

Boeing inks deal to put tourists in space by 2015

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US billionaire Dennis Tito celebrates after becoming the world's first space tourist in 2001. Tito paid \$20 million for his eight-day trip to the International Space Station. US aerospace giant Boeing has forged an alliance with marketing firm Space Adventure to put tourists into low-level orbit in a futuristic capsule by early 2015.

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The announcement is a boost to President Barack Obama's vision of a private space industry after he scrapped NASA's ambitious but costly plans to build a new generation of rockets to return humans to the moon by 2020.

[Boeing](#) received 18 million dollars in NASA funding earlier this year to develop plans for a new capsule, the CST-100, which could transport crews to the [International Space Station](#).

On Wednesday, the aerospace giant announced a deal with Space Adventure, a Virginia-based pioneer in [space tourism](#) that has already taken seven well-heeled individuals to the ISS, to sell seats in its new capsule.

"By combining our talents, we can better offer safe, affordable transportation to commercial spaceflight customers," said Brewster Shaw, vice president and general manager of Boeing's Space Exploration division.

Preliminary plans would see four professional astronauts on each trip, leaving three seats available for space tourists, private companies or US government agencies.

Boeing and Space Adventures have not yet set a price per seat, but said they would do so when full-scale development of the spacecraft is under way.

Prices are expected to be in line with those paid by previous tourists who have spent up to 40 million dollars for trips to the space station, so far aboard [Russian Soyuz spacecraft](#).

Guy Laliberte, the Canadian billionaire founder of the popular Cirque du Soleil acrobatics show, became last October the seventh person in history to fork out a small fortune for the opportunity to fly into space.

Obama laid out in June an overarching new US policy on outer space, calling for more international and private sector cooperation on exploration, climate change and orbiting debris.

Once the current [shuttle program](#) ends early next year, the United States will rely on Russia's Soyuz spacecraft to carry astronauts to the [space](#) station until a commercial US launcher can be developed.

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