

Up, Up and Away! Look Forward to Space Travel by 2008

Those who hate to fly would not be thrilled to hear about one of the newest ways to travel: spaceship.

It all began back in 1985 when the first non-astronaut, Jake Garn, flew on Discovery from April 12th to April 19th as a specialist. Later, on April 28th, 2001 Dennis Tito became the first space tourist when he paid a fee to visit the International Space Station (ISS) for seven days. He was followed by Mark Shuttleworth, a South African millionaire in 2002 and later by trained scientist Gregory Olsen in 2005 ("Space Tourism."). Since Olsen, no one has traveled to space for recreational purposes, but that is soon about to change.

According to Jane Reifert, president of Incredible Adventures, space tourism already has a market. Reifert says that customers at Incredible Adventures enjoy the simulation of weightlessness achieved from a MiG-25 and a modified B-727 conducting certain flight maneuvers (Ebner). This is just a taste of what customers are expected to experience during "personal spaceflight" (the preferred term). Besides weightlessness, seeing Earth from space is among the perks, as many astronauts describe this view as "mind-boggling". Also, those who enter space will feel as though they are among a privileged few who have had the opportunity to do so ("Space Tourism").

So far, the vehicles to make these "suborbital flights" for individuals go up to 160 kilometers above the Earth's surface. At this stage, weightlessness is obtained and customers would be able to float around for about three to six minutes. Also, they would obtain a chance to view the stars and the curved Earth. Although currently costs can be as high as \$200,000, this is expected to drop to under \$20,000 over time ("Space Tourism"). It is projected that by 2021, as many as 14,000 passengers will be able to book these flights per year, giving the space travel industry well over \$700 million in revenue (Ebner).

However, such flights will only occur if they are well within the law. As of today, the US required any company wishing to launch passengers from anywhere in the US to receive a license to do so from the Federal Aviation Administration's Office of Commercial Space Transportation (FAA/AST) ("Space Tourism."). Also, numerous safety precautions must be taken into consideration before anyone leaves the planet in an orbital. Some of the major issues being looked at are the construction of a spaceport and building a runway long enough to allow for the orbital to get up to speed before liftoff. Also, a large population cannot be around the area where the ships will be taking off. Weather delays may become an issue as well. However, none of these issues seem to deter interest in space travel as a recent study shows that interest in space travel has increased as of late in correlation with the dropping price of orbitals and the new lower training time (Ebner).

Currently there are only a few major contenders in the space tourism business; however that number is expected to grow with an increase in interest. Space Adventures sits near the top of the list as it is the only contender that has sent participants into space. Space Adventures was behind all three paid participants that have traveled to space since 2001 (Ebner). Other companies include Virgin Galactic (part of the Virgin group), Blue Origin, Armadillo Aerospace, XCOR Aerospace, and Rocketplane Limited ("Space Tourism"). These companies hope to have you clamoring to blast off in just two short years. The next step is making these rides as comfortable as possible for the traveler. How do you feel about space orbital food?

Works Cited

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