

# Europe's Venus Express is ready for launch

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The European Space Agency is set to launch its Venus Express spacecraft in the first mission to the nearest planet to the Earth's in a decade.

The robotic craft is scheduled to lift off on a Russian Soyuz rocket from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan at 10:33 p.m. EST Wednesday. It will take Venus Express about five months to reach the planet and enter polar orbit.

The Paris-based ESA says Venus Express is to orbit the planet for about 500 Earth days to study Venus's atmosphere, which has experienced runaway greenhouse warming, the BBC reported, noting scientists hope the information gathered will shed more light on the mechanisms of climate change on our own world.

Venus is often called Earth's evil twin since it's nearly identical in size to Earth, and is believed to have a similar composition. But a dense and largely carbon dioxide, atmosphere envelops Venus, trapping incoming solar radiation to heat the planet's surface to an average temperature of 872 degrees Fahrenheit.

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