

Russia to reopen space tourism in 2013: company

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The nose of a Russian Soyuz TMA-20 is seen on a launch pad at the Russian leased Baikonur cosmodrome in December 2010. Soyuz

Russia will reopen its Soyuz space ships to paying tourists in 2013 after a hiatus since 2009, the US-based company that organises the trips with Russia's space agency said Wednesday.

From 2013, three space tourists per year will be able to book seats on Soyuz flights to the [International Space Station](#) (ISS), the Virginia-based company, Space Adventures, said in a statement.

The company has signed an agreement with the [Russian space agency](#) and Energia, the state-owned company that designs the [Soyuz capsule](#), to offer the commercial flights, it said.

It quoted the president of Energia, Vitaly Lopota, as saying that: "We are very pleased to continue [space tourism](#)."

Flights will become possible in 2013 when Russia plans to raise its production of Soyuz capsules from four to five per year, the company said, in a move that will allow it to increase the number of flights to five per year.

The last [space tourist](#) was the Canadian Guy Laliberte, the billionaire founder of Cirque du Soleil, who returned to Earth in October 2009 after an 11-day flight.

The first space tourist, Denis Tito, travelled to the ISS in 2001. All together, seven space tourists have taken part in missions.

Laliberte did not reveal the cost of his ticket, but his predecessor, US software pioneer Charles Simonyi, paid \$35 million for his trip.

Since Laliberte's return, Russia has since limited flights on its cramped three-seater Soyuz spaceships to professionals only, as the US space agency NASA prepares to retire its own shuttles from service.

NASA plans to send its Endeavour shuttle into space for its last scheduled flight in April this year, after which Russia's Soyuz ships will be the only way to reach the ISS.

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