

Russian spacecraft with circus tycoon lands safely

October 11 2009, By DOUGLAS BIRCH , Associated Press Writer



This image provided by NASA shows the Soyuz TMA-14 spacecraft as it lands with Expedition 20 Commander Gennady Padalka, Flight Engineer Michael Barratt, and Canadian spaceflight participant Guy Laliberté near the town of Arkalyk, Kazakhstan on Sunday, Oct. 11, 2009. Padalka and Barratt are returning from six months onboard the International Space Station, along with Laliberté who arrived at the station on Oct. 2 with Expedition 21 Flight Engineers Jeff Williams and Maxim Suraev aboard the Soyuz TMA-16 spacecraft. (AP Photo/NASA - Bill Ingalls)

(AP) -- The Russian Soyuz capsule carrying Cirque du Soleil founder Guy Laliberte and two other space travelers landed safely in Kazakhstan

on Sunday, ending the entertainment tycoon's mirthful space odyssey.

Laliberte, who wore a bulbous clown nose during his stay aboard the [International Space Station](#), was extracted from the cramped Soyuz capsule Sunday morning following its landing in the steppes of northern Kazakhstan.

After the landing, he was carried from the capsule wearing the round red nose.

Laliberte returned with Russian cosmonaut Gennady Padalka and NASA astronaut Michael Barratt, re-entering the Earth's atmosphere several hours after their capsule left the International [Space](#) Station.

Valery Lyndin, spokesman for Russian mission control, said the capsule drifted by parachute to Earth at 10:32 a.m. local time.

Russian television showed pictures of Padalka sitting outside the spacecraft, scorched by the searing heat of re-entry, eating an apple and drinking tea as ground crew extracted the other space travelers from the capsule. All of the world's apple trees are descended from those that first grew in Kazakhstan.

Laliberte emerged later, wearing his red clown nose as he reclined in a chair set up near the [Soyuz capsule](#). Returning astronauts must rest after Soyuz landings in order to reacclimate to the Earth's gravity.

In another tradition, a Russian Orthodox priest was present for the landing.

Later, the space travelers were taken to an orange medical tent, Russian TV showed. Vitaly Davydov, deputy chief of Roscosmos, the Russian space agency, said all three of the space travelers were in good health

"and even better spirits," the Interfax news agency reported.

The three Soyuz crew members were expected to return by air to the cosmonaut training facility at Star City near Moscow shortly after 1:30 p.m. local time (0930GMT) Sunday.

While in space, Laliberte hosted an Oct. 9 global Web broadcast to promote his One Drop Foundation's crusade to preserve the world's water resources.

Former U.S. vice president Al Gore, U2 and Shakira were among the entertainers and activists who participated in the broadcast back on Earth, with participants appearing in 14 cities on five continents.

Laliberte paid US\$35 million (euro23.7 million) for his 10-day visit to the orbiting laboratory, becoming Canada's first space tourist.

The 50-year-old entrepreneur, born in Quebec, worked as an accordionist, stilt-walker and fire-breather before founding Cirque du Soleil in 1984, and is popularly known as the first clown in space.

Both Padalka and Barratt spent six months aboard the space station. A six-member crew remain aboard.

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