

4a - How Space Tourism Will Change the World

We're not too far away from a future where anyone can travel to outer space. In fact, some space tourism companies will allow you to experience that final frontier right now—for a cost. With the rapid growth of space tourism, traveling to outer space could soon be as easy as booking a flight to Europe. Experts even say that in just a matter of years, this industry could change the world.

“When aviation started [in the mid-1900s] it was for governments and those who could afford it,” says Jane Poynter, founder and co-CEO of space tourism company Space Perspective. “People then could not imagine the myriad ways air travel would be used to positively impact billions of people’s lives.” The same can be said for the future of space tourism.

Here’s everything you need to know about how space tourism works, the pros and cons of space travel, and what is expected to come for the space tourism industry.

15 What is space travel?

Space travel is defined as any air travel beyond 50 or 60 miles above sea level.(...) When booking space tours, companies offer either orbital or suborbital flights:

- **Orbital space travel** means the spacecraft is traveling around the planet with enough speed to avoid falling back to Earth. The International Space Station (ISS) is an example of orbital space travel.

- **Suborbital space travel** takes people into space and then returns to Earth at a slower speed than orbital travel. Most space tourism companies for private citizens currently offer suborbital spaceflights.

25 Why do people want to go to space?

There is one universal reason often cited by people who want to go to space. “Seeing the iconic thin blue line of our planet’s atmosphere against the stark blackness of space affects [astronauts] deeply,” Poynter says. Just imagine **all the things you can see from space**, including capturing incredible pictures of city lights from above.

“Astronauts describe it as personally transformational and say that when they return, they are compelled to get more involved in social and environmental causes. (...) Imagine thousands of people having that experience. It will have a ripple effect across society.”

Space tourism companies

Russia’s Soyuz spacecraft has been ferrying private citizens to the ISS since 2001, at a reported cost of \$90 million for a seat. Now, thanks to newly emerging U.S. space tourism companies, it will soon be possible to join the exclusive club of those who have traveled to space—that is, for anyone who can afford the still very steep ticket price.

SpaceX, founded by Elon Musk, made news when it carried two NASA astronauts to the ISS in 2020, as it was the first crewed mission to launch in the United States in nearly 10 years. SpaceX currently charters private orbital flights to the International Space Station in its Dragon spacecraft. It costs tens of millions of dollars for a seat on a flight.

Blue Origin, founded by Amazon’s Jeff Bezos, is the only space tourism company operating commercial suborbital flights. Blue Origin charged \$28 million for a ticket on its first flight with Jeff Bezos, but it does not advertise its current ticket prices.

Virgin Galactic is planning to start commercial operations next year. Reservations for Richard Branson’s Virgin Galactic flights start at \$450,000.

For those seeking a less expensive—albeit still very pricey—option, other companies offer zero-pressure balloons that will take tourists to an altitude of up to 20 miles, which is high enough to see the curvature of the Earth. Rides on Space Perspective’s balloon, called

Spaceship Neptune, cost \$125,000 per seat. World View charges \$50,000 per seat. Flights are scheduled to launch in 2024, but has not been approved by the FAA yet.

55 If you're not ready to blast through the Earth's upper atmosphere, you can still experience space travel with less risk. Companies like Zero G recreate the feeling of zero gravity on specially modified Boeing 727 flights. These experiences are also easier on the wallet, going for around \$8,200.

How to prep for a space flight

60 Taking a flight into space will require some training, but the programs are less rigorous than those faced by real astronauts. To prep for Virgin Galactic's three-hour trips, for example, tourists will be required to attend a multi-day training program with pilot briefings and spacesuit fittings. Trips on zero-pressure balloons will require a simple informational and safety course.

65 Pros and cons of space tourism

Among space enthusiasts and experts alike, space tourism opinions are varied.

Pros:

70 **Job creation.** Commercial space tourism has the potential to boost the economy by creating jobs and encouraging investment.

Advances in research. Spending more time in space could help solve some of the [most baffling mysteries about the universe](#).

75 **Opportunity to experience space.** "At Space Perspective, we want to enable more people than ever before to go to space to gaze into the unknown and imagine what could be, and to look down at Earth and gain a new perspective on home," Poynter says.

Cons:

80 **It's expensive.** Many people point out that the hefty price tag is one major downside to today's space travel. At hundreds of thousands of dollars per ticket, only the wealthiest travelers can afford a seat on a future spaceflight.

It may be bad for the environment. Scientists also worry that space travel could damage the planet and contribute to climate change. (...) However, Poynter argues that not all space travel is environmentally harmful. She notes that Space Perspective's Spaceship Neptune is the only zero-emissions, carbon-neutral spacecraft, and Space Perspective is a carbon-
85 neutral company.

The future of space tourism

90 When it comes to the future of space tourism, the sky's the limit—literally. "We are at the very beginning of space travel," Poynter says. "We simply cannot imagine now the ways people will use spaceflight to improve life right here on Earth, close to home at first and increasingly farther out into our solar system."

95 Experts predict that travelers might want to stay and live in space, and many companies have launched plans to build properties and accommodations for space tourists to spend the night. Some of these space hotels will even have offices and research spaces for rent, opening up the possibility of working from space as well.

What's more, space tourism programs can also encourage further innovation and exploration of our solar system and beyond. Taking more people into space creates opportunities to invent new space technology, conduct groundbreaking research and establish new frontiers in galaxies beyond our own.