

Soyuz Launches New Crew Into Space

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The Soyuz-FG rocket booster launching the Soyuz TMA-05M craft into space from Kazakhstan's Baikonur cosmodrome early Sunday.

A Soyuz aircraft carrying astronauts from three different countries blasted into space atop a powerful booster rocket for a two-day ride to the International Space Station on Sunday.

Liftoff from Kazakhstan's Baikonur cosmodrome took place at 8:40 a.m. local time (6:40 a.m. Moscow time), exactly on schedule. Federal Space Agency head Vladimir Popovkin said the launch went smoothly and that the astronauts were doing well, Interfax reported.

Russian cosmonaut Yury Malenchenko, NASA astronaut Sunita Williams and Japan's Akihito Hoshide looked relaxed on televised footage during liftoff, The Associated Press reported, and the crew knew they had escaped Earth's gravity when a toy doll given to Malenchenko from his daughter floated out of camera view.

The 49-year-old Malenchenko is the most experienced space traveller in the group, with a total of 514 days in space. During the current mission he will perform a fifth career spacewalk, adding seven hours to his more than 24 already spent in open space.

Williams, an Indian-American Navy pilot, holds the record for longest-duration space flight among female astronauts for her 195-day stint in space in 2006 and 2007.

The craft is scheduled to dock at the space station Tuesday at 8:52 a.m., where they will join Russian cosmonauts Gennady Padalka and Sergei Revin and U.S. astronaut Joseph Acaba.

The crew is in for a busy few weeks, as starting next week nine craft will dock with the space station over a 17-day period.

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