

MI 2021 Balloon Fiesta Rally Recap

The 2021 Monaco International Rally at the Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta (AIBF) held October 6th through 10th, 2021 was by all accounts another outstanding MI Balloon Fiesta Rally.

The Rally in essence was sold out with 80 coaches registered. Seventy-seven coaches were actually in attendance as a result of a number of late cancellations that the short time frame just did not allow replacement. In all, 177 individuals attended the Rally.

At least seventy-five percent of the MI Rally attendees were first time attendees at the AIBF and for many, this was their first MI rally.

Forty-five percent of those attending the Balloon Fiesta Rally joined MI within the past year and have not attended another MI Rally, reinforcing that this rally is a major recruiting tool for the Chapter.

All who attended the Rally observed the Inflation of 550 registered hot air balloons. While the number of Special Shape balloons registered was slightly up to over one hundred, unfortunately not all of them were present and flown since many are them from foreign countries and the pilots were not allowed to enter the country because of the US policy. Some balloon systems were shipped months ago and were flown by US pilots so it was still a great show.

The weather was the warmest in at least ten years, with nightly lows in the upper 40's and 50's to day time in the low to mid 80's. No rain or snow! The balloons were able to fly three of the four mornings of the rally and seven of the total nine days of the whole Fiesta. The perspective of the rally hosts was that Thursday morning was the best of the best over the past 18 years.

Balloon Glows occurred on all scheduled evenings, although cut short one night due to winds. Following the Glows were skydivers with pyrotechnics and then an enormous and spectacular Fireworks display. There were a lot of Oohs and Aahs in the MI Social Gathering Area as the fireworks were again truly outstanding and we had front row seats! Those who chose not to go down on the Launch Field missed out on being a part of the 900,000 who accessed the Launch Field and missed being Up— Touching close.

Monaco again had The Best parking location that could be had at the Balloon Fiesta. We were located in the first four rows of the premier VIP West Parking facility, immediately adjacent to the launch field. We were less than one hundred yards from the launching balloons and countless balloons flew directly over our coaches at 70 feet (or lower), close enough to talk to the pilot and passengers.

We were privileged again this year to have two hot air balloon pilots talk to the rally group on the first night before and after one of our excellent included meals. The pilots provided a great history of hot air ballooning and explained the fundamentals of Lighter Than Air flight.

They also brought their balloon systems, and while they could not inflate the envelope, they set out their baskets and partially assembled their system so all could see the key components and instruments. Many took advantage of having their picture taken while standing next to or in the basket, firing the burner.



Several MI rally participants took the opportunity to crew for a balloon during the Rally. One attendee (and co-host), Roger Smalley got his first balloon ride after crewing several times.

We were also blessed with three different balloons landing one morning within 30-60 feet of our front row. Many attendees took the opportunity to assist the pilots take down and pack their envelopes.





As with most MI Rallies, there were numerous comments about the copious amounts of food available for rally attendees. Yes, we ate, and ate again. In addition to the catered BBQ dinner on the first night, we returned to the extremely popular El Pinto restaurant for a buffet lunch and also again had an outstanding Texas size New Mexico style breakfast of burritos one morning, a continental breakfast another day and of course, daily Social Hours with heavy appetizers, which served as the evening meal for some. Several attendees also offered up special appetizers which were well received and consumed.

We also experienced outstanding volunteerism from the Parking and Greeting Crew to the numerous volunteers who helped prepare daily appetizers and the photographers who captured the Rally. Many, many thanks to the volunteers who were essential in making the rally a success. Not enough can be said for the outstanding Advance Crew that assisted the Co-Hosts this year. They that included: Paul and Joyce Miller, Bart and Rachel Mix and Paul and Cindy Pronze. Also a special thanks to Geoff and Johanna Mathews who helped out in many ways.

We were blessed with caterers honoring their projected 2020 prices, developed in 2019, for this year. Also diligent shopping on the part of the rally host to keep within the planned budget. This allowed the rally to

come in within one percent of the budget projected in late 2019 and actually ending very slightly in the black.

We plan to request eighty spaces in 2022 when registration opens up. Planned MI rally dates for 2022 are October 5th through 8th, departing mid-morning on the 9th after ballooning activities are over. As custom for the past several years, only MI members can apply through mid-April. On April 15th, registration will open to all FMCA members on a first-come basis, but non-members must have an MI member who is also attending as a sponsor. We want to provide an opportunity for friends who travel with MI members to also attend. We have actually picked up several as MI members when they learn they can join if they have any motorized motorhome that meets FMCA criteria.

The 2022 Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta will be the 50th Fiesta. We expect that all stops will be pulled out for this anniversary event. So put the dates on your calendar and start your planning now to trek to Albuquerque in October, 2022.

For those who have not previously attended the Balloon Fiesta, this is a destination rally with the focus on the event. There are no show coaches, no coach service, including washing and repairs, parts, etc. The focus is on Hot Air Balloons and on educating attendees on the basic of Ballooning 101, socialization among attendees and exposure to southwest culture. If you have questions, contact the Hosts or anyone who has previously attended with Monaco International.

Submitted by Co-Host:
Harry and Sandy Hentschel
Carol and Roger Smalley

