



# HOT AIR BALLOONS TO RISE OVER THE CITY

The Tamil Nadu International Balloon Fest to be held from Jan 4-Jan 6

● **Roshne Balasubramanian**

**W**atching hot air balloons soar over exotic locations and landscapes on the silver screen have not only been a magical sight to behold but has also made us desire to watch and experience it in real time. The image of gigantic, often vividly coloured balloons conjure a photographic memory of a film I watched about 14 years ago — *Around the World in 80 Days* — which featured a hot air balloon. For all you airship lovers, who can't seem to stop daydreaming about seeing one, I turn bearer of good news. The Tamil Nadu International Balloon Festival (TNIBF), which for the last four years has been organised in Pollachi, is now coming to our city! The TNIBF 2019 is the 5th edition of Global Hot Air Balloon Festivals organised by the Global Media Box and The Slaves with the support of Department of Tourism Tamil Nadu.

A curtain raiser will be held from January 4 to January 6 at Mahindra City, Chengalpattu before the festival moves to Pollachi from January 13 to 15. "TNIBF was started in 2015 and featured just four balloons. In an attempt to create more awareness about hot-air balloons, ballooning and to promote tourism, it was converted into an annual event," says Benedict Savio, business development director, Global Media Box, the brainchild behind projects including, the 80-foot Tamil Nadu balloon that was launched at Leone International Balloon festival in Mexico recently, the '2.0' superstar, and the world's first 80-foot Angry bird shaped hot air balloon.

From seeing a footfall of a few hundred people in its first edition to



The balloon festival will feature 10 balloons from eight countries

witnessing 30,000 visitors in its earlier edition, the festival has reached new heights. Benedict promises that this edition will be bigger. "This edition will feature 10 balloons from about eight countries like Germany, Belgium, Netherlands, France, Poland, Denmark and USA. They will also be in different shapes. We are expecting a footfall of about 30,000 to 50,000 people in Chennai and another 20,000 to 30,000 in Pollachi," he says.

The festival will primarily be flightless, "Most visitors think that they can come on board and get a ride. This festival is more about giving people the experience of how hot-air balloons work and educating them about the adventure sport. With 10 hot air balloons, it's highly

## Regular operations

Regular hot air balloon operations are likely to start next year in Viluppuram and Pondicherry. "It will be easy for people to access them. Certified pilots will man the balloons," says Benedict Savio, business development director, Global Media Box.

impracticable to give a balloon safari to thousands of people, especially considering that the balloons can be hovered only two hours after sunrise and two hours before sunset. But, we are planning to arrange a five-minute ride for the audience, where the balloon will go about 80 to 100 feet high," he explains. The festival will also host music concerts, a balloon glow musical show in the evening, a plethora of food stalls, and contests for children. "This is a carnival of sorts where people can come and spend a good amount of time with their friends and family, gazing at the balloons. To create awareness about something as niche as hot air ballooning is a challenge. But, in the last four years, we have managed to educate people about it. This festival will give everyone an experience that they can cherish. We invite everyone to come and enjoy the sight," he shares. Regular hot air balloon operations are also likely to start next year in Viluppuram and Pondicherry.

(For details and updates about TNIBF 2019 visit [www.tnibf.com](http://www.tnibf.com) or call 9500090850)