

Company unveils world's first commercial spaceship

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These are the voyages of the VSS Enterprise. To ferry civilians into space. To collect \$200,000 a head. To boldly go where few space tourists have gone before!

On Monday, December 7th (an “infamous” date, to be sure), Virgin Galactic [unveiled](#) [1] [SpaceShipTwo](#) [2], the world's first commercial spaceline. Dubbed the VSS (Virgin Space Ship) Enterprise, SpaceShipTwo is a suborbital composite spaceship, capable of ferrying two pilots and six passengers into the thermosphere (an apogee of about 110 km). The Enterprise features a wing span of 8.23 m (27 ft), a length of 18.29 m (60 ft), and top speed of 4,200 km/h (2,600 mph). It will launch at 15,200 m (50,000 ft) from its mother ship, [White Knight Two](#) [3].

Burt Rutan (President of Scaled Composites, a partner company) [claims](#) [4] the Enterprise will be 100 times safer than government space travel—which, in recent years, has seen [multiple](#) [5] [disasters](#) [6] and [near misses](#) [7]. It uses a “[feathered reentry system](#) [8]” that results in low reentry speeds—a stark contrast with space shuttles, which reenter at orbital speeds (25,000 km/h or 16,000 mph), and require heat shields. According to Rutan, “This is designed to be at least as safe as the early airliners in the 1920s...don't believe anyone that tells you that the safety will be the same as a modern airliner, which has been around for 70 years.”



SpaceShipTwo roll out.

Want to be the next space tourist? It'll cost you a cool \$200,000. By contrast, Russia [charges \\$51 million](#) [9] to ride a Soyuz spacecraft—of course, the [Soyuz](#) [10] is an orbital spacecraft, while the SpaceShipTwo is suborbital. But for the would-be civvie

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space traveler, the difference is semantics, as few outside of NASA and its Russian counterpart have experienced anything remotely comparable. The Enterprise is the first of five suborbital spacecraft from Virgin Galactic, with a planned "Virgin" flight sometime in 2011. The company has deposits from 300 potential space travelers.

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Links:

- [1] <http://www.virgingalactic.com/news/item/spaceshiptwo-roll-out/>
- [2] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SpaceShipTwo>
- [3] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scaled_Composites_White_Knight_Two
- [4] <http://blogs.zdnet.com/BTL/?p=7678>
- [5] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Space_Shuttle_Columbia_disaster
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- [10] [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soyuz_\(spacecraft\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soyuz_(spacecraft))