



AS IT IS

## Japanese Billionaire Offers Trip around the Moon

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Japanese billionaire Yusaku Maezawa has launched a search for eight people to join him on a trip around the moon with the American space travel company SpaceX.

Maezawa announced the passenger search on Wednesday. The trip is set to take place in 2023. The selected group would become the first private passengers to travel around the moon.

Back in 2018, Maezawa said he would invite only artists for the weeklong trip. But on Wednesday, he said he expanded the search to “give more people from around the **globe** the chance to join this **journey**. If you see yourself as an artist, then you are an artist.”

Maezawa, a former musician, is one of Japan's most colorful business leaders. The Japanese media often write about his collections of foreign and Japanese art and fast cars.

Maezawa is paying the full cost of the trip on SpaceX's next-generation vehicle called Starship. Maezawa has not said how much the trip will cost him. But he says it is more than the \$110 million he spent on a Jean-Michel Basquiat painting.

Later this year, four private citizens will travel to the International Space Station (ISS) at the cost of \$55 million each on another SpaceX vehicle, Crew Dragon.

The first part of Maezawa's selection process for the moon trip runs until March 14. Candidates for the trip will need to pass medical checks first and then meet with Maezawa.

“I thought there might be delays but everything is on **schedule**,” Maezawa told reporters. “Elon Musk says there is no problem and I believe him.” Musk is the billionaire founder of SpaceX.

Two recent Starship models have exploded during testing. This shows the risks of space travel for Maezawa and other private passengers. The passengers also will have to deal with the physical demands of traveling outside Earth’s orbit.

Maezawa said he is not in training, which he expects to take a few months at most. But he added that he is drinking less alcohol and exercising more.

“I’m only preparing mentally,” said Maezawa, who had considered a trip to the ISS before choosing the more difficult trip to the moon.

The distance from Earth to the moon is about 382,500 kilometers. Astronauts last visited the moon during NASA’s Apollo program. Twenty-four men flew to the moon from 1968 through 1972. About half of them were able to reach the lunar surface.

Maezawa’s trip around the moon will use SpaceX’s reusable Big Falcon Rocket. Musk announced the development of the 118-meter rocket in 2018. He said it is designed to send passengers to the moon and, later, to Mars.

Musk said the development of the rocket is expected to cost about \$5 billion. He did not say how much Maezawa is paying for the lunar trip. But he said that the Japanese businessman’s payment would help the cost of development.

SpaceX is competing with two other companies for space **tourism** money. They are Blue Origin, founded by Amazon chief executive Jeff Bezos, and businessman Richard Branson’s Virgin Galactic.

I’m Jill Robbins.

*Reuters reported this story. Hai Do adapted the story for Learning English. Ashley Thompson was the editor.*

## Words in This Story

**globe** - n. the earth

**journey** - n. trip

**schedule** - n. a plan of things to be done and the times when they will be done

**tourism** - n. the activity of traveling to a place for pleasure

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