

Space shuttle crew head back to Earth

May 26 2010



This NASA TV image shows NASA astronauts Steve Bowen (L), and Mike Good -- both STS-132 mission specialists -- during a spacewalk on May 19. The crew of the shuttle Atlantis made their final preparations for a return to Earth after a 12-day resupply mission to the International Space Station.

The crew of the shuttle Atlantis made their final preparations for a return to Earth Wednesday after a 12-day resupply mission to the International Space Station.

NASA officials gave the green light for a return to Florida's Kennedy Space Center after an inspection on Monday of the shuttle's heat shields.

The crew has two windows for its landing, in the event [bad weather](#) scuppers the first one, set for 8:48 am (1248 GMT).

A NASA spokesman said weather forecasts were mixed for the area on

Wednesday morning with a risk of rain hitting the coast.

If the weather forces a delay, the US space agency has planned for two more attempts on Thursday again at Kennedy, and a further back-up landing Friday at Edwards Air Force Base in California.

The shuttle uncoupled from the Space Station on Sunday after successfully delivering tons of supplies.

The trip back to [Earth](#) caps the 25-year career of one of NASA's iconic spacecrafts, which has logged some 115 million miles (185 million kilometers).

Only two more shuttle launches remain -- one in September for Discovery and the final blast off for Endeavour in November -- before the curtain falls on this era of human spaceflight.

The United States will then have to rely on Russia to take astronauts to the station aboard three-seater [Soyuz spacecraft](#) until a new fleet of commercial "[space taxis](#)" is operational.

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