

Space-odyssey asteroid pod arrives in Japan

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Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency-issued photo shows a team of scientists inspecting the capsule carried by the Japanese Hayabusa spacecraft after it parachuted back to land in the vast Australian Outback. The space capsule, thought to contain the first fragments from a moving asteroid, is being transferred to Japan, where it will be opened and analysed, scientists have said.

A space capsule thought to contain the first fragments from an asteroid arrived in Tokyo on Thursday, officials said, as scientists hope it will yield vital clues about the solar system.

A chartered aeroplane flew into Tokyo's Haneda airport from Australia, carrying the Frisbee-sized capsule, which parachuted into the Australian Outback after a seven-year space odyssey.

At the airport, the capsule was placed into a special container and will be sent to a laboratory in Kanagawa, west of Tokyo, ahead of its much-awaited opening, government officials said.

The heat-proof pod was fired back to Earth by the Hayabusa probe, which burned up on re-entry, on Sunday, after a five billion kilometre (three billion mile) journey which Japan is claiming as the longest on record.

Technical problems plagued Hayabusa, which spun out of control and lost contact with [JAXA](#) for seven weeks, delaying the mission for three years until the asteroid and Earth re-aligned.

When it finally latched onto the potato-shaped Itokawa asteroid, a pellet-firing system designed to stir up dust malfunctioned, leaving it unclear how much material the probe was able to gather.

However scientists expect to recover at least some asteroid dust from the world-first mission, which has generated great excitement in [Japan](#) with one sake rice wine maker producing a special Hayabusa brew to mark the occasion.

The probe will remain sealed for several weeks as it undergoes rigorous tests, scientists said.

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