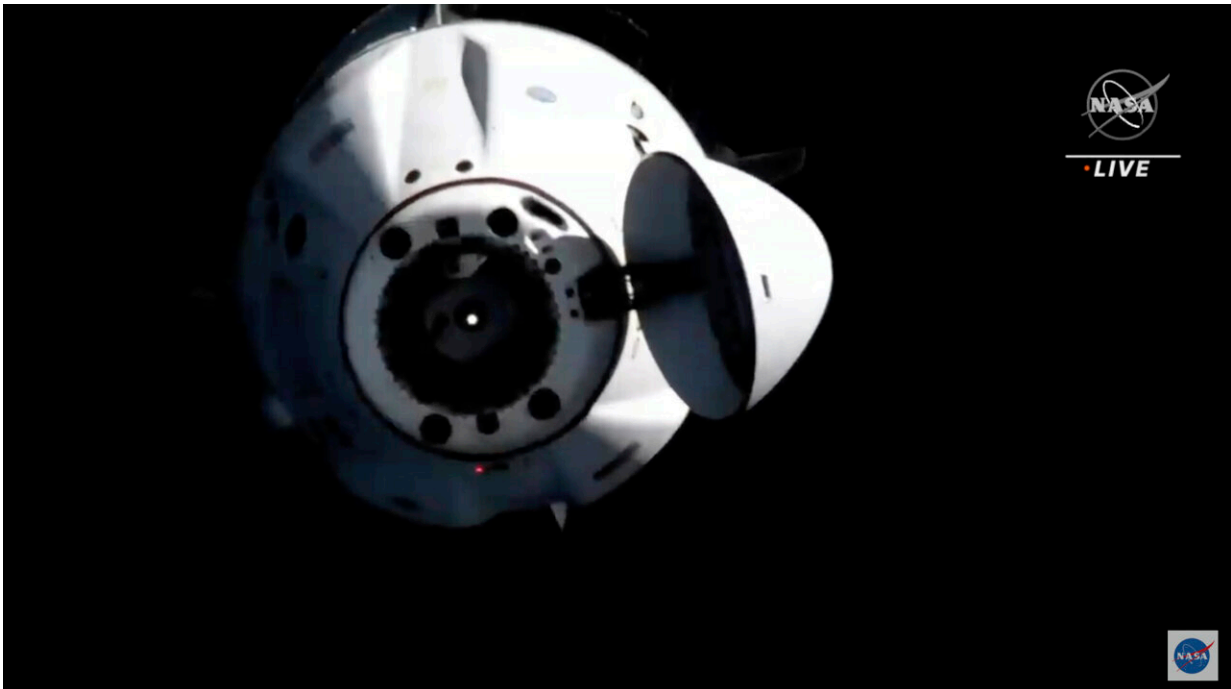


Four station astronauts catch ride with SpaceX back home

November 8 2021, by Marcia Dunn



In this image from video provided by NASA, astronauts in the SpaceX Dragon capsule undock from the International Space Station on Monday, Nov. 8, 2021, Credit: NASA via AP

Four astronauts in orbit since spring headed back to Earth on Monday, aiming for a late night splashdown off the Florida coast.

The undocking of their SpaceX capsule from the International Space

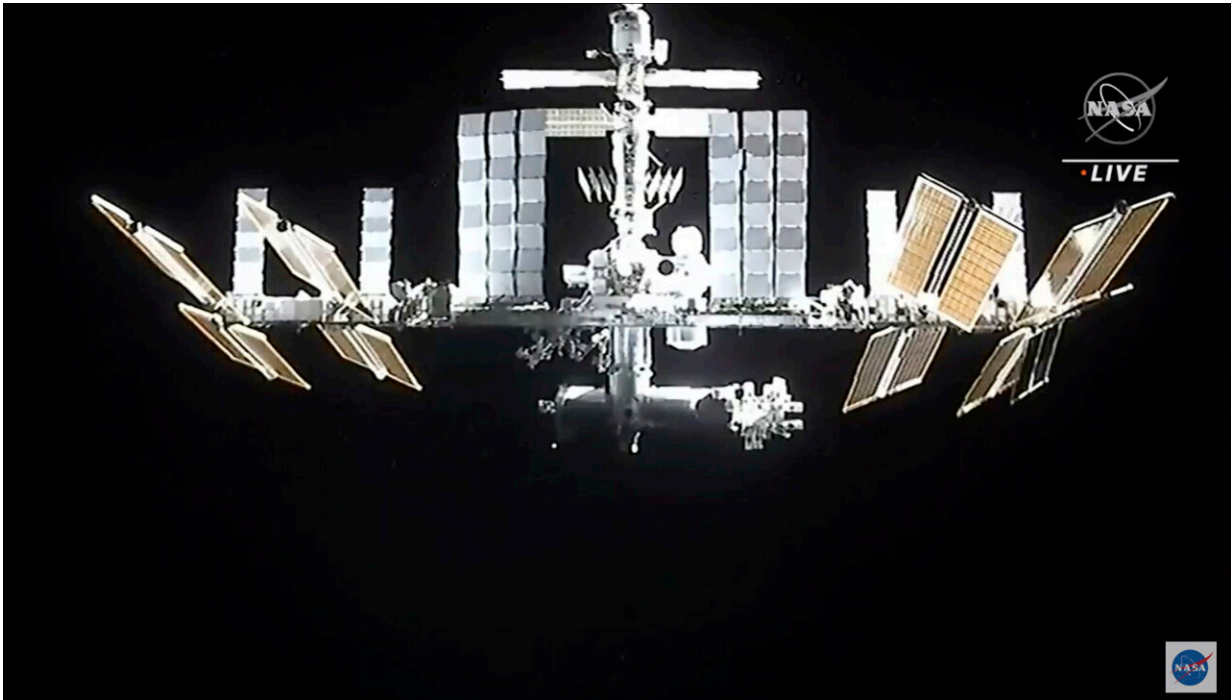
Station also paved the way for a launch of their four replacements as early as Wednesday night.

