

# China plans next manned space mission for summer

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In this Oct. 15, 2003 file photo, China's first manned spacecraft Shenzhou 5 lifts off at the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in northwest China's Gansu Province. China will send three astronauts on a mission to its orbiting space station this summer as part of preparations to establish an even larger permanent presence above Earth, the manned space program said Thursday, Feb. 28, 2013. The Shenzhou 10 spacecraft will take flight sometime between June and August, the program said in a statement. (AP Photo/Xinhua, Li Gang) NO SALES

China will send three astronauts on a mission to its orbiting space station this summer as part of preparations to establish an even larger permanent presence above Earth, the manned space program said Thursday.

The Shenzhou 10 spacecraft will take flight sometime between June and August, the program said in a statement. It will deliver its crew to the Tiangong 1, where it will spend two weeks conducting tests of the station's docking system and its systems for supporting life and carrying out scientific work.

Two [Chinese spacecraft](#), one of them manned, have docked already with Tiangong 1 since it was launched in September 2011. China has been extremely cautious and methodical in its [manned missions](#), hoping to avoid accidents and loss of life that could tarnish one of the nation's most successful and prestigious scientific and engineering undertakings.

The station is to be replaced in around 2020 with a permanent space station that will weigh about 60 tons, slightly smaller than NASA's Skylab of the 1970s and about one-sixth the size of the 16-nation International Space Station. China was barred from participating in the [International Space Station](#), largely on objections from the United States over political differences and the Chinese program's close military links.

China's ambitious space goals also include plans for sending a rover to the moon, possibly followed by a manned [lunar mission](#). China's [manned space program](#) launched its first astronaut, Yang Liwei, into space in 2003, making it just the third nation after Russia and the U.S. to achieve that feat.

China would also be the third country after the United States and Russia to send independently maintained space stations into orbit.

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