

Shuttle Endeavour undocks from space station

February 20 2010, By MARCIA DUNN , AP Aerospace Writer



This image provided by NASA shows an orbital sunrise is featured in this image photographed by Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency astronaut Soichi Noguchi, Expedition 22 flight engineer, from a window in the newly-installed Cupola of the International Space Station while space shuttle Endeavour remains docked with the station Thursday Feb. 18, 2010. A Russian Progress spacecraft, docked to the Pirs Docking Compartment, is visible at right. (AP Photo/NASA)

(AP) -- Shuttle Endeavour departed the International Space Station on Friday night and headed home, leaving behind an outpost that is nearly complete and now has the best windows ever on the world.

The shuttle undocked as the two craft soared more than 200 miles above the Atlantic, just west of Africa's Western Sahara. The two crews spent 10 days together, working to install a new room, called Tranquility, and a domed [observation deck](#) the likes of which had never been seen before

in orbit.

The compartments represented the last of the space station's major building blocks.

Mission Control told the six shuttle astronauts that they've had "an absolutely awesome mission," but now it's time to say "goodbye station, hello, Earth!" Touchdown is set for late Sunday night in Florida.

"It's been good having you. Sorry to see you guys leave," space station resident Timothy "TJ" Creamer called out as Endeavour backed away.

"We're sorry to go," replied shuttle commander George Zamka. "Hope you get to enjoy Tranquility and the new view."

The seven windows in the space station's new lookout were shuttered before Endeavour's departure, to protect against thruster contamination. The shuttle astronauts took one last long look out those windows late Thursday before retreating back into their ship to prepare for the undocking.

Endeavour then took a slow lap around the orbiting complex for picture-taking.

"Godspeed guys," radioed the space station's skipper, Jeffrey Williams.

Early Saturday, the shuttle [astronauts](#) were going to pull out their long laser-tipped boom to inspect their ship for any signs of micrometeorite damage that might jeopardize Sunday night's re-entry.

Thanks to Endeavour and its crew, the space station is now 98 percent complete, with a mass of 800,000 pounds. The two new compartments - worth more than \$400 million - were supplied by the European Space

Agency.

Tranquility arrived empty but as of Friday night was already full of exercise and life-support equipment as well as a toilet. The station's water-recycling system - for converting astronauts' urine into drinking water - apparently sprang a leak after it was moved into [Tranquility](#) a few days ago. About a quart of urine is missing and most likely contained somewhere in the system. Williams spent Friday evening trying to find the source of the leak.

Only four shuttle flights remain. Discovery is up next; it will carry up more supplies and science experiments in early April.

NASA intends to wrap up what little space station assembly is left this fall. It will coincide with the retirement of the three remaining shuttles.

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