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> Allie and Phil Dunnington sip champagne in Burma, where they first met in 2002. Left, preparing for a flight in Ashton Court, Bristol  
Pictures: Phil and Allie Dunnington

# Sky's the limit for high-fliers Allie and Phil

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**A** THRILL-SEEKING couple have proved the sky's the limit after smashing the world record for countries flown over - in a hot air balloon.

Enthusiasts Allie and Phil Dunnington spend their time travelling across the world in a bid to keep ahead of their rivals.

The pair recently broke the respective men's and women's records in Guyana - Allie's 100th country and Phil's 124th.

Although the gong has not been officially recognised, Allie said the couple are sure of their achievements.

Allie, 51, of Bristol, said: "I have a digital record of every country I have been to."

"Phil doesn't because he started flying 40 years ago, before people were taking photographs - but there are entries for all in his log book. We definitely do know there are no other balloonists with that number."

"The flight in Guyana was very, very challenging - it was tipping down with rain most of the time. We found this little cricket pitch to launch from and managed to complete the flight."

German-born Allie started flying in 2002 - on the day she met Phil, 72. The pair have flown over some of the world's most stunning locations

*We landed and this man came out - we thought 'oh my God, he's going to shoot us'*

**ALLIE DUNNINGTON**

since then - making it hard to choose the best.

Allie added: "We always get asked which one our favourite was. We've seen so many beautiful landscapes."

"I think flying over the Alps in the winter is amazing - the jungle in Burma, too."

"It's the people that make it. In

Burma I landed in a small village and 50 kids came to the balloon. That was really very touching."

But the adventures aren't without danger.

She said: "If the wind drops you're suddenly flying at 2,000 feet with just a cylinder of gas."

"That's certainly quite hairy, and you can run out of space too. There was also this one time in Kosovo. We landed and this man came out - we thought 'oh my God, he's going to shoot us.' It was just after the war. You don't know how you are going to be received."

"But it turned out he spoke perfect German - and invited us in for tea!"

The pair have set their sights on flying over as many countries as possible now that they are the world record holders.

But, sadly, it's unlikely they will ever visit every one.

"I have 20 on my list that would be too much of a problem. It's nearly impossible to do them all," Allie added.

The couple met while on a trip 17 years ago, where Allie was working as a tour guide.

A space became available on a balloon ride one day so Phil asked her along - and that was it.

She said: "The moment I was in that balloon I loved the peacefulness. I'm an outdoors fan and I love the fresh air."

"Then when we landed we drank champagne - it was great."

Phil and Allie are both involved in the acclaimed International Balloon Fiesta, which is held annually in Bristol.

They also work as examiners - of which Allie was the first woman in the UK - and run commercial flights and tours across the world.

But, wherever they go, Allie said there was one criterion.

She said: "As long as there is a good pub down the road!"



> Top, the view from the couple's balloon as they fly over Bagan, Myanmar. Above, the shadow of their balloon as they flew over South Africa. Left, Allie with some excited children in Ethiopia after landing their balloon there

