



Adventure Girl
Stefanie Michaels



Martian gravity push-ups

Weighing 40 Martian Pounds, Then Space-Induced Weightlessness **Zero-G Makes Me Ask for More, More, More**

By Stefanie Michaels as Adventure Girl | Photography by Steve Boxall Photography

*I*t is 11:05 in the morning at the back side of McCarran International Airport in Las Vegas. I have just stepped off Zero Gravity Corporation's transport bus with butterflies in my stomach, wearing an unflattering navy blue G-Force One flight suit. This seemingly regular mode of transportation has taken our group from a pre-flight meeting point at Mandalay Bay to Signature Air Terminal where we are checked in by Zero-G flight attendants dressed in black futuristic flight uniforms. I notice that their outfits are much cuter than our baggy blue flight attire, although I learn later that baggy was best.

Waiting for the group was a brilliant white, and may I say, gorgeous, specially modified 727 airliner with "Zero Gravity" in sky blue lettering embossed on its side. This unparalleled mode of transport was the focus for my next adventure: reaching weightlessness with Zero Gravity.

This is not to be just another ultra-cool adventure for me. When I was asked by Zero Gravity Corporation to join celebrities, executives and a well-known astronaut to help launch one of their first flights out of Las Vegas, I jumped at the chance. The added

"We board as strangers, bond in weightlessness, land as part of the Zero Gravity family."

bonus? The chance to experience the Zero Gravity adventure with Captain Buzz Aldrin, the second astronaut in history to walk on the Moon.

By the way, Las Vegas is Zero Gravity Corporation's new West Coast home base. Original Zero Gravity

flights have been taking off from the Shuttle Landing Facility at Kennedy Space Center in Central Florida since 2004.

Just to let you know, I am a closet astronaut. Since I was a little girl, I have yearned to land on the Moon, a desire shared with my late father. He would wake me during the night for the NASA launches and landings when the space program was in its infancy. Until the day of his death two years ago, my father kept abreast of the goings on with the space program, or lack thereof. He and I were space junkies so to speak, and Buzz Aldrin was our space hero.

Of course, no one in my family became a rocket scientist, or graduate of MIT like Captain Aldrin. And yet, we knew that one day, one of us would have the opportunity to experience the extraordinary. So, to experience my very first Zero Gravity flight with Buzz Aldrin, on my father's birthday weekend, was a great gift

and the closest thing to magic on Earth. Well, at least in terms of weightlessness.

It is all very loud standing on the tarmac, as we are drowned out by the jet's gigantic engines. This particular Boeing 727-200F was selected for the Zero-G Experience™ because of its flight characteristics, center-body mounted engines and cargo door, all which ensure very smooth and stable parabolic flight maneuvers, called parabolas. Specially trained pilots fly parabolic maneuvers between approximately 24,000 and 32,000 feet altitude. By turning the nose of the plane to about two o'clock, then turning it to four o'clock—much like a roller coaster—passengers get the identical weightless flight experience NASA uses to train its astronauts and Ron Howard used to film Apollo 13.

Despite the engine blare, our group manages to assemble in front of G-Force One for photo ops, and are then broken into teams based on the colored arm bands assigned



Dr. Peter Diamandis

ahead of time. I am thrilled to find that Captain Buzz Aldrin is on the Platinum team with me. My eyes well up; my stomach does a flip flop. It was the same kind of excited feeling I got at the airport when I smelled the jet fuel. So I am convinced right then and there, this is going to be an adventure of a lifetime.

