

# BUZZ ALDRIN

## FROM THE MOON TO THE MALDIVES

*Former astronaut and one of the first men to walk on the moon Buzz Aldrin, we speak about space tourism, Mars and the new Private Reserve in Gili Lankanfushi in the Maldives.*

### **How do you explain our fascination with space?**

We are explorers. We are destined to go beyond our normal boundaries. Why do we climb the highest mountain? Why did we learn to fly? Why did we go to the moon six times? I believe we will eventually have interstellar travel. I wrote about that in my book, *Encounter with Tiber*. We've been writing about it for centuries. We are curious creatures.

### **Tell us about why space is so important?**

By venturing into space we improve life for everyone here on

Earth. The scientific advancements and innovations that come from space-based research create products and technology that we use in our daily lives, for example cell phones, television, GPS and medical advances. Many of these advances wouldn't have been possible or as successful without investments in the space programme. Professor Stephen Hawking recently said, and I quote,

*"We have made remarkable progress in the last hundred years, but if we want to continue, our future is in space."*

### **There's a lot of talk about Mars at the moment. Is inhabiting Mars a good idea?**

It's humanity's mission to continue the human race as a two planet species. It's a habitable place and I envision thousands of permanent settlers there. I call them human Martians because that's what they'll be when we eventually colonise and settle there. The President who makes the commitment to a permanent presence on Mars will go down as the most important leader in human history. I think that would be a much more important achievement than our moon landings. I believe we can do it and I hope the next President will make



this commitment. The USA should be the leader in missions to Mars. We have the most knowledge and expertise, but Mars missions will be an international endeavour. No one nation can do it alone. This will involve cooperation with China and other nations. The kids book I wrote, *Welcome to Mars: Making a Home on the Red Planet*, published by National Geographic, teaches kids of all ages about Mars and what it would take to do a mission to Mars. Teaching kids of today about Mars is important because they are the generation that will be carrying out Mars missions in the 2030s and 2040s.

**What do you think about space tourism?**

I have been a space tourism advocate since 1985. I feel space is for everyone, not just governments or the wealthy who can afford to pay for suborbital flights or trips to the International Space Station. Three years ago I was asked to be the AXE Apollo Space Ambassador for their competition to give away 22 flights to people from all over the world, which I was happy to be involved in. I don't think space tourism is a gimmick. It's reality and will happen. I started my ShareSpace Foundation with the idea of sharing space with everyone. Originally the ShareSpace Foundation was about giving average people the a chance to go to space, but now that many companies are offering ways for people to do suborbital flights, ShareSpace is about inspiring children to realise their passion for science, technology, engineering, art and maths.

**You accomplished a lot during your space years, which includes Gemini and Apollo missions and being one of the very first men to walk on the Moon. Is there anything you regret about your space career?**

I regret that I didn't speak up about the manoeuvring unit I trained on for my Gemini mission. They cancelled that part of my mission because they felt it



was too dangerous. This unit is like the one you saw George Clooney zooming around on in the movie *Gravity*. I was supposed to be the first to use that and I was very confident in my ability.

**Where have you gained inspiration during your life?**

I was inspired by my father who was an aviation pioneer, and another aviation pioneer Jimmy Doolittle became a sort of mentor to me, especially after my father passed away. More than anything I've been inspired by service to my country, both as a fighter pilot in the Korean War and in the Gemini and Apollo space programmes.

**What has your life been like since you retired from NASA?**

I took an oath to serve my country at West Point at the age of 17. I still live my life by those principals of 'duty, honour and country' today. After returning from the moon I wrote a biography, *Return to Earth*, because what was difficult for me was not going to the moon, but figuring out what to do with my life after I'd achieved what most people would consider the pinnacle of my career. My marriage and family life struggled and I was suffering from depression and alcoholism. But I got some help and figured out what I needed to do to keep myself moving forward. I quit drinking, and today I have 37 years of sobriety. I focused on my passion — space — and began putting my energy and efforts into the future and turned my life back around. Did my space experienc-





es give me financial wealth? Not really. I wasn't paid anything extra to go to the moon, only my standard military pay. But I have my family, my friends and my team and they help me to live the life today that I do, working on my passion of space and doing my favourite thing on this planet: scuba diving. So I guess you could say I'm a wealthy guy in terms of living the life I want and keeping myself active.

**Are there any parallels with scuba diving and being in space?**

Since I was already a scuba diver when I became an astronaut, I became the first to train underwater, to simulate the weightlessness of space to train for my Gemini 12 mission. The astronauts who had already done spacewalks were having trouble, getting overheated and trying to force things, but I knew that it would be just like being in the water, where it's more like floating. Scuba diving in the ocean has a similar freedom to being in space.

**Where are your favourite places in the world to dive?**

I still have a few places in the world I'd like to dive, such as Costa Rica and Fiji. I've dived many places around the world and I particularly like the Cayman Islands, although my favourite for now is a spot in the Maldives.

**We hear you stayed at the world's largest overwater villa in the Maldives. What was your experience like?**

It's always wonderful coming to the Maldives, but staying in the private reserve at Gili Lankanfushi is an extra special experience. We're lucky and get to stay in Gili Lankanfushi's 'jewel in the crown' — their 1,700 square metre Private Reserve villa. It's so incredibly huge, I even get peace and quiet from my family, as and when that's needed too! You couldn't ask for more privacy and the service is exceptional. I like that my family can stay in one place all together, but have private areas too. The resort is the perfect family setting. You're far away from distractions and you get to enjoy this beautiful place; it's a unique place to build long lasting memories. I've dived a few times at Gili Lankanfushi and think it has the most schools of fish I've seen anywhere. You also get to see mantas and sharks and don't have to go down deep.

**What do you want to be remembered for?**

I want to be remembered for more than kicking up dust on the moon. I want people to know that this lucky tow head kid, who grew up in New Jersey and who was lucky enough to walk on the moon, is still here planning Mars missions! I believe it will happen. I may not be around to see the first Mars landing, but I want to lay the groundwork to make it happen. You ain't seen nothing yet!

WORDS BY: SASHA ARMS