The newcomers were scheduled to launch first, but NASA switched the order because of bad weather and an astronaut's undisclosed medical condition. The welcoming duties will now fall to the lone American and two Russians left behind at the [space](#) station.

NASA astronauts Shane Kimbrough and Megan McArthur, Japan's Akihiko Hoshide and France's Thomas Pesquet should have been back Monday morning, but high wind in the recovery zone delayed their homecoming. Their splashdown was planned for the Gulf of Mexico off Pensacola.

"One more night with this magical view. Who could complain? I'll miss our spaceship!" Pesquet tweeted alongside a brief video showing the space station illuminated against the blackness of space and the twinkling city lights on the nighttime side of Earth.

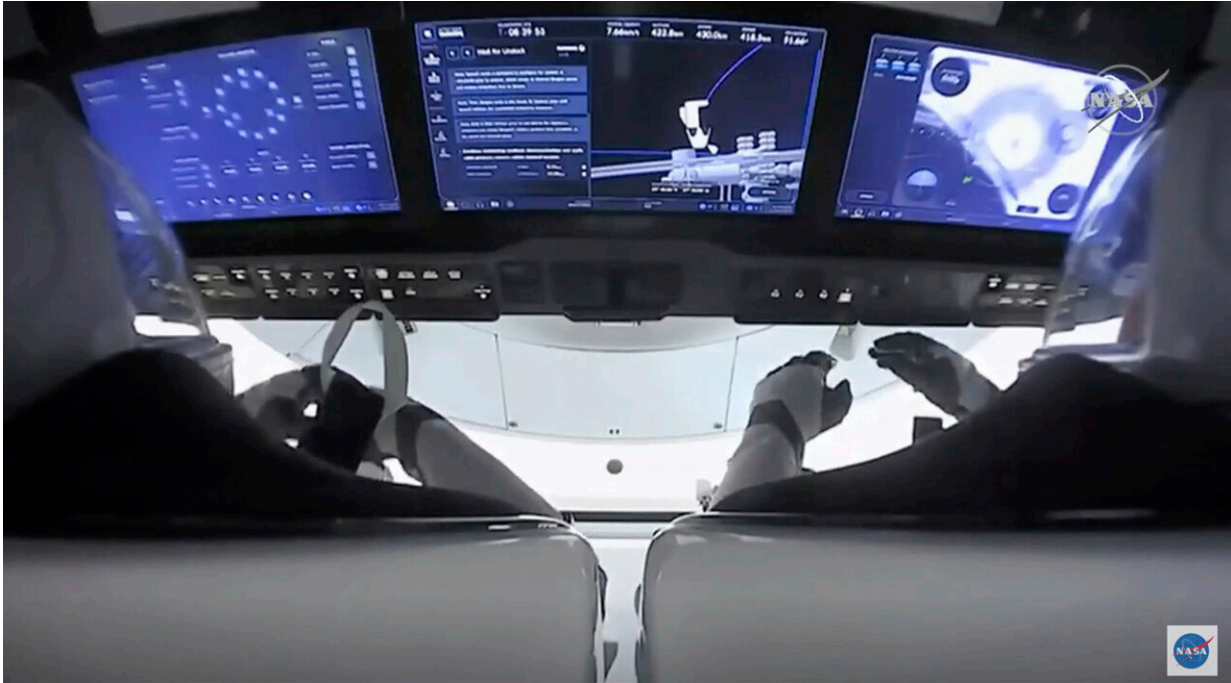
From the space station, NASA astronaut Mark Vande Hei—midway through a one-year flight—bid farewell to each of his departing friends, telling McArthur "I'll miss hearing your laughter in adjacent modules."



