

Your Next Vacation: Outer Space?

The first-ever spaceship for tourists is blasting off next year. Will you buy a ticket?

Tired of your regular vacation spots? Looking for a little adventure? Forget about that trip to Disney World or Six Flags. Why not book a trip to space?

That's right. Beginning next year, anyone with a boatload of cash and a craving for adventure can buy a ride on the world's first-ever commercial spaceship. The *Enterprise*, owned by the company Virgin Galactic, will take six passengers at a time on a three-hour trip 65 miles into the sky. Passengers will experience such space-age thrills as blasting off at high speeds, floating in zero gravity, and taking in views of Earth that only astronauts (and perhaps aliens) have seen.

Like climbing Mount Everest or sailing solo around the world, a trip to space puts a person in an exclusive club. Only 517 people in history have traveled to space, and almost all of them were highly trained astronauts. Virgin Galactic is opening up the age of space tourism, when any healthy person 18 or older can go into space.

The trip on the *Enterprise* promises to be a hair-raising thrill ride. Passengers will blast off at a speed of 2,600 miles per hour—that's four times the speed of a commercial jet. As the force of Earth's gravity fades, passengers will be able to unbuckle their seatbelts for six precious minutes of weightless floating. And they'll have dazzling views of our planet. Many astronauts agree that seeing Earth lit up against the dark and vast backdrop of space sparks an appreciation for our planet's fragility—as well as its beauty.

But as excitement builds for the maiden voyage of the *Enterprise*, so does concern. Space travel is dangerous—18 astronauts have died on missions over the past 50 years. Eleven others have died in training. The *Enterprise* does boast the latest technology and safety features, but the ship will have only a few test runs before its first official flight.

Passengers will also experience forces of motion that are far more extreme than those of the most terrifying roller coasters. Yet they will undergo little of the rigorous physical testing that astronauts endure before they are cleared for a mission. Low gravity weakens the immune system,

putting anyone in space at risk for serious illness. A minor cold on Earth might feel like a full-blown flu in space.

Finally, there is the cost of the ticket: \$200,000 for the three-hour trip. That's \$1,100 per minute.

Nevertheless, more than 430 people have already paid \$20,000 each to reserve their seats on future space flights. One of them is comedian Russell Brand; the ticket is a birthday present from his wife, singer Katy Perry.

For the celebrity who has everything, it seems a trip to space might be the perfect gift.

From "Your Next Vacation: Outer Space?" Published in *Scholastic Scope*, September 11, 2011. Copyright © 2011 by Scholastic Inc. Used by permission. Scholastic's copyrighted material shall not be republished, re-transmitted, broadcast, downloaded, modified or adapted (rewritten), manipulated, reproduced or otherwise distributed and/or exploited in anyway without the prior written permission of Scholastic, Inc.