

Beat: Local

At least 18 killed in Egypt hot air balloon accident

-, 28.02.2013, 09:00 Time

USPA News - A hot air balloon accident in Egypt killed at least eighteen people on Tuesday, local authorities said. The hot air balloon was only a couple of feet from the ground while trying to land on Tuesday morning just outside of Luxor, Egypt, when a fire broke out, causing it to quickly ascend.

Shortly after, a gas explosion in mid air, around 300 meters (1,000 feet) high, brought the hot air balloon to shoot down and crash into the ground. The exact number of victims has not been officially confirmed, as reports have been conflicting. While Egypt's Health Ministry placed the death toll at 18, a number of reports said there were 19 killed. The balloon, operated by Sky Cruise, was reportedly carrying 21 tourists and the pilot. Among the killed were Hong Kong nationals, Japanese, British, French, Hungarian, and Egyptian. At one point, a few people jumped off the balloon's basket, and survivors initially included two British nationals and the pilot. Their health condition was not immediately known, but later reports said only the pilot and one other had survived. Emergency teams located the bodies of at least fourteen victims, while several others were still missing. Egypt's Attorney General, Talaat Abdallah, ordered an investigation into the incident. Meanwhile, Luxor's governor, Ezzat Saad, said President Mohamed Morsi and Prime Minister Hisham Qandil had called him to check on the incident. Authorities also ordered hot air balloon rides to be halted until further notice. Hot air balloons are a popular touristic attraction in Luxor, where several ancient temples are located with additional aerial views of the Nile River. Tuesday's accident marks the deadliest hot air balloon crash in two decades. In 2009, sixteen people were killed in an hot air balloon accident also in Luxor.

Article online:

<https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-559/at-least-18-killed-in-egypt-hot-air-balloon-accident.html>

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