

# Russia to Fly Two Tourists Around the Moon by 2017

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Space Adventures has found two people who are willing to spend \$150 million each to fly to the moon and back.

Two "space tourists" will be flown to far side of the moon and back aboard a Russian Soyuz spacecraft within the next three years, according to the head of Energia, the company that builds the vehicles.

Tickets for the trip cost \$150 million each, Interfax reported.

Energia and its Virginia-based partner, Space Adventures, have sold tickets to eight so-called space tourists since 2001. The two companies previously arranged trips that ranged from orbiting the earth to docking with the International Space Station, but now they are shooting for the moon.

"We are carefully working with our partners from Space Adventures. We are exploring all

possible avenues of cooperation with them, and we can do this — circle the Moon in 2017 to 2018 on Soyuz. Technically it is possible," Energia CEO Vitaly Lopota told Interfax on Monday.

Space Adventures' head Tom Shelley said last month that his company has already found two people who are willing to splurge the nine-figure sum on the tickets, the MIT Technological Review reported. The company did not disclose the customers' names.

Space Adventures describes the mission as a bold return to deep space exploration, as no human has left low earth orbit since the Apollo 17 mission of 1972, which was NASA's final flight to the moon.

"Mankind can only progress to become a space faring race by taking the small steps necessary to reduce the costs of access to space. This mission will be one of those small, but very significant steps," Space Adventures said on its website.

The planned mission is also significant for the Russian space program because the Soyuz vehicle, which was designed for a Soviet mission to the moon in the late 1960s and early 1970s, has never flown beyond low earth orbit.

NASA currently buys rides to the International Space Station for its astronauts at a price of \$76 million a seat, according to the most recent contract signed between the U.S. space agency and its Russian counterpart.

Space adventures is currently arranging a flight for British singer Sarah Brightman. The Russian space agency said last May that they were looking at an October 2015 launch date for Brightman's 10-day trip to the International Space Station.

**See also:**

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