

Astronaut Alexander Gerst reaches for new horizons



Alexander rehearsing for his mission
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ESA astronaut Alexander Gerst is getting ready for his mission to the International Space Station! Scheduled for lift-off on 6 June, Alexander will be travelling into space inside a Soyuz capsule with fellow explorers, Russian cosmonaut Sergei Prokopyev and US astronaut Serena Auñón-Chancellor. He will be spending six months onboard the Station, conducting lots of exciting research experiments.

Alexander is an experienced astronaut who has been into space before. From May to November 2014 he was onboard the International Space Station for the Blue Dot mission. Since his return he has been training for his next adventure.



Alexander's Horizons mission logo
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His new mission is called Horizons, and it has a special logo with different symbols to represent Alexander's second trip into space. The logo includes a human face looking upwards, a thin blue line for Earth's atmosphere, and the International Space Station's orbit around Earth! Alexander is looking forward to his return to space. He says: "I can hardly wait to see the Space Station again, which became a second home for me in 2014."

The Horizons mission will see Alexander use the weightless conditions onboard the Station to investigate the human body, biology, radiation, and to test new technologies. This will help us to understand more about our home planet, and the Universe in which we all live. As Alexander himself explains, "Seen from a distance our planet is just a blue dot, a fragile spaceship for humankind. We need to understand the Universe we live in to protect our home."



A veteran astronaut, Alexander visited the International Space Station in 2014
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During his stay onboard the Station, Alexander will also be responsible for keeping the other crew members happy and working efficiently, checking that everything is safe, and following instructions given by the flight director at Mission Control on Earth. Horizons will be a challenging mission, but one that Alexander is well prepared for.

If you want to keep up to date with Alexander's mission and hear about it in his own words, you can follow his blog here: <http://blogs.esa.int/alexander-gerst/>

Would you like to travel to the International Space Station? What kind of experiments would you want to conduct?

Cool fact: From September, Alexander will be the Commander of the International Space Station – only the second time a European astronaut has had that role!