

NASA to send speccraft to Pluto

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NASA is all set to launch its \$700-million New Horizons spacecraft from Cape Canaveral in Florida on a nearly nine-year journey to Pluto.

The New Horizons will be the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's first mission to an unexplored planet since 1977 when it is launched on Tuesday -- and will complete NASA's grand tour of all the planets in the solar system.

"This is the capstone of the missions to the planets that NASA has led since the 1960s," said Alan Stern, an astrophysicist with the Southwest Research Institute in Colorado, who is the principal investigator for the New Horizons mission.

For planetary scientists, understanding distant Pluto with its unique composition of rock and ice is key to answering questions about how planets formed, and why they formed where they did.

"Pluto is a treasure trove of scientific information waiting to be discovered," said Andrew Dantzler, director of NASA's Solar System Division.

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