

ESA astronaut Samantha Cristoforetti arrives at the International Space Station to begin her Minerva mission



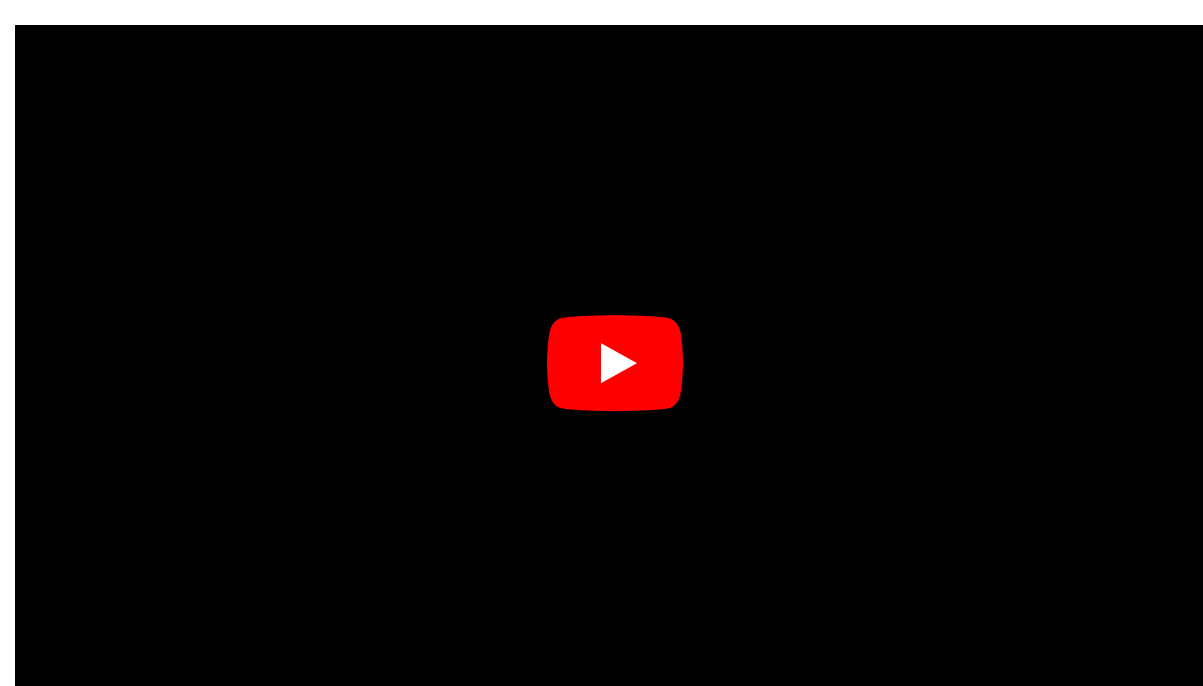
Samantha Cristoforetti is an experienced ESA astronaut. Copyright: ESA-A. Coniglio

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On Wednesday 27 April 2022, a SpaceX Crew Dragon spacecraft called Freedom blasted off from NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida, USA. On board was Italian ESA astronaut Samantha Cristoforetti and her NASA colleagues Kjell Lindgren, Robert Hines, and Jessica Watkins. These explorers travelled all the way into orbit around Earth and have now docked with the International Space Station! They were welcomed by the current crew, which includes fellow ESA astronaut Matthias Maurer.

Samantha is an experienced astronaut, having travelled to space in 2014 for a mission called Futura. Her current mission is called [Minerva](#), after the ancient Roman goddess of wisdom, handicrafts, and arts. It was chosen to thank the men and women all around the world that make spaceflight possible through their skills. The goddess Minerva was also known to be tough, disciplined, and wise, which are traits we need to adventure into space!



Samantha is now in charge of the United States Orbital Segment, which includes the US, European, Japanese, and Canadian modules and components of the International Space Station. She will certainly be kept busy with these duties over the coming five months, as well as helping with over 35 European and many more international experiments in orbit. Says Samantha, “the experiments we support in orbit enhance understanding across all scientific disciplines for better lives on Earth and more sustainable exploration beyond our planet.”



The Minerva mission patch. Can you see the owl? Copyright: ESA-K.Oldenburg

The Minerva mission has its own special patch, which is like a logo. Can you see that it looks a little bit like an owl? That is because the goddess Minerva was often seen with her sacred owl! The patch's owl has a yellow Moon as its eye, and its body is waves of blue reaching up to the sky and space. The mission name Minerva also has a secret meaning: it stands for **Marvel Inspiration Nourishment Exploration Research Voyage Adventure!**

If you would like to stay up-to-date with Minerva, Samantha will be posting news on [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#), and [TikTok](#).



Can you see Samantha in this picture, training for her launch into space? Copyright: NASA/SpaceX

Cool fact: Samantha celebrated her 45th birthday on 26 April – the day before the launch! She was in quarantine to make sure she did not get ill before her mission began, but she still