

Expedition 13 crew heads back to Earth

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The International Space Station's Expedition 13 crew began the journey back to Earth Thursday, leaving the Expedition 14 crew in full command.

New station residents Commander Michael Lopez-Alegria and Flight Engineer Mikhail Tyurin officially took control of the orbiting station Wednesday during a formal change of command ceremony.

Expedition 13 Commander Pavel Vinogradov and Flight Engineer Jeff Williams left the space station at 5:53 p.m. EDT Thursday aboard a Soyuz spacecraft for the return to Earth, accompanied by U.S. space tourist Anousheh Ansari, who also ended her ISS visit. NASA officials said the spacecraft was to land in Kazakhstan at 9:14 p.m.

European Space Agency astronaut Thomas Reiter joined Expedition 14 after having been an Expedition 13 flight engineer since July. Lopez-Alegria and Tyurin are to stay in space six months, NASA said. Reiter is scheduled to return to Earth in December aboard Space Shuttle Discovery.

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