

Space hotel to open to tourists in 2012

Sarah Gordon

The first hotel in space will be open for business and accepting tourists by 2012 after an anonymous billionaire space enthusiast granted \$3billion to finance the project.

But future space visitors will have to pack their credit cards as the Galactic Suite Space Resort will charge 3 million euros for a three-night stay and eight-week training course on a tropical island before the trip.

Despite doubts about the cost and time frame of the project, more than 200 people have expressed an interest in the trip and 43 have already made a reservation.



Future of travel: The first space tourists will be able to enjoy three-night stays on a pod from 2012

During their stay, guests will see the sun rise 15 times a day and travel around the world every 80 minutes. They will wear velcro suits so they can crawl around their pod rooms by sticking themselves to the walls like Spiderman.

Xavier Claramunt, CEO of Galactic Suite Ltd and former aerospace engineer, said the project will put 'his company at the forefront of an infant industry with a huge future ahead of it', and forecast that space travel will become common in the future.

'It's very normal to think that your children, possibly within 15 years, could spend a weekend in space,' he told Reuters.

Galactic Suite Ltd, set up in 2007, hopes to start its project with a single pod in orbit 280 miles above the earth, traveling at over 18,000 miles per hour, with the capacity to hold four guests and two astronaut-pilots. It will take a day and a half to reach the pod - which Claramunt compared to a mountain retreat - and there will be no staff to greet travellers.

'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 hasn't been abandoned. After three days the passenger returns to the transport rocket and returns to earth,' he said.



The final frontier: Sir Richard Branson christens the WhiteKnight2 (WK2) 'mother ship' which will enable commercial space travel

Galactic Suite is not the only company looking at space tourism as the future of travel.

Spaceport America, based in New Mexico, is the 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 £120,000 a ride.

Around 300 people have already paid or signed up for Sir Richard's space trips.