

Expedition 10 Space Station crew undocks, heads for Earth

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Commander and NASA ISS Science Officer Leroy Chiao and Flight Engineer Salizhan Sharipov, the 10th crew of the International Space Station, undocked their Soyuz spacecraft at 2:45 p.m. EDT Sunday, beginning their return home after more than six months in space. Landing is scheduled for 6:08 p.m. EDT in the steppes of Kazakhstan.

Image: A view of the Space Station from the Soyuz shortly after undocking. Credit: NASA

With them was European Space Agency Astronaut Roberto Vittori of Italy, who came to the Station with the Expedition 11 crew and spent

eight days doing experiments. He was aboard under a contract between ESA and the Russian Federal Space Agency.

Sharipov undocked the spacecraft manually as a precautionary measure to conserve energy. Although the back up battery charge is thought to be adequate if it were required for the undocking, it has shown signs of a reduced charge since the Soyuz relocation in November. The primary battery is fully operational, but in order to ensure adequate battery power for normal and contingency operations, Sharipov delayed the switch to internal Soyuz power until just before undocking.

Chiao and Sharipov launched from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan last Oct. 13 at 11:06 p.m. EDT, in the same Soyuz spacecraft that is bringing them home. During their increment they performed two spacewalks, continued station maintenance activities and performed scientific experiments.

Before closing the Soyuz hatches Sunday they said farewell to the Expedition 11 crew, Commander Sergei Krikalev and NASA ISS Science Officer John Phillips. They launched with Vittori from Baikonur April 14 at 8:46 p.m. EDT to begin their six-month stay in space.

Source: NASA

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