

Shuttle Discovery zooms toward space station

March 17 2009, By MARCIA DUNN , AP Aerospace Writer



The space shuttle Discovery and a seven member crew liftoff at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Fla. on Sunday, March 15, 2009. (AP Photo/Chris O'Meara)

(AP) -- With a kick of its rocket thrusters, space shuttle Discovery zoomed to the international space station Tuesday to deliver one last set of solar wings that should bring the orbiting complex to full power.

The 220-mile-high linkup was set to occur late in the afternoon.

As the [shuttle](#) pilots steered Discovery over its final 10-mile course, Mission Control informed the [space station](#) residents that visitors were

nearby: "Looks like your company is heading straight to you now."

"Fantastic," replied Mike Fincke, the space station's skipper. "That's excellent news. We'll be ready for them."

Discovery and its [crew](#) of seven have been circling Earth, slowly catching up with the space station, since Sunday night's launch. They're bringing two solar wings to be installed later this week; the electricity-producing panels will join six others already in place.

The 115-foot wings are folded on a framework that also holds a radiator. Altogether, the \$300 million segment is the last major American-made space station piece needed.

Discovery also is dropping off badly needed equipment for the space station's new water-recycling system - a spare urine processor and [iodine](#) flush to kill bacteria. NASA would like to have the system working before the crew at the orbiting outpost jumps from three to six at the end of May.

The system is designed to convert astronauts' urine and condensation into drinking water. It arrived in November.

The space station also is getting a new crew member, Koichi Wakata, who will become the first Japanese to live there. When the hatches between the spacecraft are opened, he will trade places with Sandra Magnus, who has been on board since the last shuttle visit in November.

Discovery will spend eight days at the space station, and its crew will perform three spacewalks. That's two days and one [spacewalk](#) less than originally planned. Shuttle launch delays cut the mission short, and Discovery needs to be gone so a Russian spacecraft can bring two fresh station crew members. That mission is set to begin late next week.

On the Net:

NASA: <http://spaceflight.nasa.gov>

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Citation: Shuttle Discovery zooms toward space station (2009, March 17) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-03-shuttle-discovery-space-station.html>

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