

Stephen Attenborough, Virgin Galactic talking with Dr Patrick Dixon (Chair) at Google Zeitgeist.

[youtube:<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CffkmKj7fhc> auto]

Virgin Galactic space vehicles will take people onto short trips into space in the ultimate tourist adventure but also raising questions about use of resources in a world concerned about global warming.

The space craft can take 10 people on two trips a day. Carried up to around 70,000 feet under a conventional plane, the space vehicle is released and then shoots into space in a short 90 second burst of rocket fire. The fuel is rubber pellets and nitrogen dioxide - both stable when separate so the engine can be turned on and off.

The space craft re-enters the atmosphere at a slower speed than the Nasa space shuttle, and from a lower height. It flies down to land at a conventional airport using own wings and without sustaining massive temperature issues that have made Nasa expeditions so challenging.

Cost: \$200,000 for a trip lasting a few minutes in space itself. All seats for the next year or two are fully booked.

Raises all kinds of questions about sustainability, environment and global warming.