

ESA astronaut Thomas Pesquet begins his second mission to the International Space Station



Liftoff for the Falcon 9 rocket and Crew Dragon spacecraft taking ESA astronaut Thomas Pesquet, NASA astronauts Megan McArthur and Shane Kimbrough, and Japanese astronaut Aki Hoshide to the International Space Station. Copyright: ESA - S. Corvaja

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Roaring into space onboard a high-tech Crew Dragon spacecraft, ESA astronaut Thomas Pesquet has now boarded the International Space Station to begin his mission, called Alpha! Travelling with Thomas were NASA astronauts Megan McArthur and Shane Kimbrough, and JAXA (Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency) astronaut Akihiko Hoshide.

The Crew Dragon craft is very new. In fact, Thomas is the first ESA astronaut to fly to space in any vehicle other than the Russian Soyuz or the US Space Shuttle. He is also the first ESA astronaut to launch into space from Florida, USA, in over a decade. He is a veteran of space travel though, beginning his first mission to the International Space Station in 2016, launching from Kazakhstan on a Soyuz. Called Proxima, that mission was a great success. It even broke records for the amount of time spent on science experiments!



A spectacular view of Thomas' Falcon 9 rocket and Crew Dragon spacecraft, taken shortly after liftoff. Copyright: ESA - S. Corvaja

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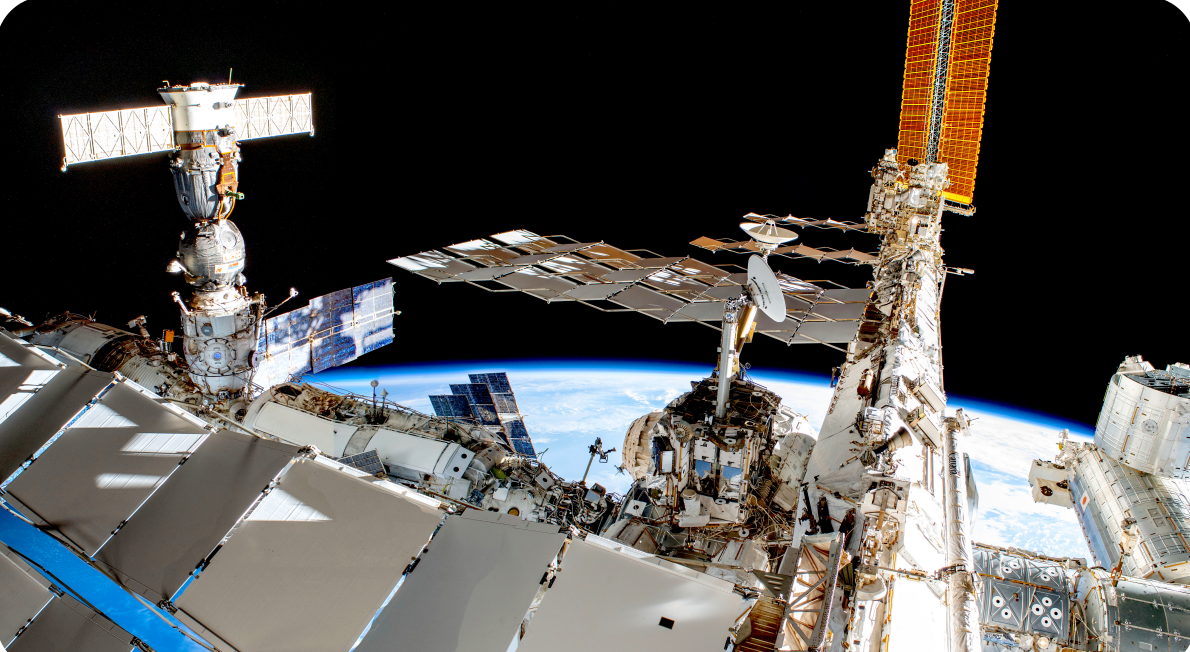
For Alpha, everything is set to be bigger and better! The new Crew Dragon has room for four astronauts at a time, rather than the three spaces in a Soyuz, allowing for more people to live and work on the International Space Station, doing more research for scientists back on Earth. This is good news, as over 200 experiments are planned during Thomas' time in space. 40 of these are European, with 12 being led by CNES, the space agency of Thomas' home country - France.



Thomas Pesquet admiring the view during his journey to the International Space Station! Copyright: ESA/NASA-T. Pesquet

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Thomas does not have much time to settle in before things will get busy! A Russian laboratory module is set to arrive this summer, along with a European robotic arm. The robotic arm will offer more flexibility in how the crew can keep up with maintenance of the International Space Station, and it will be used to support astronauts on spacewalks as they work outside the Station in the vacuum of space. Thomas will help to set up the arm and get it ready for use.



The International Space Station will be Thomas' home for the next six months. Copyright: L. Brandon-Cremer

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Thomas' Alpha mission is scheduled to end in October. Towards the end of his time on the International Space Station he will be taking on the Commander role, overseeing activity on board. One of his duties will be to welcome a new arrival: ESA astronaut Matthias Maurer, on his first flight to space!

To stay up-to-date with the Alpha mission, follow [@esaspaceflight](#) on Twitter, and ESA's exploration blog via <https://blogs.esa.int/exploration/category/astronauts/thomas-pesquet/>!

Cool fact: Thomas' journey, from lift-off to docking with the International Space Station, took around 23 hours.