

Foie gras, saxophone blast into space with astronauts (Update)

November 17 2016



French space rookie Thomas Pesquet will lift off for a six-month mission to the ISS with a selection of dishes by top French chefs Alain Ducasse and Thierry Marx

A trio of astronauts soared into orbit Friday bound for the International Space Station, with their Soyuz spacecraft delivering some fancy French food, a saxophone and the future female commander.

NASA veteran Peggy Whitson, French rookie astronaut Thomas Pesquet and Russia's Oleg Novitsky blasted off at 2:20 am local time Friday (2020 GMT Thursday) from the Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan and are expected to dock at the orbital laboratory at the weekend.

Russian space news agency Roscosmos said in a statement that the launch had been "successful" and that the spacecraft would arrive at the ISS on Saturday at 2201 GMT.

The three will carry out ISS Expeditions 50 and 51 and return home after six month, in May 2017.

This mission is Pesquet's first space flight, but he is accompanied by veteran astronauts.

The 38-year-old former Air France pilot, who spent seven years training for a trip to space, posted a "LastSelfieOnEarth" photo on the European Space Agency's Facebook page in the hours ahead of launch.

Novitsky, a 45-year-old making his second ISS trip, was born in Belarus and will carry a Belarus flag with him on his second ISS trip, official media there said.

Record-breaking Whitson

Social media was abuzz about the records that the trailblazing Whitson is due to break on her third ISS mission.

The 56-year-old already holds the record for the longest time in space for a woman.



US astronaut Peggy Whitson, NASA's most experienced female astronaut, is going on her third trip to the ISS and holds the record for time in space for a female

She will take command of the ISS in March 2017, a role she already held back in 2007, becoming the only woman to lead it twice. And she will be the oldest woman ever in space—turning 57 while still aboard the ISS.

Foie gras in space

In addition to his saxophone, Pesquet is carrying coveted cargo from his home country: a selection of gourmet dishes by world-famous chefs Alain Ducasse and Thierry Marx.

"We will have food prepared by a Michelin-starred chef at the station. We have food for the big feasts: for Christmas, New Year's and

birthdays. We'll have two birthdays, mine and Peggy's," the Frenchman said at the astronauts' last press conference before the launch.

Highlights include beef tongue with truffled foie gras and duck breast confit.

Whitson said the fancy French food would be a welcome change on the ISS.

"I think the thing that I find the most challenging about space flights is the lack of variety of the food," said.

But above all she stressed the international cooperation embodied by the space missions. "I think quite the most important thing about it, it's the demonstration of what people can do together."

Novitsky agreed. "The ISS is both a home and a place of work. It's also a place for friendship, for showing to the world that we can work together and have good relationships," he said.

Space travel has been one of the few areas of international cooperation between Russia and the West that has not been crippled by the Ukraine crisis.

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