

ISS crew lands in Kazakhstan after more than 200 days

April 17 2020, by Daria Litvinova and Vladimir Isachenkov



In this handout photo released by Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre (GCTC), Roscosmos space agency, Russian cosmonaut Oleg Skripochka gets assistance shortly after the landing of the Russian Soyuz MS-15 space capsule near Kazakh town of Dzhezkazgan, Kazakhstan, Friday, April 17, 2020. An International Space Station crew has landed safely after more than 200 days in space. The Soyuz capsule carrying NASA astronauts Andrew Morgan, Jessica Meir and Russian space agency Roscosmos' Oleg Skripochka touched down on Friday on the steppes of Kazakhstan. (Andrey Shelepin, Gagarin Cosmonaut Training

Centre (GCTC), Roscosmos space agency, via AP)

A U.S.-Russian crew landed safely Friday in the steppes of Kazakhstan following a stint on the International Space Station and was greeted with extra precautions due to the coronavirus.

NASA astronauts Jessica Meir and Andrew Morgan, and Russian cosmonaut Oleg Skripochka touched down as scheduled at 11:16 a.m. (0516 GMT) Friday. Their Soyuz capsule landed under a striped orange-and-white parachute about 150 kilometers (93 miles) southeast of Dzhezkazgan in central Kazakhstan.

Russian officials said they took stringent measures to protect the crew members amid the pandemic. The recovery team and medical personnel assigned to help the three out of the capsule and to perform post-flight checks were under close medical observation for nearly a month before the landing and tested for the coronavirus.

Morgan wrapped up a 272-day mission on his first flight into space. He conducted seven space walks, four of which were to improve and extend the life of the station's Alpha Magnetic Spectrometer, which looks for evidence of dark matter in the universe.

Meir and Skripochka spent 205 days in space, with Meir carrying out the first three all-women spacewalks with crewmate Christina Koch, who returned from space in February.



In this handout photo released by Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre (GCTC), Roscosmos space agency, rescue team members carry Russian cosmonaut Oleg Skripochka shortly after the landing of the Russian Soyuz MS-15 space capsule near Kazakh town of Dzhezkazgan, Kazakhstan, Friday, April 17, 2020. An International Space Station crew has landed safely after more than 200 days in space. The Soyuz capsule carrying NASA astronauts Andrew Morgan, Jessica Meir and Russian space agency Roscosmos' Oleg Skripochka touched down on Friday on the steppes of Kazakhstan. (Andrey Shelepin, Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre (GCTC), Roscosmos space agency, via AP)

The crew members smiled as they talked to medical experts wearing masks. Following a quick checkup, they will be flown by helicopter to Baikonur, from where Skripochka will be taken to Moscow, said Vyacheslav Rogozhnikov, a Russian medical official who oversaw the

crew's return.

Morgan and Meir will have to be driven from Baikonur to Kyzylorda, 300 kilometers (190 miles) away, to board a NASA flight to Houston. Restrictions on international flights imposed by Kazakhstan required the long drive, Rogozhnikov said.

"A 300-kilometer ride after landing is quite a load on the astronauts," he said, adding that Russia deployed its doctors to help the astronauts, if needed.

Skripochka will spend three weeks under observation at a medical facility at the Star City cosmonaut training center outside Moscow, Russian space corporation Roscosmos said. Star City officials said the medical personnel monitoring him will wear hazmat suits to protect him from becoming infected with the new virus.



In this handout photo released by Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre (GCTC), Roscosmos space agency, U.S. astronaut Jessica Meir waves shortly after the landing of the Russian Soyuz MS-15 space capsule near Kazakh town of Dzhezkazgan, Kazakhstan, Friday, April 17, 2020. An International Space Station crew has landed safely after more than 200 days in space. The Soyuz capsule carrying NASA astronauts Andrew Morgan, Jessica Meir and Russian space agency Roscosmos' Oleg Skripochka touched down on Friday on the steppes of Kazakhstan. (Andrey Shelepin, Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre (GCTC), Roscosmos space agency, via AP)

On Thursday, the Russian government coronavirus headquarters reported the first infection at the Star City, which serves as the main hub for pre-flight training of U.S., Russian and other international crew members of the International Space Station. The Star City also has residential

quarters for cosmonauts and support staff.

Roscosmos Director Dmitry Rogozin said Wednesday that the Russian space corporation had 30 coronavirus cases.

The crew returned to Earth exactly 50 years after the Apollo 13 astronauts splashed down in the Pacific after an oxygen tank explosion aborted the moon-landing mission.

Speaking from the orbiting outpost before their landing, the three said that coming back to a world drastically changed by the pandemic would be challenging. Morgan said they tried to keep up with coronavirus news in space, but added that it was hard to comprehend what was really going on below.



In this handout photo released by Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre (GCTC), Roscosmos space agency, U.S. astronaut Andrew Morgan gestures shortly after the landing of the Russian Soyuz MS-15 space capsule near Kazakh town of Dzhezkazgan, Kazakhstan, Friday, April 17, 2020. An International Space Station crew has landed safely after more than 200 days in space. The Soyuz capsule carrying NASA astronauts Andrew Morgan, Jessica Meir and Russian space agency Roscosmos' Oleg Skripochka touched down on Friday on the steppes of Kazakhstan. (Andrey Shelepin, Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre (GCTC), Roscosmos space agency, via AP)



In this handout photo released by Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre (GCTC), Roscosmos space agency, rescue team members open the capsule hatch shortly after the landing of the Russian Soyuz MS-15 space capsule near Kazakh town of

