

“The key to getting our whole project off the ground, as it were, is to make our spacecraft as fuel-efficient as possible. We’ve had a massive leap forward since the introduction of kerosene-powered propulsion systems which run at about 2% of the cost of the old hydrogen burners, but it still takes a massive amount of energy to break free of gravity so we’ve got to look at cutting fuel use to the absolute bare minimum.”

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All this was starting to sound depressingly realistic. If so much testing was needed to get the Phase 1 craft up and running, how long would it take to build the Phase 2 craft? And how long would it be before there was actually a space hotel that I could take my kids to? Maybe it wasn’t going to happen in my lifetime... I decided to ask Dr. Gordon straight out whether she thought I’d ever make it into space.

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“I’m afraid the chances of you or me living long enough to stay at the SpaceDreams hotel are fairly slim. I believe we’ll be in a position to start construction of the hotel in about 50 years’ time.”

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Somehow the idea of discussing the SpaceDreams hotel seemed a lot less thrilling now I knew I’d never get to go there but Dr. Gordon was already leading me out of the office and into the design studio to see the plans. Senior designer Richard Foster led us through a 3D computer model.

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“So, here’s what you’d see as you approach the hotel in the Phase 2 ferry.”

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What Richard showed me took my breath away — an elegant spherical silver frame slowly spinning in space, surrounded by the twinkling stars of the Milky Way.

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“There are four docking stations and reception areas around the living zone. From these guests will go straight to their rooms — the bedrooms are all on the outer edge of the living zone with massive windows so guests can get the best possible view. The rooms are going to be very luxurious. That’s partly because we want guests to really enjoy their experience of space, but also because we think the very first space tourists could find it quite strange being so far from Earth. The more comfortable they feel physically the easier it will be for them to adjust to being in an alien environment.”

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“The real fun’s going to be in the centre of the hotel where gravity is almost non-existent. There’ll be the opportunity to space walk and all sorts of sports that we play on Earth which are going to be about a million times more fun without gravity holding you back. I think the best bit’s got to be the swimming pool though, or as we prefer to call it, the swimming sphere. Without gravity water floats like a giant raindrop — swimmers will be able to swim into the sphere, around the sphere and even right out of the sphere. It’s all very exciting...”

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It certainly was exciting. So exciting that it almost made up for my disappointment that the realistic possibility of a night in a space hotel was so much further off than I’d hoped. Seeing the computer model, and meeting Dr. Gordon, Richard Foster and all the others hard at work at SpaceDreams made me realise that visits to space for ordinary people are no longer science fiction. Space tourism will happen. The work has begun. For the rest of us it’s all just a matter of time — and patience.

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