In China, sky lanterns were probably used as early as 1800 years ago to light up the sky at night during wars. But the first hot air balloon wasn't released until 300 years ago. It all started in Portugal.

Bartolomeu Lourenço de Gusmão was a Brazilian-Portuguese priest who wanted to build the very first airship ever for the Portuguese king. To convince the king that he was capable of making such a ship fly, Bartolomeu filled a paper balloon with hot air. He let it fly to the ceiling of the palace.

The king was so impressed that he immediately made Bartolomeu a professor at the university and appointed him one of the most important scientists of the kingdom.

The first *real* hot air balloons were developed in the summer of 1783 in France. In June of that year, the Montgolfier brothers presented the first hot air balloon with a basket to a large audience. They did so at the royal palace of Versailles. Because no one knew whether people could survive at high altitudes, later three animals were chosen as passengers for a test flight: a duck, a rooster, and a sheep. It was thought that the sheep's body would be somewhat similar to a human's. The sheep was even given a name: Montauciel, which is French for "ascend to heaven." The animals returned safe and sound and went down in history as the very first balloonists.

In August, the Robert brothers made the very first balloon filled with hydrogen, a flammable gas that's released when you combine an acid and metal. The balloon flew more than 20 kilometers (12 miles) and landed in the meadow of a farmer in a small village. The villagers were so frightened by the strange object that they attacked it with pitchforks and clubs.

Over the next few months, many more balloons were designed and tested. In November, the first people flew a hot air balloon. A month later, the first manned hydrogen balloon flight took place.