

BBC Learning English
6 Minute English
17 January 2013
One-way ticket to Mars



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- Callum:** Hello I'm Callum and this is 6 Minute English. With me today is Jennifer, hello Jennifer.
- Jennifer:** Hello Callum.
- Callum:** Do you like to travel?
- Jennifer:** Oh yes, I love going to new and interesting places.
- Callum:** What do you think of the idea of travelling to another planet?
- Jennifer:** Erm, not quite so keen on the idea of going to another planet.
- Callum:** What about a one-way trip to Mars?
- Jennifer:** You do mean the planet Mars? Go to Mars and never come back?
- Callum:** Yes.
- Jennifer:** What are you saying? Are you trying to get rid of me?
- Callum:** No, no, not at all. But this is what is being planned at the moment by a company in the Netherlands. They are planning to send people to Mars and the people who go would never be able to come back to Earth.
- Jennifer:** Sounds like quite a trip!
- Callum:** Well before we learn more about it, here's a question for you, about the planet Mars. How big is Mars compared to Earth? Is it bigger, about the same size or smaller than Earth?
- Jennifer:** I think I can remember this from school. I'm going to say it's smaller than the Earth.
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Callum: OK. We'll find out if you're right at the end of the programme. But now, let's hear about this scheme. What is interesting about it is the idea that this would be a one-way trip. Bas Lansdorp is head of the Mars-One project and he explains why this will be a one-way trip. What reason does he give?

Bas Lansdorp, head of the Mars-One project:

On this world we have all the technology we need to get humans to Mars and keep them alive there. What we don't have is the technology to get people from Mars back to Earth. The people who will be going to Mars in our missions will be settling on Mars permanently. They'll be doing it for the rest of their lives.

Callum: Jennifer, why is this a one-way trip?

Jennifer: He says it's about technology. Although we do have the knowledge and technology to get people to Mars, we can't get them back – so any trip would be permanent, would be forever.

Callum: That's a big commitment, isn't it? But I imagine there will be people who will jump at the opportunity.

Jennifer: I'm sure there will be, but what kind of person are they going to recruit for this 'trip of a lifetime'?

Callum: Well here's Bas again, talking about just that. What three qualities does he mention?

Bas Lansdorp, head of the Mars-One project:

We need the best of the best. We need first of all, of course, smart people, healthy people. They need to be mentally very stable.

Callum: So he needs the best of the best, but what are the three particular qualities he mentions the best of the best need to have?

Jennifer: He wants smart people, which means clever, intelligent people. As well as that, they need to be healthy both physically and mentally. As well as that, I guess he's going to need people with very specific skills.

Callum: You would think so, but Bas thinks there is something more important. What's that?

Bas Lansdorp, head of the Mars-One project:

What I initially thought is that they would be doctors, pilots, engineers. But this is actually not the case. The thing that's important, the most important quality for our candidates is character. You need to be the kind of person who other people want to be stranded with on an uninhabited island.

Callum: What does he think is more important than having appropriate technical skills?

Jennifer: Character. You need to have the right personality. He compares it to being stranded on an uninhabited island. You have to be someone that other people would want to be stranded with.

Callum: I think that has to be very important. Can you imagine being stuck on another planet for your whole life with someone you couldn't stand?

Jennifer: That would be terrible.

Callum: As well as having a good character there are some other important qualities they are looking for. Here's Bas again:

Bas Lansdorp, head of the Mars-One project:

You need to be calm and inventive. You need to be someone who is at their best when the situation is at its worst.

Callum: Jennifer, what other characteristics is he looking for?

Jennifer: He needs people who can still work well when things are bad. People who are calm in a crisis. As he says, people who are best when the situation is worst.

Callum: So from what you've heard, does it sound like the job for you?

Jennifer: Absolutely not. I don't mind travelling but I think it's a bit far for me. And what about you?

Callum: No, no it's not for me, I have to say. I'm not made of the right stuff. I don't think I'm the kind of person anyone would want to be stuck with!

Jennifer: I was wondering how they were going to pay for all of this, after all, it's not a government programme is it?

Callum: A very good question. Here's Bas:

Bas Lansdorp, head of the Mars-One project:

We plan to finance this by involving the whole world as an audience. You just had the London Olympics right there in Britain. And the Olympics had a revenue of more than three billion US dollars in the three weeks that it lasts. When people land on Mars we expect that even more people will watch this than the London Olympics. And also in the years after that they will watch as the base grows, as people start relations, end relations. Maybe at some point there will be the first Mars baby, this will be a, really the next giant leap of mankind.

Callum: So where is the money coming from?

Jennifer: Television. It sounds like a big reality TV show to me. He mentions that the Olympics raised a lot of money from people watching on television and this will be the same. He thinks there will be a big audience to tune in and watch the mission but also the relationships between the people on the mission and perhaps even the birth of the first Mars baby.

Callum: Would you watch it?

Jennifer: Definitely, yeah, it would be fascinating viewing. How about you?

Callum: You know what, I probably would. I'm not usually a fan of reality TV but this is something different. I would probably get bored very easily though.

Well, that's all we have time for today. But before we go though, the answer to this week's question. How big is Mars compared to Earth, Jennifer, you said?

Jennifer: I said it was smaller.

Callum: Well done that is the right answer. Mars is, has about half the diameter of the Earth. Well that's all from us for this week. Thanks very much Jennifer, goodbye.

Jennifer: Goodbye.

Vocabulary and definitions

a one-way journey	a trip from which you don't return immediately, or in this case, at all
to settle (somewhere)	to be the first people to establish a community in a new place
Permanently	forever
to jump at the opportunity (to do something)	to be very enthusiastic about doing something
Smart	clever, intelligent
to be stranded (somewhere)	to be unable to leave a place
an uninhabited island	an island where nobody lives
to finance (something)	to raise the money to make something possible
reality TV	a form of television show where people are filmed while living their lives, often in unusual places and situations

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<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-18506033>

Mars-one website

<http://mars-one.com>

Read and listen to the story online:

http://www.bbclearningenglish.com/general/sixminute/2013/01/130117_6min_one_way_mars.shtml