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EXCERPT

IDEAS & TRENDS

Grab Your Lawn Chair. Float Away.

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Cluster balloonists like Jonathan Trappe, who went aloft for four hours on June 7 with 55 huge helium balloons, prefer to take no chances. A 35-year-old technical projects manager in Raleigh, N.C., Mr. Trappe is an F.A.A.-certified private pilot, rated to operate hot-air balloons. For his recent flight, he worked with an F.A.A.-certified rigger, carried a clutch of safety equipment and alerted regional air traffic controllers ahead of time.

“Cluster ballooning is something people can do,” Mr. Trappe said. “They just need to do it safely. I’m very concerned that people will do it without the appropriate training.”

Not that he didn’t inject some whimsy into his trip. Mr. Trappe’s gondola was actually his office chair. “It represents a contrast between the normal mundane world,” he said, “and the world of my dreams.”