

ESA astronaut arrives at the ISS



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After two days onboard a Soyuz spacecraft, ESA astronaut Thomas Pesquet, along with NASA astronaut Peggy Whitson and Roscosmos commander Oleg Novitsky, has docked with the International Space Station!

The Soyuz design of spacecraft has been in use for almost 50 years, but it has recently been upgraded. Thomas is the first ESA astronaut to fly inside this latest version! For the crew, the journey was like spending two days inside a small car – although with a spectacular view out of the window! They kept in radio contact with ground control in Moscow.

After docking with the International Space Station, the hatch was opened and Thomas, Peggy and Oleg were welcomed aboard by NASA astronaut Shane Kimbrough and cosmonauts Andrei Borisenko and Sergei Ryzhikov. The six of them will now work together to keep the Station running smoothly.



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Thomas's mission is called Proxima, and will last for six months. During this time he will be working on around 50 scientific experiments for ESA and France's CNES space agency. But the first few weeks will be spent getting used to weightlessness! During this time Thomas's body will adapt to these new and unusual conditions. His spine will grow longer, and his bones will get weaker. Lots of exercise and food supplements will help him to keep in shape though.

After their six months are up, Thomas, Peggy and Oleg will once again board a Soyuz but this time will be heading in the opposite direction: back to Earth! The plan is for them to land in Kazakhstan, where helicopters will be sent to meet them. Meanwhile, ESA astronaut Paolo Nespoli is readying himself for launch in 2017 shortly after Thomas returns!

Cool fact: Thomas's mission, Proxima, is named after the star closest to the Sun. It is tradition to name missions with French astronauts after stars and constellations.

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