

2019 MI BALLOON FIESTA RALLY RECAP

The 2019 Monaco International Rally at the Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta (AIBF) held October 9th through 12th, 2019 was by all accounts another outstanding MI Balloon Fiesta Rally.

The Rally in essence was sold out with 80 coaches (80% were MI members) 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. One third of those attending the Balloon Fiesta Rally joined MI within the past year.

All who attended the Rally observed the Inflation of 588 registered hot air balloons, including over one hundred Special Shapes and 96 flying foreign flags from 17 countries. This IS an International event!

The weather was cool - those from FL said cold - but pleasant during the rally, dipping only into the mid-30s in the mornings. 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. 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 they 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 well less than one hundred yards from the launching balloons and countless balloon flew directly over our coaches at 70 feet, close enough to talk to the pilot and passengers.

We were privileged 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 instruments. Many took advantage of having their picture taken while standing next to the basket.

Several MI rally participants took the opportunity to crew for a balloon during the Rally. Several indicated they planned to return next year to crew for the same pilot in hopes of getting a balloon ride. This is common after crewing for the same pilot a number of times. Unfortunately, the balloon ride concessionaire was sold out weeks before the event this year disappointing some attendees. For 2020, we will try to provide details of how to sign up at an earlier date.

At least eighty percent of the MI Rally attendees were first time attendees at the AIBF and for a few this was their first MI rally. 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 outstanding Texas size, New Mexico style, breakfast burritos one morning, a continental breakfast another and of course, daily Social Hours with heavy appetizers.

We also experienced outstanding volunteerism from the Parking and Greeting Crew to the numerous volunteers who helped prepare daily appetizers and to 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 that included: Dan and Mary Beth Scott, Jim and Pat Goettinger and Jan and Marshall Couch. Also a special thanks to Roy and Jackie Holt who jumped in at the last minute to cover for a medical issue of one of the Team Members and to Lee and Kathie Fowler (guest of the Scotts) who also helped out with the arrivals and daily appetizers.

Co-Host Roger Smalley took dozens of photographs which will be posted to the MI website.

We have already registered for eighty spaces in 2020. MI rally dates for 2020 are October 7th through 10th, departing mid-morning on the 11th after ballooning activities are over. As has been the process for the last two 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 a REV product.

The 2020 theme for the Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta is Time Flies. So start your planning now to trek to Albuquerque in October and register early. Remember: Time Flies!

Submitted by Co-Host:

Sandy and Harry Hentschel
Carol and Roger Smalley