

YAHOO! TRAVEL

Five Miles Up with ... Sir Richard Branson

By [Bekah Wright](#) | [Compass](#) – 41 minutes ago

When requesting an interview with Sir Richard Branson, we were delighted by his suggestion – why not conduct it five miles up? We joined the Virgin Atlantic founder at [London's](#) Heathrow Airport for the inaugural flight of [Little Red](#), Virgin's first short-haul domestic arm to [Edinburgh, Scotland](#) (it also flies to [Manchester](#) and [Aberdeen](#)). What we learned during the flight? As souvenirs from vacations go, one of Branson's was particularly impressive – an airline. With that in mind, where would he like to travel next? Even higher. The best news – he's taking us with him.

What's something you never forget to pack in your suitcase?
My notebook, which I think I forgot and put in the hold, and my personal assistant, Helen. I can't do without a notebook. So many ideas come to me in a day and if I don't write them down I'll forget them. It's the only way I can keep myself organized. I like to make notes if I see something special. When my kids were smaller and said something fun, I'd write it down. Like my daughter, as she was sitting next to me at 9 years old, she told me, "Daddy, I know what sex is, and since I have a younger brother, I know that you and mummy have done it twice."

Carry-on or check-in?

I'm a carry-on sort of person, but I have to remember to leave those big things they keep stealing off me as I come through security behind. I like to move quickly. I don't like to wait for my bags.

Window or aisle?

As you may have heard, we're trying to put glass bottoms on our planes, so if you're sitting on the aisle, you can actually have as good a view as sitting at the window. I like the window so I can get a good view of the world.

You have one trip left in your lifetime, where will it be?

Into space.

Are you going alone, or can we come with you?

You can come with me to space from the end of this year. Virgin Galactic is almost there. It's taken us slightly longer than we'd hoped to get here. The spaceport is finished. The mother ship is finished. The spaceship's finished. In two week's time I go to the Mojave Desert for the first rocket test in the air, and then within months we'll be up and testing in space. It's all about to happen; it's very exciting.

What do you consider the perfect vacation?

I'm very lucky. I sort of live in the place that I also like to go on vacation to -- [Necker Island](#), a beautiful (British Virgin) island in the Caribbean. We also share it with other people, so I get to meet an awful lot of people as they rent or come and stay on the island. We don't just rent it exclusively. We have weeks where couples can come. People have an absolute blast there. Everybody gets to know each other. It's not like a hotel where everybody sits at separate tables and after the first years of married life don't know what the hell they're going to talk to each other about. Everybody mixes and has a good time.

Necker is great, but we've also created a number of lovely little places around the world, which are our homes, which we share. We have the beautiful Ulusaba Private Game Reserve (in [South Africa's](#) Subi Sand Reserve). We have lovely places outside [Morocco's](#) Atlas Mountains, Kasbah Tamadot (in Asni), and a ski lodge in [Verbier, Switzerland](#), where I've just come from, The Lodge. I love traveling. We try to create places for people to go to where we can protect the environment.

What's something unique you've brought back from your travels?

Once, when flying from [Puerto Rico](#) to the [Virgin Islands](#), we got bumped because the airline we were booked on decided they didn't have enough passengers. So I went to the back of the airport, made a couple of calls and managed to hire a plane. I made a sign that said, Virgin Airlines – One-way to the Virgin Islands. I walked around to all the people who'd been bumped and filled up my first plane. When I came back, I rang up Boeing and asked, "Have you got any 747s to sell?" They said, "What did you say your company was called?" I said, "Virgin. We've got the Sex Pistols and the Rolling Stones (as passengers)." Rather jokingly they said, "As long as, with a name like Virgin, your airline goes the whole way, we'll be happy to send one over to you."

Any travel regrets?

I tried to fly around the world in a balloon. At 18 days in the air, we hit a blanket of cold air up the American coast and we couldn't get our balloon through it. Regretted not going the whole way, but the good thing was, we managed to land the balloon within helicopter reach of [Hawaii](#), so we got rescued and were fortunate to get out of there. In the end, we were pleased to be home with our families for Christmas.



(Photo: Virgin Atlantic)


Ever eaten anything during your travels you wish you hadn't?


As a young man, I went to [Tokyo](#) and had never eaten raw fish before. I remember sitting there with seven Japanese businessmen waiting for me to finish my sushi. It was a painful, painful meal. Now I actually love sushi, but at the time, I couldn't understand why they didn't cook their fish.


Where would you take someone visiting your hometown?

I don't have too much trouble. My home is Necker Island and it's the most beautiful place in the world. Generally, the difficulty is asking people to leave. I try to get rid of the men and keep the women, but that doesn't seem to work, so we have to get rid of everybody.

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