

SpaceX plans historic first flight on May 7

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SpaceX owner, Elon Musk, holds a press conference last year to announce development of the Falcon rocket. SpaceX confirmed Tuesday it plans to launch a rocket and capsule on May 7 in a historic first flight of a private spaceship to the International Space Station.

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The new launch date, coming a week later than an initially planned April

30 goal, comes after [SpaceX](#) said Monday it needed to complete more testing on its unmanned Dragon capsule. The capsule is due to ride on a Falcon 9 rocket from [Cape Canaveral Air Force Station](#) in Florida.

"NASA and the Cape Canaveral Air Force Station have approved SpaceX's request to set May 7th as the target launch date for the upcoming COTS 2 mission," SpaceX spokeswoman Kirstin Brost Grantham told AFP.

On its Facebook page, the company said the spaceship would launch at 9:38 am (1338 GMT).



File picture shows the SpaceX Dragon spacecraft. SpaceX confirmed it plans to launch a rocket and capsule on May 7 in a historic first flight of a private spaceship to the International Space Station.

"We appreciate that SpaceX is taking the necessary time to help ensure the success of this historic flight," NASA associate administrator for [human exploration](#) and operations William Gerstenmaier said in a statement.

"We will continue to work with SpaceX in preparing for the May 7 launch to the [International Space Station](#)."

SpaceX aims to carry out a fly-by of the ISS and a berthing operation in which the reusable spacecraft, the Dragon, will approach the ISS as the crew aboard the orbiting outpost uses a [robotic arm](#) to dock it.

The gumball-shaped Dragon capsule will carry 1,149 pounds (521 kilograms) of cargo for the space lab and will also aim to return a 1,455 pounds (660 kilograms) load to Earth, according to ISS program manager Michael Suffredini.

Owned by [Internet entrepreneur](#) and PayPal co-founder Elon Musk, SpaceX made history with its Dragon [launch](#) in December 2010, becoming the first commercial outfit to send a spacecraft into orbit and back.



File picture shows SpaceX's Falcon 9 rocket lifting off on December 8, 2010 from Cape Canaveral, Florida, making the company the first commercial outfit to send a spacecraft into orbit and back. SpaceX confirmed Tuesday it plans to launch a rocket and capsule on May 7 in a historic first flight of a private spaceship to the International Space Station.

SpaceX and several other companies are competing to be the first to operate a private capsule that could tote astronauts and cargo to the ISS, after NASA retired its [shuttle program](#) last year.

Russia's [Soyuz capsule](#) is currently the world's sole means of transporting astronauts and cargo to the orbiting space station.

Other companies in the private space race include aerospace giant Boeing, the Nevada-based Sierra Nevada Corporation and Washington state-based BlueOrigin LLC.

NASA has channeled \$270 million to firms hoping to join the new commercial space race and hopes to foster a billion-dollar industry over the next decade.

In a draft budget submitted to Congress in February, President Barack Obama requested \$829 million to develop commercial flights to the ISS, partly to end US reliance on Russian craft to deliver astronauts and re-supply the station.

The privatization of space transport is expected to pave the way for tourism, with British tycoon Richard Branson's Virgin Galactic offering \$200,000 reservations for journeys into space.

The company has already taken in \$60 million in sales and deposits, with more than 500 individuals -- including Hollywood stars and other multimillionaires -- adding their names to the list.

The prices of the only trips into space so far, which were sold to private individuals traveling on Russian spacecraft, have ranged from \$45 million to as much as \$150 million.

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