

SPACE TOURISM: FIRST FLIGHT BOOKED 2013



The first tourist trip to outer space is booked for next year. Is this the cutting edge to tourism or is it a dangerous sport?

A front row window at the west end of Pall Mall has the words "Space is Virgin Territory" in it. This is the new headquarters of the Virgin Galactic lead by Richard Branson who aims on taking tourism on a whole new level. The space inside will show visitors a picture of its launch base in New Mexico with its space craft taking off.

According to the company's commercial director, Stephen Attenborough, they are hoping to replace those photographs on the wall with the real thing because everything is going well as planned. Branson spent more than £162m along with innovative and striking technology in the design and production of the WhiteKnightTwo mother ships alongside a SpaceShipTwo planes which is a smaller one. These are expected to bring space tourists 100 kilometres above the earth which is already outside the earth's atmosphere.

Each space place is able to carry two pilots and 6 passengers which will be then strapped into a mother ship. The launch is described to be stomach-churning. As the rocket engine will ignite, the passengers will be rammed back in their positions and the space vehicle will rocket its way outside the earth at the speed of 4,000 km/h. The passengers will see the sky turn from blue to black as they travel into space.

A 90 second mark will cue the pilot to pause the engine and the tourists on board will experience weightless silence. The earth's curve will be very visible amidst the dark background of outer space. Passengers will be given about seven minutes to literally float inside and take pictures. Afterwards, the wings of the giant ship will point upwards and then the shuttlecock will go back to earth. Once back to an altitude of 15km, the wings will return to their initial position and it will be ready for an airport landing.

Among those booked are Branson's son Sam and daughter Holly. Angeline Jolie will be with Brad Pitt for an early flight. £125,000 will be willingly spent by Paris Hilton, Ashton Kutcher along with some Formula 1 drivers.

So far, Virgin Galactic has received £64m in deposits from about 520 customers. The first flight is scheduled 2013. Soon, Branson will have competitors in this business venture as a European conference for space tourism will be held.

Andrew Nelson, CEO of XCOR in Mojave, California has progress in a Lynx spacecraft. In comparison to the Virgin Galactic's craft, the Lynx has space for only one pilot and one passenger which is reported to launch 2014.

Branson, Nelson and others is aiming to bring the space tourism service to more people. According to Attenborough, this activity was claimed dangerous and was under the governments control for

over 50 years. There is a big gap from what has been done before to what they are going to attempt to do.

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