

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

Spaced out: the booming business of space tourism

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Space travel could be an affluent's next destination. Image courtesy of Space Perspective

By KATIE TAMOLA

In this day and age, the idea of traveling to space as a simple fee-paying passenger is no longer out of this world.

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Several tech moguls such as Amazon's Jeff Bezos and Tesla and SpaceX CEO Elon Musk as well as Virgin CEO Sir Richard Branson have gravitated towards space tourism, creating a need where little existed a decade ago. As billionaires and others continue forming and promoting space travel organizations, it is becoming clear that leaving planet Earth will also be an opportunity for affluent consumers who are willing to pay for it.

"It is not only likely, but certain that space travel will become more cost-effective and, as a consequence, more frequent in the next few years," said Hugh Fletcher, global marketing director and thought-leadership lead at [Wunderman Thompson Commerce](#).

"Space tourism is really just the first understandable step into using space in the future," he said. "The reality is that the greater investment in space is much more commercially focused and much less about consumers than it is presented."

Flights of the fancy

The interest in space tourism became paramount in 2021, from billionaires and beyond.

There are several major space companies that are planning or arranging space tours, including Sir Richard's [Virgin Galactic](#), Mr. Bezos' [Blue Origin](#), [SpaceX](#), [Boeing](#), [Axiom Space](#) and [Space Perspective](#).



Several organizations are willing to bring consumers to space as long as they have the cash. Image credit: Wunderman Thompson/NASA

Axiom and Boeing are reportedly working on orbital missions, which are trips that require staying in orbit and not immediately returning to earth. These kinds of trips can take several days or more.

In July 2021, Mr. Bezos blasted into space on the New Shepherd. Through his company, Blue Origin, a trip for one passenger costs approximately \$300,000 for a 12-minute suborbital flight.

Sir Richard launched his spaceflight company, Virgin Galactic, on July 11, 2021. The following month, he reopened ticket sales for its space flights starting at \$450,000 a seat.

Ostensibly, if one wishes to go to space, they must have the cash.

"For the foreseeable future, and until costs come down, yes space tourism will be only for the affluent," Mr. Fletcher said. "And clearly there is some irritation about this.

"We asked consumers in the United Kingdom and the United States what they thought the motivations were," he said. "Just 15 percent believed that these forays into space were for the betterment of the human race, while a considerably larger 36 percent believed that they were pioneering into space for their own benefit."

Mr. Musk has also kept the space firm he founded, SpaceX, in the news, announcing a collaboration with space tourism company Axiom Space. There are plans to send additional crews into space in the next few years.

Private spaceflight specialist Axiom Space, based in Houston, announced it was planning the first private astronaut mission to the International Space Station in 2022.

SpaceX's Starlink Mission

The crew includes Michael Lopez-Algera, the Ax-1 commander, former NASA astronaut and vice president of Axiom Space; Larry Connor, Ax-1 pilot, entrepreneur and nonprofit activist investor; Mark Pathy, Ax-1 mission specialist, investor and philanthropist; and Eytan Stibbe, Ax-1 mission specialist, impact investor and philanthropist.

In 2021, Axiom announced a deal with SpaceX, adding three more crewed flights to the International Space Station.

NASA is reportedly paying SpaceX about \$55 million per astronaut to fly to the space station, reflecting the exorbitant costs of space travel.

All the way up

Several organizations are now scheduling trips to space, inviting consumers.

With new opportunities, comes a hefty demand. Experts understand why.

"At the current time, of every human that has ever existed, only just over 600 have ever been into space," Wunderman Thompson Commerce's Mr. Fletcher said. "To have been into space, even if it is low-orbit, is a rare and precious experience.

"One thing we know for sure from the pandemic, is that we have been robbed of experiences holidays canceled, families separated et cetera, while at the same time much of our discretionary spending has gone down," he said. "People are therefore craving experiences, and what better experience is there than heading into space?"

In June 2021, Space Perspective, a luxury spaceflight experience company, announced that reservations were open for six-hour, history-making flights to space, beginning in 2024.

Spaceflights for 2024 are sold out, but trips for 2025 and beyond are currently on sale.

"Space Perspective heralds a new era in travel by reimagining the thrill of space exploration with the world's most elegant voyage to space," said Jane Poynter, founder/co-CEO of Space Perspective.

"The zero-emissions Spaceship Neptune offers a gentle, six-hour journey to 100,000 feet while viewing planet Earth in the comfort of an eight-person capsule that is as accessible as boarding an airplane," she said. "Space Perspective was founded with the mission to invite more people to view space than has historically been possible, a perspective-changing experience only very few have enjoyed."



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With tickets at \$125,000 each, travelers will be able to board Spaceship Neptune and take in 360-degree views of Earth while socializing, eating and drinking. The capsule holds plush seating, a bar and a bathroom, and can fit up to eight travelers at a time.

For most people, an opportunity like this is unparalleled.

"Another appeal must surely be to gain a proper perspective on the Earth," Wunderman Thompson Commerce's Mr. Fletcher said. "Most astronauts who return from space talk about how their new vantage point of Earth made them realize just how precarious our planet's position is.

"With so much focus on our climate, and the finite nature of earth's resources, then seeing what the future of the human race might feel like is an irresistible proposition," he said.

Experts are anticipating that space tourism will not just be an enticing excuse for a trip, but also a world of opportunities for brands and organizations to make money.

A 2021 "Space Commerce" **report** from Wunderman Thompson surveying 4,210 consumers across the United States and the United Kingdom found that 56 percent of consumers believe that space commerce is possible.

Sixty-three percent of consumers said they would pay a premium for products from space that could increase the potential for a healthier or longer life, while 55 percent said they would pay a premium for "exceptional" products made in space.

"While the first step may be billionaires and celebrities on joy rides to space, in future, it will be about exploration, mining asteroids and planets for their natural resources, creating specialist products in space that can be used on Earth, warehousing and distribution from space," Mr. Fletcher said.