

'Millions will be living in space'

theday.co.uk/millions-will-be-living-in-space-4 17 January 2025



Lift-off!: Jeff Bezos's Blue Origin company hailed a new era in commercial spaceflight yesterday after its giant New Glenn rocket made a long-awaited successful maiden launch (above) from Florida.

Is this the answer to Earth's problems? Jeff Bezos has launched his most powerful rocket yet. He and Elon Musk believe that living in space is the key to our future.

What's happening?

Early yesterday morning, New Glenn achieved lift-off.

It is the first rocket launched by Blue Origin, the commercial space exploration company run by Amazon tycoon Jeff Bezos.

The launch was a victory for Bezos. He has long dreamt of space travel, but had fallen behind fellow tech billionaire Elon Musk, whose SpaceX launched 134 rockets last year.

Find out more

Nasa last sent people to the moon in 1972. But Blue Origin and SpaceX have helped revive interest in space travel.

The advances funded by both companies could lead to the time when popping to space is no harder, more expensive or dangerous than hopping on a commuter train.

Both billionaires think people should live in space, Bezos in space stations, Musk in Martian cities.

Many people disagree with this though. Even for the world's richest men, travelling to space and creating liveable environments is incredibly expensive.

No one has ever set foot on Mars, which lacks the air we need to breathe. It is often freezing and there are permanent dust storms.

Is this the answer to Earth's problems?

Some say

Yes! The Earth is rapidly running out of road. The only place left to turn is space.

Others think

No! Bezos and Musk's projects may enable some lucky people to survive while the rest of humankind remains on a dying planet.

Some people say

"There are no passengers on spaceship earth. We are all crew."

Marshall McLuhan (1911 – 1980), Canadian media theorist

Six steps to discovery

1. Connect

How do you feel about this story? - Do you worry about your future on Earth? How do you imagine the planet in 50 years?

2. Wonder

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What do you think?

What questions do you have? - For example: What is the longest distance humans have travelled? Why is Nasa based in Cape Canaveral?

3. Investigate

What are the facts? - Research how long it would take to travel to Mars, using the fastest rockets currently invented.

4. Construct

What is your point of view? - You are offered a seat in a rocket touring space. Would you go? How would you feel?

5. Express

What do others believe? - In groups, discuss what you think life on Mars would be like.

6. Reflect

What might happen next? - Design an advertising poster encouraging people to move to Mars.

Glossary

Nasa - The National Aeronautics and Space Administration, responsible for the US space programme.