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Blades of glory
Give your sales a lift by selling helicopter rides in Las Vegas, New York and beyond p43
A new fleet

Hei USA has introduced three new customised Agusta Westland 119KE helicopters, with more on order for later this year. Billed as the fastest and most powerful in the industry, the seven-passenger aircraft cost nearly $4 million each, reach speeds of 175 miles per hour and have huge panoramic windows. They are the first tour helicopters fitted with an autopilot system.

Book it: Travel 2 sells Hei USA's Grand Canyon Escape and Sunrise Helicopter in a Teepee from £368.

- travel2.com
- heliusa.com

Flying high in the US

Katherine Lawrey compares chopper rides to tell your clients about in Las Vegas and New York and, overleaf, rounds up other best-selling helicopter experiences

Las Vegas

Maverick Helicopters

One of the key selling points about taking a helicopter flight from Las Vegas to the Grand Canyon is that it saves you a lengthy drive. The distance from the city to the West Rim is about 120 miles, which can take three or four hours to drive. But in a helicopter, it’s a mere 30-40 minute hop.

Maverick Helicopters, based at Las Vegas airport, has multiple options for shorter Strip flights and longer flights out to the canyon. On my bespoke tour, we fly out to the Grand Canyon, over Hoover Dam and Lake Meade, passing over the disused airstrip and cliff edge where the dramatic ending to Thelma & Louise was filmed. The pilot expertly lands the helicopter on the West Rim canyon floor in a remote area only accessible by foot or helicopter. A couple more helicopters land beside us and their occupants spill out but I still feel like I own the canyon. I toast my majestic surroundings with a glass of bubbles, and I don’t think I have ever drunk champagne in a more scenic spot.

Back in the helicopter we ascend to the rim to walk the Skywalk and visit a Hualapai tribe homestead. Then it’s back to Las Vegas, where we swoop down the Strip to end on a flourish.

Some helicopter tours can feel rushed, but on this tour I have plenty of time to enjoy the sensation of being in a helicopter, as well as taking in the view. “A helicopter ride is an experience”, says Maverick’s director of marketing Bryan Kroten. “It’s not just a way to get you there and back.”

Company details: Maverick began operating in 1995 with a single helicopter. It now has a fleet of 34, and the oldest is no more than eight years old. I flew in an ECO-Star helicopter, which Kroten says is “the best on the market.” It cost $2.3 million, has a 23% larger cabin, and quiet technology reduces its impact on nature.

Flight times: The first flights of the day are at 7am. In winter the sunset flight is at 3pm and in summer it’s 6:30pm.

Book it: Skywalk Express, combining a helicopter flight with Skywalk, costs £309 with Attraction World.

New York

Liberty Helicopters

My flight over Manhattan is shorter, but it’s an action-packed
12 minutes. You can take in pretty much every highlight on the island and surrounding area, with one sweeping glance, on Liberty Helicopters’ Big Apple tour.

My chopper takes off from the Downtown Manhattan Heliport, a short walk from South Ferry metro station. We head out across Governors and Ellis Islands, Orange Staten Island ferries pass each other on the river below. We swing round the tip of downtown Manhattan where the new One World Trade Centre tower has reached 100 floors and is still rising. It overlooks the twin pools of the National September 11 Memorial. These are sunk into the ground so you would not see them on a river cruise. We fly upriver to Midtown until we’re level with Central Park, at which point we swing round and make our return.

My pilot Reagan says he can do as many as 20 flights a day when the weather’s good. Even when it’s overcast and raining, the helicopters will fly but he admits poor visibility impacts on views. On a clear day it’s well worth the money, but the souvenir DVD at $69 is overpriced as it’s mostly stock footage. Memories will linger without it.

**Company details:** Liberty Helicopters started 25 years ago, and now has a fleet of 10 American Eurocopters, chosen for their manoeuvrability, comfort and reduced vibration.

**Flight times:** Liberty flights operate from 9am until sundown in winter and 7pm in summer owing to noise restrictions.

**Book it:** Big Apple helicopter flights, departing at 1pm, cost $96 with Attraction World.

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**TOP CHOPPER FLIGHTS**

1. **Hawaii: Circle of Fire Flight**
   - This 45-50 minute tour gives a bird’s eye view of Kilauea volcano, which has been continuously erupting since 1983. The vistas are good for spotting lava flow.
   - **Book it:** DoSomethingDifferent.com sells this tour for $146.

2. **Los Angeles: Deluxe Night Tour**
   - Ditch the hire car and shun the limo – this is the way to travel in the city of stars. Enjoy a 35-minute flight over the LA skyline while slopping on champagne. The chopper then lands outside a top restaurant in LA, and dinner is included in the cost.
   - **Book it:** Attraction World sells this tour for £181.

3. **Miami: Helicopter Tours**
   - This tour takes you flying over downtown Miami, South Beach and the cruise terminal. It’s also a great opportunity to snap into the back gardens of the some of Florida’s wealthiest residents.
   - **Book it:** Attraction World sells this tour for £133 for 30 minutes and £179 for 60 minutes. Buy two places and the third is free.

4. **Niagara: Helicopter Flight**
   - Blink and you’ll miss the falls on this nine-minute flight, but at least you’ll stay dry, hovering above the spray of the thunderous falls. And from the lofty vantage point you should spot the pots of gold at the end of the rainbows.
   - **Book it:** Travel Trade Tickets and Tours (tttandt.com) sells this tour for £81.25 (adult), £49.40 (child).

5. **New Zealand: Taste of Taupo helicopter**
   - Get a front row seat to watch the geothermal power of nature on a 30-minute flight – this tour covers Huka Falls, thermal Wairakei Park and the Aratiatia Rapids. Take a short guided walk when the chopper lands by Lake Rotorua.
   - **Book it:** DoSomethingDifferent.com sells this tour for £130 (adult), £83 (child).

6. **Rio de Janeiro: Rio by Air**
   - Take an 11-minute flight over Rio, also known as Cidade Maravilhosa for never-to-be-forgotten views of the Sugar Loaf, Christ the Redeemer and Ipanema Beach.
   - **Book it:** Attraction World sells this tour for £169.

7. **Sydney: Twilight Tour**
   - Fly over Bondi and Manly beaches, bathed in the glow of a setting sun, then pass over Sydney Harbour Bridge and the Opera House as the night sky darkens and lights are switched on all over the city. Tour lasts 25 minutes.
   - **Book it:** Attraction World sells this tour for £240.