

## Japanese startup unveils balloon flight space viewing tours



Keisuke Iwaya (L), CEO of a Japanese space development company, Iwaya Gikan, and Takayuki Hanasaka, JTB Senior Managing Executive Officer, pose for a photo after unveiling a two-seater cabin and a balloon that the company says is capable of rising to an altitude of 15 miles, which is roughly the middle of the stratosphere, as he speaks during a news conference in Tokyo.

● AP

A Japanese startup announced plans Tuesday to launch commercial space viewing balloon flights that it hopes will bring an otherwise astronomically expensive experience down to Earth.

Company CEO Keisuke Iwaya said passengers do not need to be billionaires, go through intense training or have the language skills needed to fly in a rocket, according to AP. "It's safe, economical and gentle for people," Iwaya told reporters. "The idea is to make space tourism for everyone." He said he wants to "democratize space."

The company, Iwaya Giken, based in Sapporo in northern Japan, has been working on the project since 2012 and says it has developed an airtight two-seat cabin and a balloon capable of rising up to an altitude of 25 kilometers (15 miles), where the curve of the Earth can be clearly viewed. While passengers won't be in outer space — the balloon only goes up to roughly the middle of the stratosphere — they'll be higher than a jet plane flies and have an unobstructed view of outer space.

The company teamed up with major Japanese travel agency JTB Corp., which announced plans to collaborate on the project when the company is ready for a commercial trip. Initially, a flight would cost about 24 million yen (\$180,000), but Iwaya said he aims to eventually bring it down to several million yen (tens of thousands of dollars). While Japanese space ventures have fallen behind U.S. companies like SpaceX, Iwaya said his aim is to make space more reachable.

## Iranians donated around \$0.5b to charity

People of Iran donated around half a billion dollars to the needy and help-seekers, announced the deputy of popular participation development of Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation (IKRF).

"On the whole, so far this year the charitable people have donated something around half a billion dollars to the needy and the poor," said Habibollah Asoudeh, according to ISNA.

Speaking at the 26th round of the scientific and promotional conference in honor of Zakat (a form of almsgiving by Muslims) in Alborz Province, he added, "Out of all the popular donations, more than half was collected by charity centers, and these very centers distributed the donations among the needy." He further stated that 10,000 li-

censed charity centers operate under the supervision of IKRF, half of which are based in mosques and distribute the popular help among their target groups. Asoudeh noted, "This year, \$87 million was directly paid to 420,000 parentless children."

He proclaimed that IKRF supports 2,500,000 families, and added, "Iranians helped around \$30,000 via IKRF's charity boxes."

The IKRF official then noted that people should become acquainted with the effects and benefits of zakat, which is of utmost help to the subsistence of the less fortunate in Iran.

"Seven percent of all the collected zakat is spent on construction projects and the rest is spent on the needy," he said.



## Venice canals run dry as low tide and lack of rain hit



● REUTERS

Weeks of dry winter weather have raised concerns that Italy could face another drought after last summer's emergency, with the Alps having received less

than half of their normal snowfall, according to scientists and environmental groups.

The warning comes as Venice, where flooding is normally the primary concern, faces unusually low tides that are making it impossible for gondolas, water taxis and ambulances to navigate some of its famous canals, the Guardian reported.

The problems in Venice are being blamed on a combination of factors — the lack of rain, a high pressure system, a full moon and sea currents.

Italian rivers and lakes are suffering from a severe lack of water, the Legambiente environmental group stated, with

attention focused on the north of the country.

The Po, Italy's longest river which runs from the Alps in the north-west to the Adriatic has 61 percent less water than normal at this time of year, it added in a statement.

In July last year, Italy suffered its worst drought for 70 years and declared a state of emergency in the areas surrounding the Po, which accounts for roughly a third of the country's agricultural production.

"We are in a water deficit situation that has been building up since the winter of 2020-2021," climate expert Massimiliano Pasqui from Italian scientific

research institute CNR told the press.

"We need to recover 500mm in the north-western regions: we need 50 days of rain," he said.

Water levels on Lake Garda in northern Italy have fallen to record lows, making it possible to reach the small island of San Biagio on the lake via an exposed pathway.

An anticyclone has been dominating the weather in western Europe for 15 days, bringing mild temperatures more normally seen in late spring.

Latest weather forecasts do however signal the arrival of much-needed precipitation and snow in the Alps in coming days.

### PIC OF THE DAY

Hassan Bigdeli is a farmer by day and an artist at night. Based out of Rostam Abad village in Ramhormoz County, he collects useless pieces of wood every day after his work to turn into useful artifacts, mainly classic items of village life, such as a plow.

● SEYYED KHALIL MOUSAVI/  
MEHR NEWS AGENCY



Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus  
@DrTedros

Concerned about ongoing tremors in #Türkiye and #Syria causing further deaths, injuries and trauma. @WHO teams are supporting health workers and mobile clinics in both countries with medical supplies so they can offer immediate care to everyone in need.

11:12 AM - Feb 21, 2023



United Nations  
@UN

Hate speech can take many different forms. But no matter what it looks like, hate speech has real consequences. Get ideas on how you can take action and say #NoToHate: [un.org/en/hate-speech/take-action/engage](https://un.org/en/hate-speech/take-action/engage)

11:32 AM - Feb 21, 2023



World Health Organization (WHO)  
@WHO

Working Group on Amendments to the International Health Regulations (2005) takes place from 24–20 February 2023.

Live broadcast here  
[www.who.int/news-room/events/detail/20/02/2023/default-calendar/second-meeting-of-the-working-group-on-amendments-to-the-international-health-regulations-2005](https://www.who.int/news-room/events/detail/20/02/2023/default-calendar/second-meeting-of-the-working-group-on-amendments-to-the-international-health-regulations-2005)

12:45 PM - Feb 21, 2023

