



Written by [James Heiser](#) on October 6, 2011

## “Space Tourism” Company Partners With Airline

A new competitor in private industry’s “space race” has drawn the attention — and financial support — of a major airline. Space Expedition Curaçao (SXC) hopes to eventually shuttle human beings between distant points on the Earth in less than two hours, and it appears that Royal Dutch Airlines (KLM) is betting that SXC will accomplish that goal.



Although evaluations of various approaches to private space flight — and even “space tourism” — have assessed such efforts as ranging from innovative to quixotic, the concept of private corporations ferrying humans to orbit, or using suborbital craft for high speed transportation around the Earth, has endured. To date, Richard Branson’s [Virgin Galactic](#) has often been seen as the most serious contender for being the first to accomplish the feat of creating a fleet of spacecraft for suborbital flights. As reported for *The New American* [in December 2009](#), over 300 individuals had already committed to a \$200,000 per flight price tag to fly on a Virgin Galactic flight. But now SXC has entered the competition, at a dramatically reduced — and yet still fittingly astronomical — price tag of \$93,000.

Wealthy Dutch businessman Michiel Mol — the cofounder of SXC — boasted that once SXC develops its capacity for high-speed global travel, it will be the future of transportation; [The Sunday Times quotes](#) Mol as declaring, “Being able to travel from London to Sydney in an hour and 45 minutes, that is the future. It is also the reason why KLM joined our firm [Space Expedition Curacao, or SXC] as a partner.”

The decision [last year](#) by aerospace giant Boeing to enter the “space tourism” market offered a sense of seriousness to the field that many observers may have thought lacking prior to that point; now, the action of KLM, a major international airline, partnering with SXC offers a similar perception of credibility. Airlines may not rank very high in public opinion, but despite their delays, fees, and frequent shortcomings, they generally deliver on their promise of on-time transportation.

However, it remains to be seen how large of a market exists for flights with a \$93,000–\$200,000 price tag.

At present, it appears that Virgin Galactic is winning private industry’s “space race.” If the company



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holds to its current schedule, Virgin Galactic will begin operations a full two years ahead of SXC. However, since both companies are committed to opening up the realm of suborbital flights as a significant factor in future global travel, neither Virgin Galactic nor SXC is focused solely on short term goals. As *The Sunday Times* reports:

Sir Richard Branson intends to become the first private space tourism operator, booking seats at \$200,000 each for suborbital flights on his Virgin Galactic vehicles, which he hopes to begin launching as soon as 2012.

Mol intends to follow suit in early 2014 and says he has already sold 35 tickets at \$93,000 for flights from the Caribbean island of Curaçao. Regulatory approval is still under negotiation.

His first spaceship, the Lynx, from the Californian firm XCOR Aerospace, will be unveiled next spring and will, he claims, feature breakthrough technology with a reusable engine.

"It's the first time a spaceship will be capable of doing four flights a day and of doing 5,000 flights with one engine," he said.

Time will tell whether the Lynx will perform as promised, and how both Virgin Galactic and SXC will fare as the economic travails of the industrialized world continue. What seems certain is that a free market approach to space travel is alive and well.



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