

SOFIA observatory on first overseas deployment

September 22 2011

On Sept. 16, at 10:10 a.m. local time, NASA's Stratospheric Observatory for Infrared Astronomy, SOFIA, lifted off from its base at Palmdale, Calif., flying east en route to Cologne, Germany, for its first international deployment. After conducting astronomical research during the flight, SOFIA landed at the Cologne-Bonn Airport, shortly before 7 a.m. local time.

While at the Cologne-Bonn airport, SOFIA will be featured at the German Aerospace Day, Sept. 18, the annual open house of the German Aerospace Center (DLR). The [observatory](#) will then fly to Stuttgart on Sept. 20 to support the University of Stuttgart's German SOFIA Institute's (DSI) exhibition on infrared astronomy. The deployment will conclude with a 10-hour science flight on Sept. 22, as the observatory flies west returning to the United States.

"It is a privilege to fly SOFIA to Germany to showcase the work of our international partners," said Bob Meyer, [NASA](#) SOFIA program manager. "The DLR and the DSI have collaborated with NASA and its partners in developing this world-class observatory. SOFIA's appearance here is a matter of national pride, both for the United States and Germany."

SOFIA's observing flights are flown at altitudes between 39,000 and 45,000 feet, above 99 percent of the water vapor in the Earth's atmosphere. The telescope and instruments provide imaging and spectroscopic capabilities at infrared wavelengths between 0.3–1600

microns, making SOFIA one of the world's premier infrared astronomical facilities. The telescope is located in the rear section of the aircraft, open to the atmosphere with a view out of the port side.

During SOFIA's deployment, the observatory's telescope is collecting data using the German REceiver for Astronomy at TeraHERz Frequencies (GREAT), developed by a team led by researchers from the Max Planck Institute for Radio Astronomy, in Bonn, Germany. On its return flight to the [United States](#), SOFIA will use the GREAT instrument to collect data at infrared wavelengths on the physics of the center of the Milky Way Galaxy.

SOFIA is a joint project of NASA and the German Aerospace Center (DLR), and is based and managed at NASA's Dryden Aircraft Operations Facility in Palmdale, Calif. NASA's Ames Research Center in Moffett Field, Calif., manages the SOFIA science and mission operations in cooperation with the Universities Space Research Association headquartered in Columbia, Md., and the German SOFIA Institute (DSI) at the University of Stuttgart.

Provided by JPL/NASA

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