

Astronauts dock at International Space Station

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Top-bottom: Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency astronaut Soichi Noguchi, US astronaut Timothy J. Creamer and Russian cosmonaut Oleg Kotov wave before boarding a Soyuz TMA-17 spacecraft at Baikonur cosmodrome on December 20. A Russian rocket carrying three astronauts from Japan, Russia and the United States docked at the International Space Station Wednesday, the Russian flight control centre said.

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The [Soyuz rocket](#), which blasted off early Monday, docked at 1:48 am Moscow time (2248 GMT Tuesday), an official from the centre said in a report by the Interfax news agency.

It left from Russia's [Baikonur cosmodrome](#) in the barren Kazakh steppe carrying Soichi Noguchi of Japan, US astronaut Timothy Creamer and Russian cosmonaut Oleg Kotov.

The crew will now spend six months in orbit, during which time they will celebrate Christmas and ring in the new year.

The expedition has several technical goals including completing a new viewing platform for the station which will provide a 360 degree view of the heavens and bring the station another step closer to completion.

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.

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