Dr. Peter H. Diamandis, co-founder and CEO of Zero Gravity, is our team leader and is all smiles as



Stef and Buzz Aldrin

Stef and NASA Engineer Ray Cronise



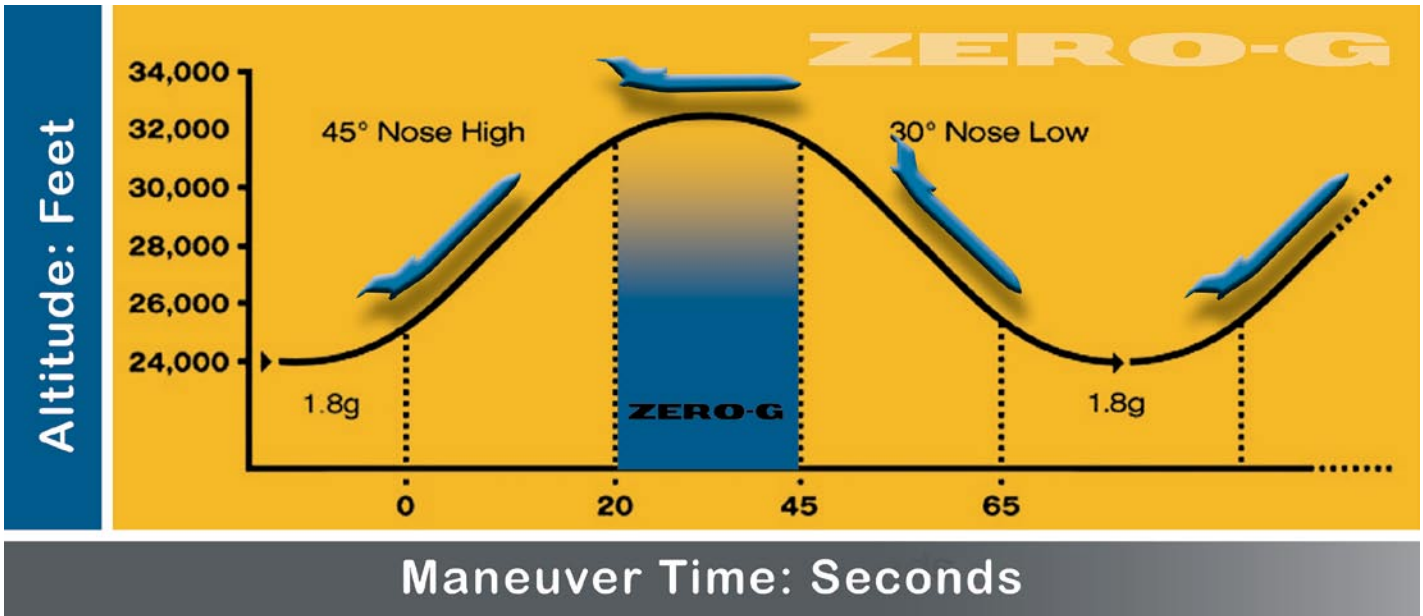
he shouts to me over the noise, “Are you ready to get going?”

“Are you kidding me?” I shout back. “I can’t wait to get weightless!”

Dr. Diamandis knows what we are all in for, and his energy and enthusiasm are contagious. He is like a kid in a candy store about to share his favorite piece of chocolate with friends.

Dr. Diamandis is a new kind of hero in my book. He is a successful entrepreneur and pioneer in the commercial space arena. He is a gifted visionary who co-founded Zero-G with veteran Astronaut Dr. Byron Lichtenberg and NASA Engineer Ray Cronise. Their goal was to give the public a chance to experience the excitement of space first hand.

Dr. Diamandis explains that it took him nearly 20 years working with the FAA to bring Zero Gravity flights to where they are today. He was co-



founder of Space Adventures, Ltd. a leading space travel and tourism company, and co-founder and chairman of Starport.com, a leading Internet site for space exploration acquired by SPACE.com in 1990. The doctor-entrepreneur is also on the forefront of space-tourism as chairman and CEO of the X PRIZE Foundation.

In 2004, Dr. Diamandis raised a \$10 million dollar prize purse, which went to Mojave Aerospace Ventures for the flight of SpaceShipOne. The event made global headlines. The man knows what he is talking about, and what he is doing, when combining space, zero gravity and a whole lotta fun.

