

So far there are only two ways to get into space — you either have to be an astronaut or very rich. Countries such as Russia and the USA have space programs, but you need to be highly qualified and very determined if you want to become an astronaut. Only a few of the thousands of applicants make it through the training and selection program. Alternatively, if you have the money and are fit enough, you may be able to buy a place on the space journey, as the US millionaire, Mike Melwill did in 2004. But soon there may be another way.

Asif Mahsood is a 14-year old Pakistani with big plans. He dreams of getting a job in space, but hopes he doesn't need to become an astronaut. And the idea is not so fantastic. Many experts believe that the travel industry will be revolutionized during the next decades by the development of space holidays.

Most people know about the space stations that are already circling the Earth. They are used for research and are operated by professional astronauts. But soon a space station could be built for commercial purposes. A holiday in space would not be cheap, but there are probably already plenty of people who would be prepared to pay.

This is where Asif's dream comes in. He wants to be the manager of the world's first orbiting hotel. It is likely that rocket ships will provide the transport. They could be launched from the Earth's surface, or even from a carrier aircraft high in the atmosphere. The space hotel will be designed with a landing platform for the rocket ship. The passengers could then move into the hotel through a large tube connected to the hotel entrance. This would be necessary because there is no gravity in space. However, inside the space hotel there would need to be a system creating artificial gravity, so that guests could move around normally.

Naturally, if hotels are built in space, there will also be new jobs in space. Guests will need all the normal services found in a hotel on Earth, but there will also be some new possibilities. For example, all sorts of recreation activities could be designed to take advantage of the zero gravity conditions in space. Being able to float around a room, bounce off the walls and ceiling would be very attractive for tourists looking for a new experience. Games of three-dimensional football, basketball or volleyball would certainly be very interesting. The hotel would also have telescopes to look out at the universe, and to look back at the Earth below.

A space hotel will need to have other facilities that are not necessary in normal hotels. It would be more like a small city in some ways, with its own hospital, communication system, police force and fire department.

In the meantime, Asif is going to keep studying hard at school so that he can find a job working in one of the big international hotels in Lahore or Karachi. He wants to qualify in hotel management and continue to study business administration. The hotels are much the same, so Asif believes that the best preparation for a job in space will be gaining plenty of experience working in Earth hotels.

The whole idea of hotels in space may sound a little like science fiction, but 30 years ago technology such as mobile video phones and the Internet seemed to be just a crazy dream, whereas today they are a normal part of everyday life, and it is hard to imagine our world without them.

Who is Mike Melwill?

1. The founder of a new space program.
2. An American scientist.
3. A highly-qualified astronaut.
4. A man who paid for a space travel.