Dzhezkazgan, Kazakhstan, Friday, April 17, 2020. An International Space Station crew has landed safely after more than 200 days in space. The Soyuz capsule carrying NASA astronauts Andrew Morgan, Jessica Meir and Russian space agency Roscosmos' Oleg Skripochka touched down on Friday on the steppes of Kazakhstan. (Andrey Shelepin, Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre (GCTC), Roscosmos space agency, via AP)



In this handout photo released by Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre (GCTC), Roscosmos space agency, a search and rescue team works on the site of landing of the Soyuz MS-15 space capsule near Kazakh town of Dzhezkazgan, Kazakhstan, Friday, April 17, 2020. An International Space Station crew has landed safely after more than 200 days in space. The Soyuz capsule carrying NASA astronauts Andrew Morgan, Jessica Meir and Russian space agency Roscosmos' Oleg Skripochka touched down on Friday on the steppes of Kazakhstan. (Andrey Shelepin, Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre (GCTC),

Roscosmos space agency, via AP)



In this handout photo released by Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre (GCTC), Roscosmos space agency, U.S. astronaut Andrew Morgan gets assistance shortly after the landing of the Russian Soyuz MS-15 space capsule near Kazakh town of Dzhezkazgan, Kazakhstan, Friday, April 17, 2020. An International Space Station crew has landed safely after more than 200 days in space. The Soyuz capsule carrying NASA astronauts Andrew Morgan, Jessica Meir and Russian space agency Roscosmos' Oleg Skripochka touched down on Friday on the steppes of Kazakhstan. (Andrey Shelepin, Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre (GCTC), Roscosmos space agency, via AP)



In this handout photo released by Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre (GCTC), Roscosmos space agency, U.S. astronaut Andrew Morgan sits in the capsule shortly after the landing of the Russian Soyuz MS-15 space capsule near Kazakh town of Dzhezkazgan, Kazakhstan, Friday, April 17, 2020. An International Space Station crew has landed safely after more than 200 days in space. The Soyuz capsule carrying NASA astronauts Andrew Morgan, Jessica Meir and Russian space agency Roscosmos' Oleg Skripochka touched down on Friday on the steppes of Kazakhstan. (Andrey Shelepin, Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre (GCTC), Roscosmos space agency, via AP)



In this handout photo released by Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre (GCTC),

Roscosmos space agency, Russian space agency Roscosmos' Oleg Skripochka sits in the capsule shortly after the landing of the Russian Soyuz MS-15 space capsule near Kazakh town of Dzhezkazgan, Kazakhstan, Friday, April 17, 2020. An International Space Station crew has landed safely after more than 200 days in space. The Soyuz capsule carrying NASA astronauts Andrew Morgan, Jessica Meir and Russian space agency Roscosmos' Oleg Skripochka touched down on Friday on the steppes of Kazakhstan. (Andrey Shelepin, Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre (GCTC), Roscosmos space agency, via AP)



In this handout photo released by Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre (GCTC), Roscosmos space agency, U.S. astronaut Jessica Meir sits in the capsule shortly after the landing of the Russian Soyuz MS-15 space capsule near Kazakh town of Dzhezkazgan, Kazakhstan, Friday, April 17, 2020. An International Space Station crew has landed safely after more than 200 days in space. The Soyuz capsule carrying NASA astronauts Andrew Morgan, Jessica Meir and Russian space agency Roscosmos' Oleg Skripochka touched down on Friday on the steppes of Kazakhstan. (Andrey Shelepin, Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre (GCTC), Roscosmos space agency, via AP)



In this handout photo released by Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre (GCTC), Roscosmos space agency, rescue team members carry U.S. astronaut Andrew

Morgan shortly after the landing of the Russian Soyuz MS-15 space capsule near Kazakh town of Dzhezkazgan, Kazakhstan, Friday, April 17, 2020. An International Space Station crew has landed safely after more than 200 days in space. The Soyuz capsule carrying NASA astronauts Andrew Morgan, Jessica Meir and Russian space agency Roscosmos' Oleg Skripochka touched down on Friday on the steppes of Kazakhstan. (Andrey Shelepin, Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre (GCTC), Roscosmos space agency, via AP)



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In this image from video made available by NASA, U.S. astronaut Jessica Meir speaks, accompanied by Andrew Morgan and Chris Cassidy, during a news conference held by the American members of the International Space Station on Friday, April 10, 2020. Meir and Morgan said they expect it will be tough returning to such a drastically changed world next week, after a half-year or more in space. (NASA via AP)



In this image from video made available by NASA, newly-arrived International Space Station crew members, foreground from left, Chris Cassidy, Anatoly Ivanishin and Ivan Vagner, stand with outgoing crew members, background from left, Andrew Morgan, Oleg Skripochka, and Jessica Meir during a news conference on Thursday, April 9, 2020. (NASA via AP)



In this handout photo released by Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre (GCTC), Roscosmos space agency, rescue team members get out of the capsule U.S. astronaut Andrew Morgan shortly after the landing of the Russian Soyuz MS-15 space capsule near Kazakh town of Dzhezkazgan, Kazakhstan, Friday, April 17, 2020. An International Space Station crew has landed safely after more than 200 days in space. The Soyuz capsule carrying NASA astronauts Andrew Morgan, Jessica Meir and Russian space agency Roscosmos' Oleg Skripochka touched down on Friday on the steppes of Kazakhstan. (Andrey Shelepin, Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre (GCTC), Roscosmos space agency, via AP)

"It is quite surreal for us to see this whole situation unfolding on the planet below," Meir said. "We can tell you that the Earth still looks just as stunning as always from up here, so it's difficult to believe all the changes that have taken place since both of us have been up here."

A new crew comprising NASA's Chris Cassidy and Russians Anatoly Ivanishin and Ivan Vagner arrived at the station on April 9. They said before blastoff that they had been under a very strict quarantine for a month before the flight and felt well.

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