

# Mission to Mars, 2040

By Tom Jolly

Penny Wordsworth, a reporter for Space Travel News Weekly, sat across from the NASA Mars Mission Director, Dr. Joseph Jones. The walls around them were covered with launch photos from the glory days of NASA; the Shuttles, Saturn V's, Titans, and Atlases. Penny had taken the time to look at them the first few times she was there, waiting for the Director. Now they were just wallpaper for her. "What have you got for me this week, Dr. Jones?" she asked.

"Well, Ms. Wordsworth, we got our final budget numbers on the 2040 Mars Mission last year. They look pretty good."

Penny blinked. "That's news?"

The Director nodded. "You bet. You might remember that back in the late 80's, the estimated cost to fund a mission to Mars was about \$450 billion. When we finally adopted the Mars Direct mission architecture during the 2010's, we were able to get the cost estimate down to \$50 billion."

"Impressive."

"Indeed. And our actual final mission costs for the 2040 mission were under three hundred million dollars!"

"Wow," Penny said, "I guess that is news. Do you have a copy of the budget?"

"I do." Director Jones pulled out a flimsy. "Here you go."

"Still using paper, I see," Penny commented. She scanned over the single sheet. The first item on the sheet said;

1. Mars Mission Profile studies; \$110.5 million. Subcontract to VLAG.

"So the Very Large Aerospace Group developed the mission profile?" Penny asked.

"Yes. It was a sole-source contract. They were really the only ones left with the experience to put the mission together."

Penny raised her eyebrows, then went back to the budget sheet.

2. Buy 4 tickets on the SpaceX Marsline. - \$4 million

3. Astronaut training – included with ticket cost, ref item 2.
4. Suitcases - \$2 million

“Two million for suit cases?” Penny exclaimed.

The Director shrugged. “They’re built to NASA Tech Standards. You know, lots of rugged testing and stuff. And studies.”

“Uh huh.” She kept reading.

5. Overnight at the Bigelow Historical Space Station Hotel and Orbiting Museum - \$40,000
6. Travel to Mars – see item 2.
7. Landing on Mars – see item 2.
8. Falcon’s Rest Hotel, 2 weeks - \$560,000.
9. Hotel incidentals - \$24,050.

“Incidentals?” Penny asked.

“Bar tab.”

“Ah.” She kept reading.

10. Rover rental, 2 weeks - \$120,000
  11. Space suit rentals, 2 weeks - \$112,000
  12. Entrance fee to Frank’s Fabulous Fossil Field - \$50,000
  13. Return flight to Earth – see item 2.
  14. Extra bag fees for Martian sample return - \$200.
  15. 100% Mission Success Bonus for VLAG - \$110.5 million.
- Total: \$227,906,250

“Not bad.” Penny commented. “You could have saved a few bucks at the Blue Origins Bed and Breakfast, or Li Wang’s Red Palace. Or even gone roughing it with one of the inflatable habs that Bigelow rents out.”

The director shook his head. “Only the best for our astronauts.”

“Tourists,” Penny mumbled.

“What?”

“Nothing. That’s quite a bonus for VLAG for mission success,” Penny said.

“Hey, they deserved it,” the Director said. “We couldn’t have done it without their expertise.”

END

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