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SPACE TOURISM Getting Away from It All - In Orbit

Looking for an exclusive holiday destination with spectacular views and its own unique atmosphere? If you can scrape together \$20 million or so, you could soon book yourself on the trip of a lifetime. MirCorp of Amsterdam and Russia's RSC Energia are looking into the feasibility of a small private space station, Mini Station 1, that would be funded partly by tourist trips. "Customers are lining up," says MirCorp's senior vice president Gert Weyers, with private citizens, scientists, reporters and media companies showing interest. The company is considering a game show offering two weeks in space as a prize. Contestants would be whittled down to around a dozen, who would all undergo cosmonaut training at the Yuri Gagarin Center near Moscow. Then cameras would follow the lucky winner into space.

All civilian visitors to Mini Station 1 would be taught cosmonaut skills, apart from "extras" like space walking. Mini Station 1 won't have a permanent crew, which should keep down running costs, and will share the same orbit as the International Space Station, open for business since last November. This means it can support the International Space Station by, for example, delivering fresh Soyuz escape rockets, which must be changed every six months.

The Soyuz would take a crew of three (initially one tourist and two professionals, though the ratio may change) to Mini Station 1 for a stay of 21 days or possibly longer, then journey on to the International Space Station. The number of visits a year will depend on demand, says Weyers. If Mini Station 1 is fully booked, Mir Corp may be able to get you onto the International Space Station, as it did for Californian businessman Dennis Tito earlier this year.

Weyers sees all kinds of merchandise possibilities, including memorabilia such as fountain pens made of platinum that has made the trip to space.

TIME, November 12, 2001.

NB. Ne pas traduire "MirCorp" et "RSC Energia"