

Space tourism is set for an imminent lift-off, with various players striving to be the first to explore the final frontier

The great space race

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THE ARTISTIC ENDEAVOUR

Japanese billionaire Yusaku Maezawa is slated to be the first civilian passenger to fly to the moon in 2023 (courtesy of SpaceX) and plans to take six artists with him as part of his #DearMoon project. These diverse creatives, from painters and musicians to designers, will then be tasked to "create something after they return to Earth... [and] inspire the dreamer within all of us".

THE SPACESHIP

After undergoing testing for over two years, Virgin Galactic's suborbital spaceplane, *VSS Unity*, finally launched into space last December. Given the landmark success of billionaire founder Richard Branson's enterprise, highly anticipated commercial trips will likely soon follow; 700 people have already forked out US\$250,000 each for a ride on the six-seater spaceplane.

THE ELEVATOR

Willy Wonka would be proud: scientists from Beijing's Tsinghua University have developed a carbon nanotube fibre supposedly strong enough to build a space elevator. Russian scientist Konstantin Tsiolkovsky pioneered the concept in 1895; it involves sending a counterweight into orbit, tethered to Earth with a super-strong cable. The cable will be pulled taut due to gravity and centrifugal force, enabling cabins to travel along its length.

THE GRAND PLAN

Elon Musk is – among other things – a man of many ideas, but his SpaceX project is his most outlandish one yet. The tech entrepreneur says that mankind could well establish an outpost on Mars by 2028. To that end, SpaceX is currently building a space vehicle called Starship to help humans explore the solar system, with the first orbital flight tentatively scheduled for 2020.

THE HOTEL

Startup Orion Span has unveiled plans to launch luxury space hotel Aurora Station in late 2021 and accept guests (only six at a time) the year after. According to founder Frank Bunker, guests will get to experience zero gravity, watch 16 sunrises and sunsets every day and marvel at the northern and southern aurora. The catch? It'll cost an eye-watering US\$9.5 million for a 12-day stay.

THE SPACEPORT

Last summer, the United Kingdom Space Agency unveiled a proposal for a £45 million spaceport – the region's first – to be built on the A' Mhòine peninsula in northern Scotland, with plans for launching pads in Cornwall and North Wales also in the works. But while the Scottish project will create as many as 400 jobs, locals are worried about its potential impact on the region's delicate peat bog ecosystem.

MAGES: ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; WARNER BROS. (FILM STILL)

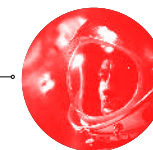
ROCKET TALES

Fun facts from notable movies set in space over the years

FUTURE

Ad Astra

Starring actors Brad Pitt, Tommy Lee Jones and Ruth Negga, the space thriller is slated for a May release. Director James Gray has said that the film shares parallels with the Joseph Conrad novella *Heart of Darkness*.



Interstellar

Instead of relying on CGI to generate the setting for the movie's scenes set in rural America, director Christopher Nolan allocated part of his US\$165m budget to growing a 200ha cornfield from scratch.



Armageddon

While the movie was a box-office success, its director, Michael Bay, wasn't quite as pleased with the product and blamed the short 16-week shoot for the movie's failings. "It was terrible," he told the *Miami Herald* in 2013.



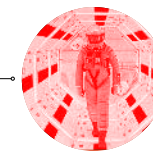
Star Wars

Far from having a smooth start, director George Lucas went through several rounds of rejections from Hollywood studios before the film that kick-started the intergenerational phenomenon was finally taken on by 20th Century Fox.



2001: A Space Odyssey

It's said that director Stanley Kubrick attempted to insure his sci-fi movie to avoid potential losses, just in case extraterrestrial intelligence were to be discovered before its release.



PAST