

First hotel in space on schedule, to open in 2012

The company behind plans to open the first hotel in space says they are still on target to accept the first paying guests in 2012.

The Barcelona-based architects of Galactic Suite say the space hotel will be the most expensive in the galaxy, costing €3 million, or \$4.5 million, for a three-night stay. During that time guests would see the sun rise 15 times a day and travel around the world every 90 minutes.

Galactic Suite's CEO said the project will put them at the forefront of an infant industry with a huge future ahead of it. Company Director Xavier Claramunt believes that within a few years space travel will become a common occurrence.

"It is very normal to think that your children, possibly within 15 years, could spend a weekend in space", he added.

A nascent space industry is beginning to take shape with construction underway in New Mexico of Spaceport America, the world's first facility built specifically for space-bound commercial customers and fee-paying passengers.

British tycoon Richard Branson's Space tours firm, Virgin Galactic, will use the facility to propel tourists into suborbital space at a cost of \$200,000 a ride.

Galactic Suite hopes to start its project with a single pod in orbit 450 km above the earth, travelling at 28,000 km per hour. It will take a day-and-a-half to reach the pod - which Claramunt compared to a mountain retreat - with no staff or receptionist to greet the traveller.

"When the passengers arrive in the rocket, they will join it for three days, rocket and capsule. With this we create in the tourist a confidence that he has not been abandoned. After three days the passenger returns to the transport rocket and returns to earth," a statement from Galactic Suite read.

More than 200 people expressed an interest in travelling to the space hotel and at least 43 people have already made reservations.

The numbers are similar for Branson's Virgin Galactic with 300 people already having paid up or signed up for the trip. But unlike Branson, representatives of Galactic Suite say they will use Russian rockets to transport their guests into space.

They say the space dream is near and say their first launch in 2012 will herald the start of space as tourist destination, not just for the super-rich.