

US space tourist shrugs off 10 mln dollar price hike

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US software architect and space tourist Charles Simonyi meets with press outside Moscow in Star City. Simonyi shrugged off a 10 million dollar price hike by Russia for his next space flight, saying space tourism was the way of the future.

American software tycoon Charles Simonyi on Thursday shrugged off a 10 million dollar price hike by Russia for his next space flight, saying space tourism was the way of the future.

Simonyi, one of the brains behind the rise of Microsoft, said the 35 million dollars (28 million euro) he is paying for his March 26 trip --

compared to the 25 million dollar bill he paid for a first trip in 2007 -- was worth it.

"It's money that is spent on space exploration.... Russia is the only country in the world which offers those services," Simonyi told journalists at the Star City training centre near Moscow ahead of his flight.

"I think space tourism is probably the only business model that is a viable business model for manned space flights, where you can actually make a profit," he added.

Simonyi is to spend 11 days on his trip from Russia's Baikonur cosmodrome to the International Space Station, bumping back down to Earth on April 6.

Russia has announced it is to be the last flight by a paying space tourist, due to pressure on seats from its main space partner the United States and others.

Asked why he was making a second flight, Simonyi said he wanted to improve his skills.

While in space he plans to conduct experiments and communicate by radio with students on Earth.

"I think of this flight as a continuation of the first flight. When you do something and you learn a skill I think it's a great opportunity to use that skill, to be more efficient," he said.

Recently married to Swedish millionaire's daughter Lisa Persdotter after breaking from former partner Martha Stewart, Simonyi said he had renounced the idea of a third flight for the sake of his marriage.

"I decided to do this flight before I got engaged and me and my wife agreed that I would be able to fly just once more. So I cannot fly the third time. My wife is absolutely against it," he said.

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