G-Force One is split into two zones and has seating for up to 35 passengers and crew at the back of the plane called the Seating Zone. The 90-foot-long padded section directly in front of the seating area

is called the Floating Zone, providing enough room for passengers to float and fly during Martian (1/3-gravity), Lunar (1/6-gravity) and 30-second intervals of zero gravity conditions



Zero gravity conditions

created during the experience. The floating area is peppered with six high-definition video cameras around the cabin for maximum video coverage of our adventure. (Each person

receives a video of their adventure as part of the package).

I choose the back row seating, next to a couple of reporters, Ray Cronise and Buzz Aldrin. Sans seats in the floating area in front of us, I see where we will be experiencing our weightlessness. I am told that once the plane hits cruising altitude, we will leave our seats, lie down on the floor and await the calls for zero gravity. Suspense.

I soon discover that our clearance will not be over the Nevada desert, but over the Pacific Ocean for the flight. This gives me enough time—an hour there and back—to talk with fellow passengers, change into flight socks and to drill Buzz Aldrin with all my questions about space. He described his first few steps on the Moon and his early years as a NASA astronaut. Then we talked about my father, the future of space travel, and



he asks me to work with his foundation. If that isn't enough to send an Adventure Girl over the Moon.

As we bonded in our seats, we bonded in Zero Gravity. First, push-ups in Martian gravity. Gloriously, I only weigh about 40 Martian pounds. Then, a few parabolic maneuvers to Lunar gravity, plus 15 parabolas of Zero Gravity. Fantastic. Captain Aldrin and I play with our water balloons, popping them and then catching the water in our mouths. Suddenly, the M&Ms stashed in our flight suit pockets release into Zero Gravity, so we try to catch them in our mouths. The ultimate destiny: chocolate in space!

I am later told by my fellow aeronauts that they could hear me squealing with joy from start to finish. The only thing I remember is it all happened so fast that I find myself lying on the floor saying, "more, more, more." (Perhaps I was begging.)

We head back to Nevada on G-Force One, more exuberant than the start, high on adrenaline, talking about what happened with activities such as the human ball toss. One of us would roll into a fetal position and be tossed about the cabin. We laugh about how appreciative we are for those baggy flight suits, and are told by Dr. Diamandis that we are official Zeronauts. Only about 2,500 people

get that title, and I am immediately proud to be counted among them.

I head to my seat and belt up for landing. I look at Dr. Diamandis across the aisle. There is that vibrant smile and gleam in his eye. "Did you have fun?" he asks.

"Are you kidding me?" I say. "I had the adventure of my life." ■

Zero Gravity Offers Florida and Nevada Flights

Founded in 1993, Zero Gravity Corporation brings the excitement and adventure of weightlessness to the public through a safe, fun and cost-effective experience. ZERO-G is the first and only FAA-approved provider of commercial weightless flights for the general public, offering flights from Kennedy Space Center in Central Florida and McCarren International Airport in Las Vegas.

Since its launch in 2004, groups and top-tier consumer brands such as American Express, Hewlett-Packard, Google and Cadbury Schweppes have chartered Zero-G flights. At \$3,500 per seat, flights can be rewards, incentives, celebrations and even revenue sources for charitable organizations. For example, In April 2007, ZERO-G flew Professor Stephen Hawking, the world's leading expert in gravity, aboard G-Force One to raise funds for Easter Seals, the Starlight Starbright Children's Foundation, the X PRIZE Foundation and Augie's Quest.

In 2006, ZERO-G joined with Northrop Grumman, sponsor of the Weightless Flights of Discovery, an innovative science and engineering education program that incorporates zero-gravity flight experiences for teachers. In its inaugural year, the program hosted 250 teachers representing 49 states, five U.S. territories and 24 countries.

For more information, visit www.gozerog.com or call 800-937-6480.