

# VIRGIN GALACTIC - FUTURE OF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH



As Virgin Galactic offers 4 minutes of weightlessness on their SpaceShipTwo, many scientists rejoice. Orbit experiments are often out of financial reach for them yet times are changing fast.

When the world watched breathlessly the first steps of Neil Armstrong on the surface of the Moon in 1969, many were not willing to accept the footage was real. Who would have thought that some forty years from that moment, 'civilians' have a chance to take a suborbital trip and experience weightlessness on their own? **Virgin Galactic is one of the first companies intensely working on the launch of their new SpaceShipTwo, which for \$200,000 offers a seat to space enthusiasts.** Alongside the lucky rich who can spare such a sum, researchers see this as their new hope.

Usually, outer space research starts at a 7-digit sum and for many researchers it is inaccessible; however, **as suborbital travel is no longer a utopic idea of the far future, but a very real and current one, many researchers see their opportunity.** As Dr Alan Stern, Associate Vice President of the Southwest Research Institute put it: "It's revolutionary". His institute has already paid a deposit for two scientists to travel on Virgin's SpaceShipTwo and plans to secure another six seats.

There are other suborbital companies which are working on similar projects, such as XCOR Aerospace of Mojave, which charges \$95,000 whose plane offers a rather private experience for the pilot and one passenger.

Scientists long to focus their research on diverse areas from studying loose soil and rocks which cover asteroids to the impact of weightlessness on human body and its biometrics, and also plan to send an ultraviolet telescope on board the aircraft. **It appears the commercial flights might end up not only generating profit, but also serve the noble purpose of scientific research.**

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