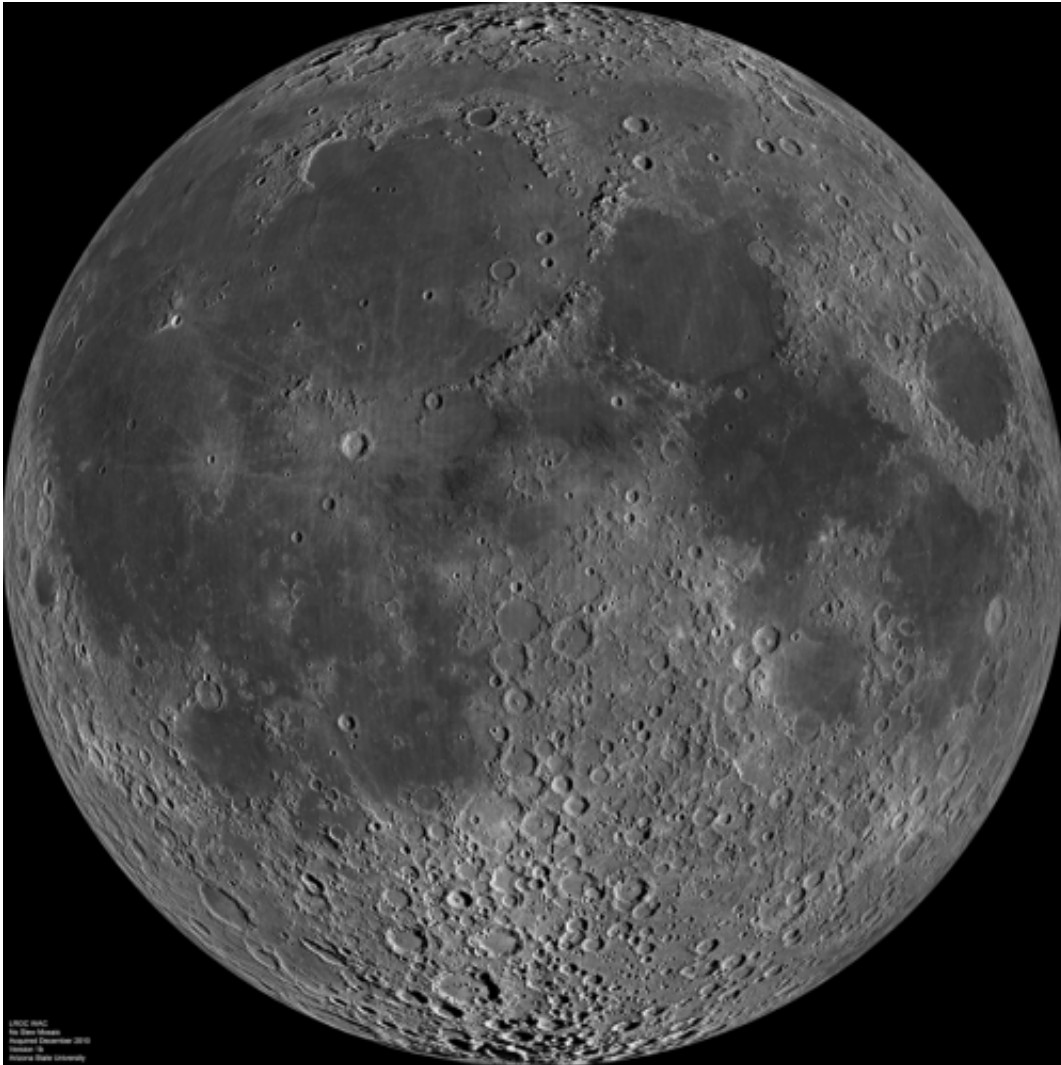


# Japanese billionaire businessman revealed as SpaceX's first Moon traveler

September 18 2018



This is a composite image of the lunar nearside taken by the Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter in June 2009, note the presence of dark areas of maria on this side of the moon. Credit: NASA

A Japanese billionaire and online fashion tycoon, Yusaku Maezawa, will be the first man to fly on a monster SpaceX rocket around the Moon as early as 2023, and he plans to bring six to eight artists along.

