

- Mark your confusion.
- Purposefully annotate the article (1-2 mature, thoughtful responses per page to what the author is saying)
- Write a 250+ word response to the article.

Space travel for sale: Two people have paid SpaceX to fly them to the moon

by Associated Press, adapted by Newsela staff, 03.03.17

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — SpaceX said Monday it will fly two people to the moon next year. The feat has not been attempted since NASA's Apollo missions close to 50 years ago.

Tech billionaire Elon Musk, founder of the space exploration company, announced the surprising news Monday.

Two people who know each other approached the company about sending them on a weeklong flight just beyond the moon, according to Musk. He won't identify the pair or the price tag. They've already paid a "significant" deposit, he noted.

Musk said SpaceX is on track to launch astronauts to the International Space Station for NASA in mid-2018. This moon mission would follow about six months later, by the end of the year under the current schedule. The mission would use a Dragon crew capsule and a Falcon Heavy rocket.

Moon Mission Carries Some Risk

The moon mission is designed to be independent, unless something goes wrong, Musk said.

"I think they are entering this with their eyes open, knowing that there is some risk here," Musk told reporters in a telephone news conference. He spoke to them a day after teasing via Twitter that an announcement of some sort was coming.

The two are aware of the danger, he said. "We'll do everything we can to minimize that risk, but it's not zero. But they're coming into this with their eyes open," said Musk, adding that the pair will receive "extensive" training before the flight.

Musk said he does not have permission to release the passengers' names, and he was hesitant to even say if they were men, women or even pilots. He would only admit, "It's nobody from Hollywood."

Long Loop Around The Moon

The passengers would make a long loop around the moon, skimming its surface and then going well beyond, perhaps 300,000 or 400,000 miles altogether. The mission won't involve a moon landing, according to Musk.

It's about 240,000 miles to the moon alone, one way.

NASA will have first dibs on a similar mission if it so chooses, Musk said. The space agency learned of his plan at the same time as reporters and was busy preparing a statement following the announcement. NASA sent several Apollo moon missions, with the last in 1972.

"This should be a really exciting mission that hopefully gets the world really excited about sending people into deep space again," Musk said.

The Dragon crew capsule has not yet flown in space. Neither has a Falcon Heavy rocket, which is essentially a Falcon 9 rocket with two strap-on boosters, according to Musk. He said there will be plenty of time to test both the spacecraft and the rocket before the moon mission. The Falcon 9 rocket has been used to put spacecraft into orbit to meet with the International Space Station.

Opening The Door For More Customers

Musk expects to have more moon-mission customers as time goes by.

Just late last week, NASA announced it was studying possibly adding crew to the test flight of its

megarocket, at the request of President Donald Trump's administration. Such a flight to the moon's neighborhood wouldn't happen before 2019 at best — if, indeed, that option is even implemented.

Musk said anything that advances the space exploration cause is good, no matter who goes first.

"This should be incredibly exciting," he said.

SpaceX is also working on a so-called Red Dragon. It is meant to fly to Mars around 2020 with experiments, but no people, and land on the surface.

NASA Statement About SpaceX Private Moon Venture Announcement

The following is a statement on SpaceX's announcement Monday about a private space mission around the moon:

"NASA commends its industry partners for reaching higher.

"We will work closely with SpaceX to ensure it safely meets the contractual obligations to return the launch of astronauts to U.S. soil and continue to successfully deliver supplies to the International Space Station.

"For more than a decade, NASA has invested in private industry to develop capabilities for the American people and seed commercial innovation to advance humanity's future in space.

"NASA is changing the way it does business through its commercial partnerships to help build a strong American space economy and free the agency to focus on developing the next-generation rocket, spacecraft and systems to go beyond the moon and sustain deep space exploration."

Possible response options:

- Summarize the recent announcement by SpaceX, and summarize NASA's public statement that followed.
- Is it good for private companies like SpaceX to be taking human travel in space further, rather than government organizations like NASA?
- Choose any passage and respond to it.