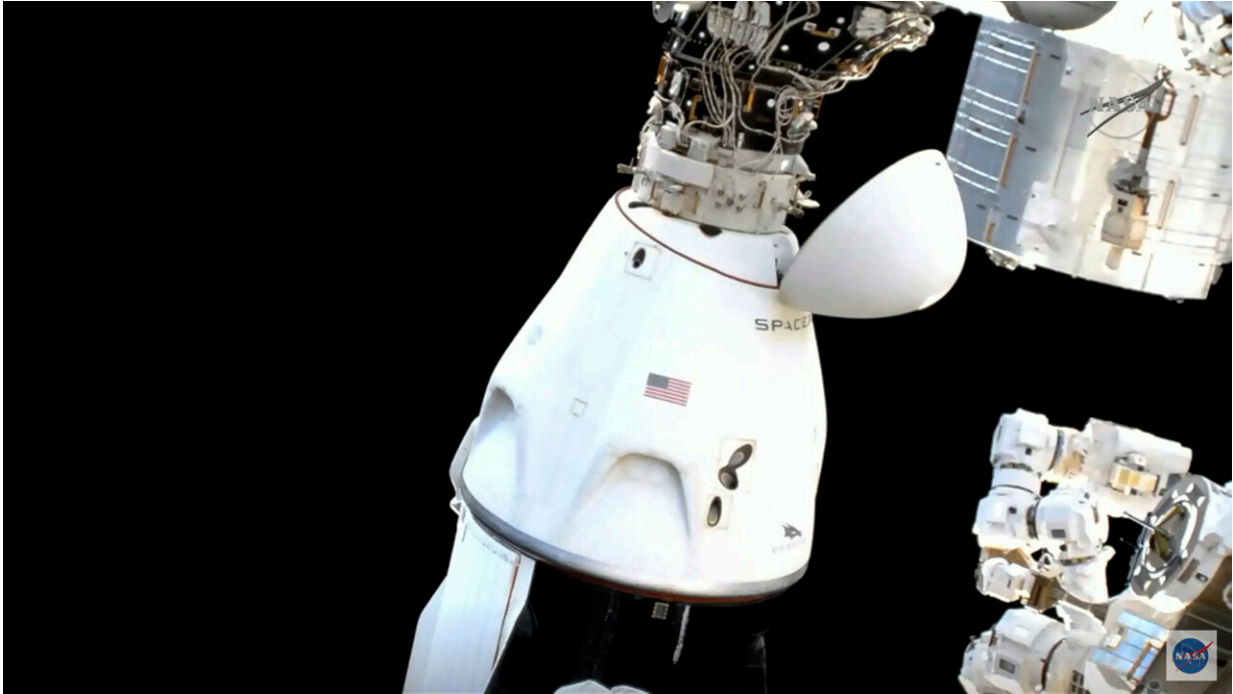
In this image from video provided by NASA, the International Space Station is seen as astronauts in the SpaceX Dragon capsule undock on Monday, Nov. 8, 2021, Credit: NASA via AP



In this image from video provided by NASA, astronauts in the SpaceX Dragon capsule prepare for undocking from the International Space Station on Monday, Nov. 8, 2021, Credit: NASA via AP



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Before leaving the neighborhood, the four took a spin around the [space station](#) to take pictures. This was the first time SpaceX attempted a flyaround like this; NASA's shuttles used to do it all the time before their retirement a decade ago.

It wasn't the most comfortable ride back. The toilet in their capsule was broken, and so the astronauts needed to rely on diapers for the eight-hour trip home. They shrugged it off late last week as just one more challenge in their mission.

The first issue arose shortly after their April liftoff; Mission Control warned a piece of space junk was threatening to collide with their

capsule. It turned out to be a false alarm. Then in July, thrusters on a newly arrived Russian lab inadvertently fired and sent the station into a spin. The four [astronauts](#) took shelter in their docked SpaceX capsule, ready to make a hasty departure if necessary.

Among the upbeat milestones: four spacewalks to enhance the [station's solar power](#), a movie-making visit by a Russian film crew and the first-ever space harvest of chile peppers. Their 200-day mission began last April.

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Citation: Four station astronauts catch ride with SpaceX back home (2021, November 8) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2021-11-station-astronauts-spacex-home.html>

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