

Russian Cosmonauts Land After 166-Day Mission

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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NASA astronaut Cassidy, at left, sitting with Russians Vinogradov, center, and Misurkin after landing Thursday. **Bill Ingalls**

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — Two Russian cosmonauts and a U.S. astronaut left the International Space Station on Tuesday, leaving a skeleton crew to maintain the outpost until replacements arrive later this month.

Outgoing station commander Pavel Vinogradov, NASA astronaut Christopher Cassidy and Russian cosmonaut Alexander Misurkin bid their crewmates goodbye and climbed aboard their Russian Soyuz capsule to prepare for a 3 1/2-hour flight back to Earth after 166 days in orbit.

"The time has gone by so incredibly fast," Cassidy said during an in-flight interview last week.

"It'll be really sad to leave. This is an incredible experience ... but by the same token, I'm ready to go. It's time for some other people to come ... and I'm really excited to go back and see my friends and family."

Before leaving, Vinogradov, a veteran of three spaceflights, transferred command of the \$100 billion station, a project of 15 nations, to fellow cosmonaut Fyodor Yurchikhin, who remains aboard with Italian astronaut Luca Parmitano and NASA's Karen Nyberg.

Strapped inside their Soyuz capsule, Vinogradov, Cassidy and Misurkin pulled away from the station's Poisk module at 11:35 p.m. GMT as the two ships sailed 415 kilometers above Mongolia, NASA mission commentator Brandi Dean said.

Three hours later, the Soyuz hit the top of Earth's atmosphere. The final leg of the journey took place under parachutes, with the capsule finally coming to a stop on the steppes of Kazakhstan at 2:58 a.m. GMT.

A replacement space station crew is due to launch Sept. 25.

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