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***Kiwis Spend Almost $2 Million on Tickets to Space***

Kiwis have spent more than $1.8 million on space travel to embark on flights with the world’s first commercial space service.

New Zealanders are able to secure their tickets with the Virgin Galactic service through its travel partner House of Travel.

Interest in these history-making flights is expected to increase as Kiwis learn more of the opportunity to aboard a space-bound aircraft.

Eight Kiwis nationwide have purchased tickets for the rocket-powered flights, which will see would-be astronauts view the planets and stars from above the Earth’s atmosphere, while feeling the unique sensation of zero gravity.

Owner of House of Travel Palmerston North, Stephen Parsons, has visited twice the operating port of the flights, Spaceport America, New Mexico, and Virgin Galactic’s operations at Mojave airport.

The passionate space aficionado is thrilled to be able to connect his clients with the new space service, expected to launch this year.

“This is cutting edge stuff, and the first step towards an incredibly exciting future for the travel industry and travellers. It is such a privilege to be involved in a service that will change Kiwis’ lives forever,” he says.

“It’ll be like standing next to Wright Brothers [who were credited with building and flying the world’s first successful airplane] and saying, ‘G’day, what are you doing today?’ – we’ll be making history like they did. It’s incredible to think that even when the first 500 people have been to space with this service, it’ll still be less that 1000 people who have been in history overall,” says Parsons.

House of Travel has six accredited space agents nationwide, who travel to the homes of each person who books a flight to prepare them for their upcoming adventure.

While three of the eight Kiwis who have booked a flight purchased their ticket through Virgin Galactic directly, the other five secured their spot through House of Travel – all of whom are Aucklanders, and one of whom lives in America.

The Director of House of Travel Botany Junction, Katrina Cole, says that it’s fantastic to see such a range of Kiwis making bookings.

“Our current ticket holders are from all walks of life, but what they have in common is an absolute passion for space. They have all always thought they’d go to space at some point in their lifetimes,” she says.

House of Travel Chief Executive Officer Mark O’Donnell couldn’t be happier for the New Zealand-owned company to have the opportunity to take Kiwis to space.

“We have always relished helping locals to see the world, and now they will be able to see it from a whole different perspective. It’s truly amazing that now people can now buy a ticket to see our planet in all its glory from above and revel in feeling weightless and free,” he says.

“We’re delighted to be working so closely with Virgin Galactic as we take our offering to clients to a place it’s never been before.”

Virgin Galactic, the world’s first commercial spaceline owned by Sir Richard Branson’s Virgin Group and Abu Dhabi’s aabar Investments PJS, recently completed the first rocket-powered flight of its space vehicle, SpaceShipTwo in Mojave, California.

The test, conducted by teams from Scaled Composites and Virgin Galactic, officially marks the beginning of Virgin Galactic’s final phase of vehicle testing prior to commercial service from Spaceport America in New Mexico.

Virign Galactic’s spacecraft, which reached a maximum altitude of 55,000 feet during this test flight, has been designed to accommodate six passengers and two pilots. It’s expected to eventually do around five commercial flights a day, each reaching an altitude of over 359,000 feet.

In the coming months, the testing team will aim for a full test space flight, which is anticipated to take place before the end of the year. Kiwis can book their space-bound flight by enquiring at their House of Travel outlet, which will put them in touch with their nearest accredited space agent. Tickets cost just over $234,000.

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Written on behalf of House of Travel by Impact PR. For further information or images, please contact Mark Devlin, mark@impactpr.co.nz (ph. 021509060).

Notes to editors:

**About House of Travel**

House of Travel is a Kiwi owned and operated business. It is unique in the travel industry because its outlets are a true business partnership between local owner operators and House of Travel Holdings.

The company is a home-grown Kiwi success story which has helped many New Zealanders to become successful business people in their own right. House of Travel has more than 70 stores and more than 600 travel consultants nationwide.