

# Astronauts land safely in Kazakhstan after mission

June 2 2010

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A Russian Soyuz spacecraft on Wednesday brought a Russian cosmonaut and US and Japanese astronauts safely back to Earth on the steppe of Kazakhstan after a five-and-a-half month stay in space.

Russian Oleg Kotov, Soichi Noguchi of Japan and US astronaut Timothy Creamer "landed southeast of Kazakhstan's town of Jezkazgan" as they returned from the [International Space Station](#) (ISS), said Russia's Mission Control outside Moscow.

Television pictures showed the capsule carrying the [astronauts](#) being guided by a parachute and producing a plume of dust as it touched down under clear blue skies.

The trio, still strapped to their seats and covered with blankets, were given apples -- a traditional welcome-back gesture -- as doctors and rescuers swarmed around to conduct regular checks and help adjust them to gravity.

Broadly smiling, the astronauts joined hands with each other and gave thumbs-up signs as they posed for cameras.

"A very good landing. Everyone feels excellent," the chief of Russia's [space](#) agency Anatoly Perminov told reporters.

"Recently, all the touchdowns have been not just successful but with a high-precision landing and most importantly, excellent health," he said

televised remarks.

"You see they are already eating apples," he added, referring to television pictures showing Noguchi happily chewing an apple.

Kotov, the Soyuz commander, was at the controls of the spacecraft when it undocked from the station, NASA said. He will return to Russia's space training centre outside Moscow, while Creamer and Noguchi will go back to Houston, it said.

The trio left Earth in December for a mission to the ISS where they spent five and a half months.

During their stint at the ISS, they supported three space shuttle missions and "put finishing touches on US laboratory research facilities," among other duties, NASA said.

Russian cosmonauts Alexander Skvortsov and Mikhail Korniyenko and US astronaut Tracy Caldwell Dyson took over aboard the ISS.

A video posted on the [NASA](#) website showed the departing and remaining astronauts shaking hands and hugging each other amid banter and laughs.

"We will be thinking about you guys all day," Dyson said.

"Only one?" a Russian colleague shot back.

"Only one day and that's it," Dyson replied, laughing.

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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Citation: Astronauts land safely in Kazakhstan after mission (2010, June 2) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-06-astronauts-safely-kazakhstan-mission.html>

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