

Astronauts to carry Christmas cheer to ISS

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US astronaut Timothy Creamer (L) and Russian cosmonaut Oleg Kotov give a press conference at the Baikonur cosmodrome. Despite being separated from their families, astronauts heading to the International Space Station next week are excited to be spending Christmas in space, a crew member said Saturday.

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Invoking a famous cartoon shown in the United States during the holiday season, American astronaut Timothy Creamer said the crew would not let a trip to the cosmos spoil their mood and planned to exchange gifts as usual.

"There's a famous cartoon in the United States called 'The Grinch who Stole Christmas'," Creamer said.

"Part of the theme in that cartoon is that even if all the presents and all the trees and the decorations are stolen from the town, the town still celebrates Christmas with the spirit of Christmas."

Creamer, together with Japanese astronaut Soichi Naguchi and Russian [cosmonaut](#) Oleg Kotov, blast off on Monday from Russia's [Baikonur](#) cosmodrome, located in the barren Kazakh steppe.

After a two-day ascent to the space station, the astronauts will meet the two remaining members aboard the ISS just two days before Christmas, a welcome bit of holiday cheer for the bare bones crew.

The ISS, which orbits 350 kilometres (220 miles) above Earth, is a sophisticated platform for scientific experiments, helping test the effects of long-term space travel on humans, a must for any trip to distant Mars.

A huge new [solar array](#) was installed earlier this year to provide more power which, together with a newly installed European laboratory and a hi-tech Japanese lab, Kibo, has significantly boosted the station's capabilities.

Sitting next to Kotov, who waved to his seven-year-old son Dima from behind a sheet of plastic which keeps the crew quarantined from infection, Creamer said that the crew members were simply exchanging one family for another.

"So... there's a bit of bittersweetness because we're leaving our family and our close and bestest friends, but I also have to say that we are going as a family together to a family on the space station."

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