

SCIENCE NEWS

UP, UP AND AWAY

THE race to get tourists into space is hotting up! The latest idea is a luxury flight in a hot air balloon capsule.

The Neptune capsule will have space for eight passengers, plus the crew. It hangs underneath a balloon the size of a football stadium filled with hydrogen.

The plan is for the huge balloon to drift upwards to the edge of space, reaching a height of 30 kilometres above the Earth. There, space tourists will be able to look back at the Earth or out to dark space and the sight of millions of stars.

Because the capsule stays within the Earth's atmosphere, no special suits or training are needed. Anyone can give it a go – as long as you have the cash!

Although the price hasn't been decided yet, the six-hour luxury flight is likely to cost more than £100,000.

One downside (apart from the price) may be the method of landing back on Earth. The balloon drifts back to Earth and splashes down into the sea. Passengers, crew, capsule and balloon are then recovered by ship.

Space Perspective, the company behind the idea, is planning unmanned test flights next year. But it has ambitious plans to operate up to 500 flights from sites across the USA by 2024.

If all goes well, peeking into space could be as easy as flying abroad in a few years' time!



The Neptune capsule



The balloon will drift to the edge of space

Questions on: 'Up, up and away'

1) What is the name of this invention and who is making it?

The _____ capsule by _____
_____.

2) The journalist mentions that there is a race.
A race to do what?

3) The race is “hotting up”. What do you think this means?

4) The Neptune project is at which stage?

- An early idea
- In testing
- Ready to launch
- Launched

5) What will take the capsule up into the atmosphere?

6) How high will the balloon travel, in kilometres?

7) A passenger aeroplane travels at **10km** above the earth.
The International Space Station travels at **400km** above the Earth.

Do you think you could say you've seen space after a trip in this balloon?

8) Imagine you were considering a flight in the Neptune capsule.
Make a list of pros and cons below.

Pros – reasons to give it a go	Cons – reasons not to do it