Maezawa, 42, will be the first lunar traveler since the last US Apollo mission in 1972. He paid an unspecified amount of money for the privilege.

"Ever since I was a kid, I have loved the Moon," Maezawa said at SpaceX headquarters and rocket factory in Hawthorne, California, in the middle of metropolitan Los Angeles, late Monday.

"This is my lifelong dream."

Maezawa is chief executive of Japan's largest online fashion mall, and is the 18th richest person in Japan with a fortune of \$3 billion, according to the business magazine Forbes.

Maezawa's other hobby is amassing valuable works of modern art and last year, he announced the acquisition of a Jean-Michel Basquiat masterpiece worth \$110.5 million.

His love of art led him to decide to invite artists to come along, he said.

"I would like to invite six to eight artists from around the world to join me on this mission to the Moon," Maezawa said.

"They will be asked to create something after they return to Earth. These masterpieces will inspire the dreamer within all of us."

Maezawa said he planned to pick "artists I love" to go along, but gave no further specifics.

Until now, Americans are the only ones who have left Earth's orbit. A total of 24 NASA astronauts—all white men—voyaged to the Moon during the Apollo era of the 1960s and '70s. Twelve walked on the lunar surface.

The first space tourist was Dennis Tito, an American businessman who in 2001 paid some \$20 million to fly on a Russian spaceship to the International Space Station.

## **Free for artists**

SpaceX CEO Elon Musk described Maezawa as the "bravest" and "best adventurer."

"He stepped forward," Musk added. "We are honored that he chose us."

Musk said he would not reveal the price Maezawa paid for the Moon trip, but said it would be "free for the artists."

"This is dangerous, to be clear. This is no walk in the park," Musk cautioned.

"When you are pushing the frontier, it is not a sure thing. There is a chance something could go wrong."

Still, when asked by reporters if Musk would be a passenger, he left the door open to the possibility.

"As far as me going, I'm not sure. He did suggest like maybe that I would join on this trip. I don't know," Musk said.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," said Maezawa.

"All right. Maybe we will both be on it," Musk said to cheers and applause.

The ride will take place aboard a Big Falcon Rocket (BFR), which may not be ready for human flight for five years at least, Musk said.

The BFR was first announced in 2016, and was touted as the most powerful rocket in history, even more potent than the Saturn V Moon rocket that launched the Apollo missions five decades ago.

Last year, Musk said the BFR's admittedly "ambitious" goal was to make a test flight to Mars in 2022, followed by a crewed flight to the Red Planet in 2024.

## **'Multi-planetary species'**

This isn't the first time Musk has vowed to send tourists around the Moon. Last year, he said two paying tourists would circle the Moon in 2018, but those plans that did not materialize.

Musk showed off designs for the 118-meter (129 yards) long BFR, which will consist of a first stage with engines and fuel systems, and a second stage with the spacecraft where the passengers will ride.

Musk estimated it would cost \$5 billion to build.

The BFR spacecraft's shape is reminiscent of the space shuttle, the bus-like US spaceships that carried astronauts to space 135 times from 1981 to 2011.

Musk has said he wants the BFR's vessel to be able to hold around 100 people, and that the launch system could one day be used to colonize the Moon and Mars in order to make humans a "multi-planetary" species.

Other space companies, like Virgin Galactic, founded by British tycoon Richard Branson, and billionaire Amazon founder Jeff Bezos's rocket company Blue Origin, are working on trips to the edge of space that could offer tourists a chance at weightlessness for 10 minutes or so.

Virgin's trip will cost about \$250,000. Blue Origin's price has not been revealed.

Russian and Chinese companies are also working on space tourism plans.

