

# Space tourist is just one way to describe Simonyi

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Charles Simonyi, the only civilian to visit the International Space Station twice, poses for a photo Tuesday, March 27, 2012, as he looks through a window of the Soyuz TMA-14 descent module that took him to the International Space Station on his second trip into space, at the Seattle's Museum of Flight's new space gallery, which is named after him. The Microsoft billionaire is still obsessed with space, but has no plans to take a third trip, instead he's focused on publishing a physics book written by his father and continuing to work with the museum. (AP Photo/Ted S. Warren)

(AP) -- Charles Simonyi may still be described as a space tourist even though the Microsoft billionaire has no plans to take a third vacation on the International Space Station and hasn't hung out in outer space for a few years.

He's still obsessed with space and is heavily involved in the Seattle

Museum of Flight's new space gallery, which is named in the philanthropist's honor.

Since 2002, Simonyi has been running his own company called Intentional Software that specializes in creating industry-specific computer software, and he recently he took on a new title: book publisher.

The son of a Hungarian physicist, the 63-year-old just made one of his dad's dreams come true by helping translate the senior Simonyi's epic about physics into English.

"A Cultural History of Physics" by Karoly Simonyi, who died in 2001, is a heavy tome with an intimidating name but inside the non-scientist will find lots of pictures and stories that offer a whimsical side of physics.

Flip through the book, which has had five editions in Hungarian and three in German, and you'll find a full-page diagram showing how the scientists of the 17th century enjoyed dismissing each other's theories. A diagram and an explanation by [Sir Isaac Newton](#) of how rainbows are formed are on another page.

An illustration of a cat with its hair standing on end may catch your attention toward the end of the book. If you stop to find out why the cat is on the page, you'll find an explanation of [quantum mechanics](#) and [radioactive decay](#).

Simonyi says that page is just one of many parts of the book that illustrate his father's sharp sense of humor.

The project was personal for Simonyi but has elements of other things he does for work and fun: it was a challenge, it's about science and it has the potential to help people learn.

The man who led the Microsoft teams that developed Word and Excel also is great at explaining scientific concepts. From the stories he shares about his father, that's a quality he likely inherited from the former physics professor, who Simonyi says inspired generations of Hungarian electrical engineers.

Charles Simonyi left Hungary at 17, and says his interest in space as a child helped him learn English - two of his first English words were "propellant" and "nozzle." His knowledge of space trivia led him to win a junior astronaut contest at age 13. The prize was a trip to Moscow to meet one of the first cosmonauts, Pavel Popovich.

His next project will be writing a book about his space trips in 2007 and 2009 with Virginia-based Space Adventures, which cost him a total of \$60 million. The idea was inspired in part by all the questions he was asked on a website he set up during his space travels called "Charles in Space."

"I love talking about space flight," said Simonyi, who says the privilege of going to space can be measured by the fact that only about 500 people have ever left Earth's atmosphere. "If you've been there, then you kind of have this obligation to tell people about what it's like and share the experience."

Earlier this week, he dropped off a space toilet at the Museum of Flight.

Going to the bathroom in space is quite a bit more complicated than sleeping there, and Simonyi is enthusiastic about sharing all the personal, yet technical, details with anyone curious. He even made a video about the mechanics of bodily functions in zero gravity.

Sleeping is actually easier in space than on earth, Simonyi said.

"You can sleep anywhere in any position - vertical, horizontal or at an angle," he said, adding that he slept in a room where the Russian space suits were kept. "It was out of the way and pretty quiet. I enjoyed it very much."

Thanks to Simonyi, the museum also has one of the Russian Soyuz space capsules he used to ride back to earth from the space station. Simonyi gave \$3 million to the museum to help build the space gallery, and has given the Soyuz capsule, a space suit, space toilet and other artifacts to the museum on a long-term loan.

Eventually the small cone-shaped capsule will sit beside the giant U.S. space shuttle trainer, for which the hangar-sized gallery was built.

Simonyi said he never felt claustrophobic on the [space station](#) or in the Russian ships to or from the station.

"I find the spacecraft very comfortable, very cozy," he said.

Nothing about the experience was scary, he said, even though he doesn't consider himself much of a daredevil. He is a pilot, flying both jets and helicopters.

He compared the experience of dropping back to earth in the Russian [space](#) capsule to snow skiing, from the s-turns the capsule makes as it falls through the atmosphere to the whooshing sound it makes as the air and heat blast off the surface.

Conversely, the idea of riding in a submarine miles beneath the surface of the ocean - like James Cameron did recently - that gives him the willies. "That takes guts," he said.

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