

Kate Washington

Minister for Families and Communities
Minister for Disability Inclusion



Tara Moriarty

Minister for Agriculture
Minister for Regional New South Wales
Minister for Western New South Wales

Liesl Tesch

Parliamentary Secretary for Families and Communities
Parliamentary Secretary for Disability Inclusion

Media Release

Up, up and away with a new accessible tourism experience

Wednesday, 27 September 2023

Vision pack available [here](#)

People with mobility access requirements can now enjoy the freedom of flight with NSW's first wheelchair accessible hot air balloon experience in the Hunter Valley.

Minister for Regional NSW Tara Moriarty said the balloon's first official flight is a milestone moment for local accessibility and inclusion, which are critical components for responsible and sustainable tourism in the Hunter Valley.

"Planning and creating accessible tourism experiences like this one in the picturesque Hunter Valley has removed the barriers that prevented locals, families or visitors from enjoying the freedom of flight and will also help the local tourism industry become more sustainable," Ms Moriarty said.

Minister for Disability Inclusion Kate Washington said the wheelchair accessible balloon basket is significant.

"As of today, it's up, up and away for everyone seeking a ballooning experience in the stunning Hunter Valley!"

"The NSW government is excited to be backing inclusive tourism initiatives like this, allowing people with disability to access adventures and seeing wheelchair accessible tourism taking off."

Parliamentary Secretary for Disability Inclusion Liesl Tesch said it was a proud moment to be part of the state's first accessible balloon flight and understands how important it will be for locals and visitors to the region, especially for those with disability.

"Dignified and equitable tourism experiences benefit the individual and also their support networks, who will now be able to share an unforgettable experience together, and that will go a long way in making life more inclusive for people with disability in NSW," Ms Tesch said.

"Too often, people with disability miss out on the joys of tourism and I am thrilled to see more equitable experiences across our regions."

Member for Cessnock Clayton Barr said the Hunter Valley is among the state's leading tourism destinations and attracts visitors from all parts of Australia and abroad.

Hunter Valley local and Vietnam veteran David LeBrocque, who was onboard the official first flight, has a history of adrenaline fuelled adventures, including skydiving, bungee jumping and joy flights.

In 2011 the self-confessed daredevil was riding with friends in Northern NSW when his motorbike hit rough terrain.

"There's an old saying with motorbikes, where you look is where you go, and I ran off the side of the road and I knew straight away I'd hurt my spine - I was driven by ambulance to Newcastle and then by helicopter to Royal North Shore Hospital in Sydney," Mr LeBrocque said.

"I was on a ventilator unable to breathe independently for three months however, I knew if anyone could dig themselves out of a hole it would be me, and a week later I had managed to get myself off the ventilator to begin my recovery back home in Maitland."

"I know this opportunity will open up avenues for other adaptive adventure seekers out there, and for them to see a person with a disability like mine do this and know they are able experience the same thing is very exciting, I am truly humbled to be the first flight participant."

Australian balloon manufacturer Sean Kavanagh of Kavanagh Balloons said designing and building the state's first accessible balloon basket has been both a challenge and a privilege.

"The biggest challenge was ensuring we could engineer a wheelchair accessible balloon basket that was safe, so we locally designed and built a basket with a door and cushioned seating with restraint systems and a multi-point harness," Mr Kavanagh said.

"We're very proud to be involved in this project as hot air ballooning is our passion, and one of the greatest things about our business is being able to share that with other people, and everyone should be able to experience a balloon flight."

The balloon is the first of its kind in NSW and has been supported by the NSW Government and Cessnock City Council, in partnership with operator Balloon Aloft in the Hunter Valley.

Cessnock City Council Mayor Jay Suvaal said we are focused on ensuring that the unique sights and experiences that attract tourists are available to everyone and our new accessible hot air balloon boosts the number of inclusive tourism experiences on offer in the Hunter Valley region."

Pilot and General Manager Matthew Scaife said Balloon Aloft, which has been based in the Hunter Valley for 43 years, is excited to be launching a tourism experience that will enable people with limited mobility to experience the thrill of hot air ballooning.

"We believe everyone should have the opportunity to enjoy this amazing experience and our new balloon will make that possible for more people than ever before and it's wonderful to see this come to fruition with the launch of our Hunter Valley Accessible Balloon Flights," Mr Scaife said.

For more information about flights go to: www.balloonaloft.com

MEDIA:

Alastair Walton | Minister Moriarty | 0418 251 229

Joely Langmaid | Liesl Tesch | 0422 103 440