## **Human flights to space**

Musk, who is also the CEO of Tesla Motors, has drawn attention in recent months over his erratic behavior.

He has alleged that a cave diver in Thailand who helped rescue stranded boys was a "pedo," smoked what appeared to be marijuana on a comedian's podcast, spooked Tesla investors with comments about the future of the electric car maker, and admitted to exhaustion and use of the sleeping pill Ambien.

But so far this year, his space firm has also kept up a schedule outpaced only by the Chinese government, making 15 launches with its Falcon 9 rocket.

Next year, SpaceX—which has received billions in NASA funding to ferry supplies to the ISS and build a crew vehicle—hopes to become the first private company to send astronauts to the [space](#) station.

## **Yusaku Maezawa: Japanese spaceman with a taste for art**

Billionaire Yusaku Maezawa, confirmed as SpaceX's first Moon tourist, is a former wannabe rock star now worth \$3 billion with a penchant for pricey modern art as well as space travel.

The 42-year-old tycoon, chief executive of Japan's largest online fashion mall, is the country's 18th richest person, according to business magazine Forbes.

His Instagram feed is peppered with shots of his luxury living—including private jets, yachts and designer watches, but also his beloved art.

Maezawa hit the headlines last year when he bought a Jean-Michel Basquiat masterpiece worth \$110.5 million.

But he also often features in the tabloid glossies for his celebrity love life.

He used to date the ex-wife of professional baseball player Yu Darvish, pitcher at US major league team Chicago Cubs and is now reportedly with Japanese actress Ayame Goriki.

The entrepreneur has a passion for modern art and splashed a record sum for Basquiat's 1982 "Untitled", a skull-like head in oil-stick, acrylic and spray paint on a giant canvas.

Maezawa founded the Contemporary Art Foundation in Tokyo and was on the 2017 list of "Top 200 Collectors" of the ARTnews magazine based in New York.

He insists he is just an "ordinary collector"—despite his extraordinary bank balance. His purchases are born out of love and driven by gut instinct, rather than the instructions of any art advisor.

"I buy simply because they are beautiful. That's all. I enjoy classics together with the history and stories behind them, but possessing classics is not the purpose of my purchase," he told AFP in an interview last year.

And rather than squirrel the work away, he loaned it out to museums including the Brooklyn Museum, in the artist's hometown.

"I hope it brings as much joy to others as it does to me, and that this masterpiece by the 21-year-old Basquiat inspires our future generations," he said.

Art was high on his mind when he announced he would blast into space on a SpaceX rocket in 2023, saying he would invite six to eight artists from around the world with him.

"They will be asked to create something after they return to Earth. These masterpieces will inspire the dreamer within all of us," he told reporters.

He has already shown his appreciation for Musk's space programme, tweeting his congratulations for the successful launch of Falcon Heavy in February.

"I am moved that I shared the historic moment on the scene. I am so thrilled and encouraged I can't put it into words," his tweet said.

## **'Routine work'**

As a young man, Maezawa had aspirations in the music world and was a drummer with a band named Switch Style, which made its debut in 2000.

In an interview with corporate affairs website Nippon Shacho, he said he

eventually discovered that the business world was more creative than music.

Writing songs, releasing albums and touring the country performing was "gradually becoming routine work," he told the website.

"We were about to become salary worker-like musicians," he said, referring to the famous Japanese "salaryman" businessman.

Even before the band's debut, he was dabbling in business, founding Start Today, which operates online fashion shopping site ZOZOTOWN.

Start Today is now a publicly listed company with 900 employees according to its website.

He said his company has grown because he and his staff "are doing what we enjoy."

"We love clothes, and we love our colleagues who love clothes. We are doing business as an extension of our hobby," he said.

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Citation: Japanese billionaire businessman revealed as SpaceX's first Moon traveler (2018, September 18) retrieved 30 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-09-japanese-billionaire-businessman-revealed-spacex.html>

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