

SPACE TOURISM REGAINS HOPE



SpaceShipTwo's accident last November, in which the co-pilot passed away, caused a serious setback for the emerging space tourism. However, it has been able to regain hope at the end of the year.

The 5th December 2014 was a great success for Orion, NASA's capsule. After a 4-and-a-half hour flight, orbiting the Earth (two full turns had been achieved), Orion made a sea landing at 5:30 pm (Paris time) at about 1000km away from the Mexican coast, slowed down by its three huge parachutes.

The capsule that was constructed by the American aerospace group Lockheed Martin, vaguely reminiscent of the Apollo vessel, is also **the first space vessel developed in the past 30 years in the USA**. The preceding shuttle that was made to rotate only in low orbit flew with astronauts in 1981 for the first time and completed its last flight in July 2011.

So this is the first American vessel since Apollo that is capable of transporting astronauts outside of the Earth's orbit. Capable of carrying four astronauts for missions towards the moon and beyond, Orion won't be making its first inhabited flight before 2021, which however confirms the regained interest of USA in space.

Therefore one can certainly see excellent news for the space industry in general, and particularly for space tourism.

The private sector has already had more than one foot in space. NASA has placed everything on their "Space Taxi" programme, based on Boeing and SpaceX; their only alternative to the quite humiliating position in which the USA is dependent on the Russians for its inhabited flights.

These last few years, the brake of the conquest of space has been neither technology nor accidents, but rather budget-related problems. For private companies, money will also be the crux of the matter. As long as there are people to believe in its future and invest in it, the adventure will continue.

Certainly, Lady Gaga, Justin Bieber and the 700 people who have already booked a ticket for a flight on SpaceShipTwo will most likely have to wait a bit longer than 2015 to live out their dream, but maybe not that much longer.

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