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## **Commercialism of Space**

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“Everything You Wanted to Know about Space Tourism but Were Afraid to Ask”

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## Summary of Article

The upcoming extreme experience is space tourism and this article discusses the many logistics of making this a reality. Over the past ten years, many different private companies have been postponing and re-announcing their launch dates. It seems that this inevitable adventure may never actually become a reality, but on February 2, 2013 the International Institute of Space Commerce held a workshop entitled Space Tourism: Risks and Solutions. This day long event solidified many ideas and coordinated many areas of expertise (such as insurance, regulation, health care, and business) that are essential to making space tourism a legitimate endeavor.

Past experiences, such as the Challenger and Colombia, prove that there are many uncertainties involved with making a trip to space. The personal risk is fairly high for the space flight participants. If the failure rates of government funded flights are applied to commercialized flights, chances are that if 700 passengers are flown annually, as many as ten of them might not survive the flight. The chance to fly towards the stars, watch the Earth from above, and enjoy several minutes of floating in microgravity seems worth it to many eccentric billionaires, but if the industry wants to thrive, more conservative risks must be in place in order to gain a wider customer base. Regardless of the potential precautions, space tourism will be regarded as an extreme adventure.

There are many other risks to consider besides the personal safety of the passengers. Companies might fail to make profits and shuttle crashes could potentially endanger innocent people on the ground. Solutions to these problems lie in the space flight participants' consent to accept all liability however the details of such contracts are still being hashed out. Another factor to consider is the health assessments of aspiring participants required for space travel. The criteria has not been set yet and there is debate over the accommodation of the disabled, not to mention what can be refunded if the participant does not meet their health requirements during the preflight medical exam.

Once all of the details are figured out the two leading space flight companies, XCOR and Virgin will have smooth sailing for each have many down payments and scheduled passengers for the first couple voyages. Something to consider however is that the risks rise after the first few flights when things seem to be running smoothly. According to the Space Shuttle Challenger and Columbia experience, the disaster usually takes place when everyone is too sure that nothing

can go wrong. With time, Space Tourism should settle into an extreme activity comparable to climbing Mount Everest or hang gliding.

### Personal Ideas

I think that the commercialization of space is a good idea. The demand to travel to space is obviously high and as technology progresses and the cost is driven down, I can easily imagine the venture as an affordable one within the next twenty years.

Personally, I do not have a burning desire to spend a fortune to hop in a spaceship and spend a few weightless minutes but at a more affordable price (we're talking \$20,000 rather than \$200,000) I might consider it. It would certainly be an amazing experience and to see the earth as a whole from that altitude would truly be a life changing event; however, I am just not convinced that I couldn't be equally as amazed by various extreme adventures here on earth. I am an earthling and always will be for I really have no desire to be a colonizer of the moon or mars. Studying the sky from a soft blanket laid out on a remote beach is much more my style.

I think I am in the minority regarding the desire to travel to space. If the cost of a space tour was significantly lower, the wait list for a trip would be decades long. Now space flights are reserved for the fabulously wealthy, but just as regular airlines have become affordable, it is almost certain that space trips will follow suit and widely available to the general public well within our lifetimes. This is the chance for every child who declared they would become an astronaut to fulfill that dream.

I approve of the privatization of space tourism. While our government should continue to fund research missions, I mostly agree with the shutdown of the shuttle program. With commercialization of shuttles, transportation to the ISS or even the moon or mars can be contracted through those companies. More government money can then be spent on creating probes and rovers to continue the efficient exploration of our solar system.

The uncertainties involved with space tourism are recognized but just like any other extreme sport, as it gains traction and popularity, the risks will level off. The risks of climbing Mount Everest are extremely high with 1 death every 10 ascents, but this is an accepted risk and many people still make the great ascent year after year. As the personal liability goes down the demand will rise and the price will eventually fall as better technology and more space tour companies are created to meet that demand. It's basic economics and while right now the process

of privatizing shuttle programs is unbearably slow, the interest exists and the funding will build over time. Then, once the billionaires test it and it becomes available to the general public, the legal contracts will begin to sort themselves out as well. I see space tourism becoming a fairly affordable experience within the next 30 years. Then the same process will repeat itself with vacation resorts on the moon.