

China's next space mission to carry 3 astronauts

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A Long March CZ-2F rocket carrying the manned craft 'Shenzhou V' is launched into space from the Jiuquan launch center, 2003. China will launch a manned spacecraft between June and August on a mission to take three astronauts to the Tiangong-1 module currently orbiting the Earth.

China's next space mission will carry three astronauts who will dock with and live inside an experimental orbiting module launched last year, state media said Friday.

The Shenzhou 9 spacecraft will be launched aboard its Long March 2F rocket sometime between June and August, the official [Xinhua News Agency](#) said, citing an unidentified spokesman for the [manned space program](#), known as Shenzhou, or "Sacred Vessel."

The astronauts will manually dock with the Tiangong 1 module that was

launched last year and conduct scientific experiments while aboard, Xinhua said. It didn't say how long the mission was supposed to last.

China completed its first such space rendezvous last year when the unmanned Shenzhou 8 docked with the Tiangong 1 by remote control. That was considered something of a breakthrough since early U.S. astronauts did so manually.

China has scheduled two space docking missions for this year and plans to complete a [manned space station](#) around 2020 to replace Tiangong 1. At about 60 tons, the Chinese station will be considerably smaller than the 16-nation International Space Station.

China's space program has made steady progress since a 2003 launch that made it only the third nation to put a man in space. Two more [manned missions](#) have followed - one including a space walk - and China separately seeks to launch a lunar rover next year.

The country launched its independent space station program after being turned away from the [International Space Station](#), largely on objections from the United States. The U.S. is wary of the Chinese program's military links and the sharing of technology with its chief economic and political rival.

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