll be able to meet other ballooning enthusiasts and competitors. I'll talk to anyone who is willing to talk to me. More or less, I just want to hear other people's experiences with the sport. Whether new to the scene (like me) or seasoned professionals, I want to listen to and understand their stories. Most of these festivals are international in scope and world-class in reputation, and I'll be able to meet people and balloon with people from literally all over the world. I really just want to get out and away for a couple of months and truly experience the fine art of travel, particularly travel in the form of hot air ballooning. I hope to see Germany, Turkey, Italy, Spain, Luxembourg, and the United Kingdom during my journey around the skies of Western Europe. I've attached an exact list of balloon festivals I hope to attend below, at the bottom of this proposal. While there are many festivals around the world this summer, I've researched a select handful that will offer the most in terms of size, scope, and international experience.

This summer I want to do something creative and see something beautiful, because summer is precious and time in college even more so. After college I will have more responsibilities and more demands, and I doubt I'll be able to propose a hot air ballooning trip again. As I've said, hot air ballooning makes you let go and let loose. You just have to drift along with the wind in order to enjoy the experience. I'm hoping that this trip can help me resolve my issues of *needing to know*. By allowing a balloon to take me wherever it may, and by meeting people with the same philosophy, I know that I can wake up to a fresh start and a clean slate. This is a daring step for me, but it's a daring step in the right direction.

I want to thank the Goliard Committee very sincerely for considering my application and offering this amazing opportunity. Please let me know if I can provide you with any other materials to supplement this proposal—a more specific itinerary, a budget, anything. I also hope to share my travel experiences with the Rice community upon my return. As documentation of my trip, I hope to create a photo collage for the Goliard Board of Governors, a giant collage of the thousands of pictures I plan to take and memories I know I will treasure.

Bon Voyage!

Proposed Balloon Festivals

Date	Balloon Festival	Location
June 15-24	Warstein Balloon Sail Week	Kiel, Germany
June 21-24	Cappadocia Balloon Festival	Nevsehir, Turkey
June 29-30	Ballooning on the Balcony	Cingoli, Italy
July 5-8	European Balloon Festival	Igualada, Spain
July 11-15	LuxGSM World Championship	Echternach, Luxembourg
July 8-22	Italian International Grand Prix	Todi, Italy
July 26-29	Saxonia International Balloon Festival	Leipzig, Germany
August 9-12	Bristol International Balloon Fiesta	Ashton Court, Bristol, UK

Check out these cool photos!

European Balloon Festival, July 5-8 in Igualada, Spain



This picture is my favorite.



LuxGSM World Championship, July 11-15 in
Echternach,
Luxembourg

Warstein Balloon Sail Week, June 15-24 in Kiel, Germany

Great view from the top!

