

# Image: Home away from home planet

November 24 2020

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Credit: ESA/NASA

As a month of celebrating 20 years of continuous human habitation of the International Space Station draws to a close, we look back on the first mission of the next ESA astronaut to travel to the Space Station, Thomas Pesquet.

The ESA astronaut of French nationality lived and worked on the Space Station for 196 days during his first mission, Proxima, between November 2016 and June 2017. Thomas is one of 18 European astronauts to have spent time on board and will return for his Alpha mission in spring 2021.

Thomas is seen here working in the European Columbus laboratory that was launched to the Station in February 2008.

The Columbus laboratory is Europe's largest single contribution to the International Space Station. Permanently attached to the Harmony module, this pressurized laboratory allows researchers on the ground, aided by the Station's crew, to conduct a wide variety of research in a weightless environment.

Experiments in [space science](#), Earth observation and technology can also be conducted outside the module, thanks to four exterior mounting platforms that are exposed to the vacuum of space. Room outside Columbus for commercial experiments is also on its way, with the Bartolomeo services due to begin operations soon.

During his upcoming Alpha mission, Thomas will continue this research and experimentation on the International Space Station supported by his crewmates and ground teams from ESA, the US space agency NASA, Russian space agency Roscosmos, the Canadian Space Agency and the Japanese space agency JAXA.

This enduring international partnership is a key feature of the Space Station as nations work across cultures and borders, performing science, research and engineering that has led to breakthroughs in disease research, [materials science](#), Earth observation, our understanding of Earth's origins and more.

Provided by European Space Agency

Citation: Image: Home away from home planet (2020, November 24) retrieved 23 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2020-11-image-home-planet.html>

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