

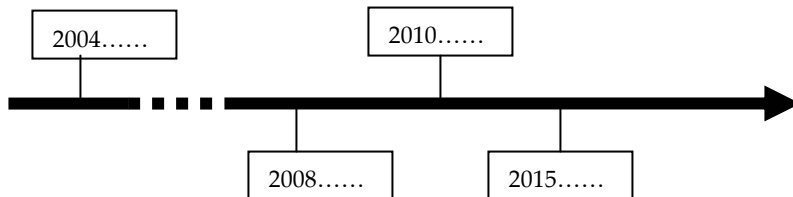
Space tourism

Over 20,000 people have registered to take a flight into space on Virgin Galactic. Will 'space tourism' finally take off?

1 All these words can go after the word 'space' – except one, which can go in front. Which is the 'odd word out'?

craft	race	station	travel
exploration	outer	flight	ship

2 Complete the timeline with the information (a-d) from the Key. Check your answers in the article below.



KEY

- (a) First commercial space trips to begin
- (b) China expects to land on the moon
- (c) Space station to be built on the moon
- (d) First private space craft travels into space

The commercialisation of space

Last year, Spaceshipone became the first private manned craft to travel 100km above Earth. The technology behind Spaceshipone was developed by aviation legend Burt Rutan. Rutan's company, *Scaled Composites*, is financed by one of the richest men in the world, *Microsoft* co-founder Paul Allen. Industry and entrepreneurs are showing that world governments do not have to be involved in space travel.

This same technology will enable Sir Richard Branson's Virgin Galactic's fleet to offer flights into space. So far, over 20,000 people have registered their interest in taking a flight. Over one third are from the US. The first flight is scheduled for 2008. The cost of such a ride? Around \$200,000 a head! Or you may get lucky – earlier this month, in a remarkable promotion, *Volvo* in the US offered a prize of a free flight on Virgin Galactic to people who take test drives. The Swedish car maker attracted about 135,000 entrants to its competition.

Perhaps 'space tourism' is the wrong term – this trip would be more like an extreme sport, with passengers experiencing weightlessness. Apart from being wealthy, passengers will need to be physically and mentally fit, and will have to train for about a week first. The future is still uncertain. Travel will be expensive, and consumer demand will be limited in the early stages. The venture capital needed to start up *Aera*, another company planning scheduled space flights, was reportedly immense.

Meanwhile governments are still involved, although not from countries traditionally associated with space. There is talk of a space race between Tokyo and Beijing. China's National Space Administration expect to land on the lunar surface by 2010. Japan's space agency, JAXA, dream of building a space station on the moon by 2015. In the USA, NASA has its eye on Mars. However, it will soon have to share its position above the atmosphere as the commercialisation of human space travel begins!

3 Read the article again. What requirements are necessary to become a space tourist?

4 Create sentences about the business world, or your own company, using the following words and expressions.

entrepreneurs financed by consumer demand promotion venture capital

5 Discuss the following questions in small groups and report your ideas to the class.

- (a) Would you like to ride on Virgin Galactic? Why / why not?
- (b) Should governments spend money on space exploration or invest in making life better here on Earth?
- (c) What other developments do you think will happen in the future of space travel?