

Russian ship with tourist docks with space station: reports

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A Russian Soyuz capsule carrying second-time space tourist Charles Simonyi along with a US and a Russian astronaut docked Saturday at the International Space Station, media reports quoted the control centre near Moscow as saying.

Spokesman Valery Lyndin told Interfax news agency that checks would be made to ensure there were no leaks in the airlock between the capsule and the space station before the crews of the two vessels joined up.

He said the automatic docking procedure had not worked and the docking had been done manually, while adding that this was not exceptional.

He expected the Soyuz crew to enter the ISS around 1610 GMT, three hours after docking.

US software pioneer Simonyi, 60, is the first person to travel twice into space as a tourist, having paid 35 million dollars (28 million euros) for the voyage.

He previously travelled to the space station in April 2007, becoming one of a select group of wealthy civilians, most of them from the United States, to have pioneered [space tourism](#).

The professional spacemen on the flight are Russian Gennady Padalka, who is to become the space station's commander, and American Michael

Barratt, who takes over as flight engineer.

The launch comes as Moscow is doubling the number of manned space launches to meet the needs of the expanding space station, with a second launch due in May.

The head of Russian space agency Roskosmos, Anatoly Perminov, said that for a period it could be the last time a [space tourist](#) would be taken on board due to increased demand on the programme, but had high praise for Russian-US space cooperation.

Simonyi's trip to space was the seventh by a space tourist since the programme was launched by Roskosmos and US firm Space Adventures in 2001.

But plans to raise the number of crew for the ISS from three to six from May, meaning there will no longer be a spare seat for a tourist on future missions.

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