

# Russian manned spacecraft docks with ISS: official

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A newly-modernized Russian Soyuz spacecraft carrying three astronauts on Sunday docked with the International Space Station (ISS) to double its crew to six, mission control said.

"Capture and docking confirmed. The ISS crew has doubled in size," mission control said in the live television relay, confirming the docking at 4:01 am Moscow time (0001 GMT).

Spokesmen for mission control in Moscow Valery Lydin told the Interfax news agency the process had taken place automatically and the

two Russians and one American would open the hatches and enter the ISS itself three hours after docking.

There was evident relief at mission control in Korolyev outside Moscow over the flawless docking after a rare hiccup last month. The return of the [Soyuz capsule](#) carrying three crew back to earth was delayed by 24 hours when it failed to undock.

The Soyuz TMA-M spacecraft that docked Sunday is a modernised version of the ship used by Russia to put humans into the space and the first of a new series to have fully digital systems.

Its crew includes one of Russia's most experience spacemen, Alexander Kaleri, whose first mission to space was in in March 1992 just after the fall of the Soviet Union to the now defunct Russian space station Mir.

Kaleri has already made four space flights, logging up 610 days in space and almost 24 hours of spacewalks, his last trip an October 2003 mission to the [International Space Station](#).

Joining him are American Scott Kelly, who has made two spaceflights and Oleg Skripochka, who is making his first space flight. They had blasted off early on Friday from Russia's [Baikonur cosmodrome](#) in Kazakhstan.

On board the ISS, where they will spend the next five months, they are joining Americans Douglas Wheelock and Shannon Walker as well as Russian Fyodor Yurchikhin.

The newly arrived crew will receive two US shuttle flights to the ISS during their stay -- Discovery in November and Endeavour in February.

The commander on the Endeavour flight is due to be Scott Kelly's twin

brother Mark, meaning that if all goes to plan the two are set for an unprecedented reunion aboard the ISS.

After last month's undocking embarrassment, Russia's space programme suffered another problem this week when it emerged that the Soyuz due to launch on December 13 had suffered damage to its container on its way to Baikonur.

Roskosmos chief Anatoly Perminov has said its components had shifted by two millimetres but insisted that the next mission would be on schedule.

But sources quoted by Russian news agencies have said a delay until 2011 is possible.

The burden on the Russian space programme is set to grow in the next months as NASA in 2011 withdraws the space shuttle from service. That means the Soyuz craft will for several years be the only vehicle for transporting humans into space.

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