

Next stop: Space

Financier Per Wimmer takes being an adrenaline junkie to a whole new level



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SKYDIVING? Only if it's at 29,500 feet (about 9,000 metres), minus 50 degrees Celsius and off the top of Mount Everest. Prototype submersibles? Only at 3.8 kilometres under the ocean, flitting in and out of the *HMS Titanic's* ballrooms.

The Danish financier and author takes a methodical approach to his jaw-dropping exploits. "I have an annual adventure calendar," he explains. "If something falls through and there's a hole in the schedule, I make sure there is a Plan B."

But what Mr Wimmer is best known for is his ambition to be the first Danish citizen in space. So keen is he for this accolade that he purchased tickets aboard all three commercial tourism space flights as soon as they were available. These are run by Richard Branson's Virgin Galactic, Jeff Greason's XCOR Aerospace and Eric Anderson's Space Adventures.

Had it not been for the tragic Virgin Galactic crash last year, Mr Wimmer would likely have already achieved his ambition this July. But the accident naturally demanded a thorough investigation that has since proved to be unfortunate human error.

Now, XCOR and Virgin are neck-and-neck in a modern day commercial space race, which will see one or the other launch the first space tourism flight between 2016 and 2017. Mr Wimmer will be among the

world's first civilians to experience sub-orbital space, in a half-day trip reaching 100 km in altitude.

"In the 15 years since I bought the tickets, I've learned two things. Space always takes longer and costs more than you think," he explains. "But it is something I have yearned to do ever since I was a kid. I'm an adventurer and pioneer and I have an inner desire that drives me towards exploration and learning. I like to write the manual, as opposed to reading it," he laughs.

Curiously Mr Wimmer's day job couldn't be more at odds with his personal passion. After attaining no less than four Masters degrees—including one from Harvard—and spending four years at one of the world's most revered investment banks, Goldman Sachs, he set up Wimmer Financial, a private family office. As an adviser to the world's wealthiest individuals, he deals with long-term, risk-averse strategies, wealth protection and jurisdiction planning. It's a far cry from his "Indiana Jones-meets-James Bond" hobby, he admits.

"The disadvantage to finance is that it is regulated and constrained; I observe a very different level of risk when I'm in my adventure sphere. But I enjoy everything I do, I feel like I'm on holiday 365 days a year. The things I don't like doing, I outsource," he says.

When it comes to risk, Mr Wimmer's approach is similarly methodical. He has calculated that his chance of death on a space flight is in the "low double digits, about the same as the first users of aviation." "I'm comfortable with that."

Not everyone agrees. Mr Wimmer grew up in a loving, typically middle-class nuclear family in Denmark. His mother worked at

an institute for handicapped adults and his late father set up a vehicle dealership and made investments in property. Although they have supported him in whatever path he chose, his mother is anxious about his flight, especially after the Virgin Galactic crash last year.

Mr Wimmer also has a three-year-old son to think about. And errors do happen. In 2008, when he participated in the world's first tandem skydive above Mount Everest, one of his peers Carrie Holmes broke her leg when she was forced to land in thick fog.

But Mr Wimmer is undeterred and now in the midst of writing his autobiography, his fourth book to date. For most 47-year-olds this might feel somewhat premature. But Mr Wimmer, who has visited a third of the world's countries, will no doubt fill the pages. And what happens to his adventure calendar after space? Can it really be the final frontier?

Mr Wimmer is already looking beyond space to the ocean. His journey to the *Titanic* which would have taken place aboard Russian submersible *Mir 1*, was cancelled after Russian-European relations broke down. Mr Wimmer hopes that the lines of communication will soon be reopened and allow him to voyage to the depths of the North Atlantic.

"The problem you have as an adventurer on Earth is that the world is ever-smaller. No matter where I travel there's always a Coca-Cola dispenser. The new frontier in the 21st century is either up, or down." **W**

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PHOTOS: WIMMER SPACE.COM



A ticket to the final frontier

Virgin Galactic VSS Voyager

What: 'The Red Carpet' of space tourism, built by 300 full-time engineers (15 alone built the flight seat). A Mothership flies to 17 km up and then propels the rocketship into space.

How much: US\$250,000

Estimated first flight: Q4 2016/Q1 2017

Launch: New Mexico

Capacity: Seats eight, six passengers and two pilots

XCOR Lynx

What: A smaller, nimbler craft with a single launch vehicle with nitrogen rocket engines, constructed by 30-40 engineers. The seats are built for race cars bought from a supplier.

How much: US\$150,000 (the price has increased from the initial US\$95,000)

Estimated first flight: Q4 2016/Q1 2017

Launch: Mojave Desert/Midland Texas

Capacity: Seats two, one passenger and one pilot

Space Adventures/Armadillo Aerospace

What: Space Adventures abandoned its initial rocketcraft The Explorer in 2006, because it got too expensive. In 2010, it partnered Armadillo Aerospace on a new vehicle, which in 2013 was said to be in 'hibernation mode' due to setbacks.

How much: US\$102,000

Estimated first flight: Unknown

Launch: Unknown

Capacity: Unknown

LEAP OF FAITH
Mr Wimmer participating in the world's first tandem skydive above Mount Everest in 2008