

Canada 'going to the Moon': Trudeau

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David Saint-Jacques of the Canadian Space Agency, a member of the International Space Station (ISS) expedition 58/59

Canada will join NASA's space mission to put an orbiter around the Moon in a few years, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced Thursday.

"Canada is going to the Moon," Trudeau told a press conference that included a live video link from the International Space Station with Canadian astronaut David Saint-Jacques.

NASA plans to build a small space station, dubbed Gateway, in the Moon's orbit by 2026.

It will serve as a way-station for trips to and from the lunar surface, but will not be permanently crewed like the International Space Station (ISS), currently in Earth's orbit.

According to the Canadian Space Agency, Gateway will provide living space for astronauts, a docking station for visiting spacecraft and research laboratories.

Canada will develop and contribute an autonomous robotic system—Canadarm3 — that will be used to repair and maintain the station.

The original 15-meter remote-controlled mechanical Canadarm, also known as the Shuttle Remote Manipulator System, was used on the Space Shuttle for 30 years, deploying, capturing and repairing satellites, positioning astronauts, maintaining equipment and moving cargo.

Its successor is used on the ISS.

NASA Administrator Jim Bridenstine said in a statement that the organization is "thrilled that Canada is the first international partner for the Gateway lunar outpost."

"Our new collaboration on Gateway will enable our broader international partnership to get to the Moon and eventually to Mars," he said.

Trudeau also announced Can\$2.05 billion (US\$1.55 billion) over 24 years for Canada's space program, which will help support a push to develop new "artificial intelligence-based technologies" for space.

Due to communications lags between Earth and remote outposts, it will be increasingly necessary to automate many robotic functions on space stations and vehicles.

The last person to walk on the Moon was Eugene Cernan in December 1972, during the Apollo 17 mission.

Before humans set foot on the lunar surface again, NASA aims to land an unmanned vehicle on the Moon by 2024.

So far, only Russia, the United States and China have made the 384,000-kilometer (239,000-mile) journey and landed spacecraft on the Moon.

Last week, Israel launched a spacecraft that aims to join them.

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