

Japanese space tourists safely return to Earth

December 20 2021, by Vladimir Isachenkov



In this photo taken from video footage released by the Roscosmos Space Agency, Russian space agency rescue team help spaceflight participant Yusaku Maezawa to get from the capsule shortly after the landing of the Russian Soyuz MS-20 space capsule about 150 km (80 miles) south-east of the Kazakh town of Zhezkazgan, Kazakhstan, Monday, Dec. 20, 2021. The Japanese billionaire, his producer and a Russian cosmonaut safely returned to Earth on Monday after spending 12 days on the International Space Station. Credit: Roscosmos Space Agency via AP

A Japanese billionaire, his producer and a Russian cosmonaut safely returned to Earth on Monday after spending 12 days on the International Space Station.

Fashion tycoon Yusaku Maezawa, his producer Yozo Hirano and Russian cosmonaut Alexander Misurkin made a soft landing in a Russian Soyuz capsule in the steppes of Kazakhstan at 9:13 a.m. (0313 GMT) about 150 kilometers (90 miles) southeast of the city of Zhezkazgan.

Low clouds prevented the deployment of search-and-rescue helicopters to the area, so rescue teams reached the landing site in all-terrain vehicles to assist the crew and conduct medical checkups. They reported that the trio was feeling fine.

Later in the day, they will be flown to the Star City space flight preparation facility outside Moscow for post-flight checks and rehabilitation.

Maezawa, 46, and his 36-year-old producer Hirano were the first self-paying tourists to visit the space station since 2009. Misurkin was on his third space mission.

Speaking to The Associated Press last week in a live interview from the orbiting space station, Maezawa said that "once you are in space, you realize how much it is worth it by having this amazing experience."



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Asked about reports claiming that he paid over \$80 million for the 12-day mission, Maezawa said he couldn't disclose the contract sum but admitted that he paid "pretty much" that amount.

In October, Russian actor Yulia Peresild and film director Klim

Shipenko spent 12 days on the station to make the world's first movie in orbit, a project sponsored by Russia's space corporation Roscosmos to help burnish the nation's reputation for space glory.

Staying behind at the station are NASA astronauts Raja Chari, Thomas Marshburn, Kayla Barron and Mark Vande Hei; Russian cosmonauts Anton Shkaplerov and Pyotr Dubrov; and Matthias Maurer of the European Space Agency.

Speaking to the AP from orbit, Maezawa deflected criticism from those who questioned his decision to spend money on space travel instead of using it to help people back on Earth, saying that "those who criticize are perhaps those who have never been to space."



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Japanese space tourist Yusaku Maezawa speaks during an interview with The Associated Press from the International Space Station, ISS, Monday, Dec. 13, 2021. Maezawa said he experienced motion sickness after arriving at the space outpost and it took him a few days to adapt to zero gravity. Credit: Roscosmos Space Agency via AP



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Space flight participant Yusaku Maezawa attends a news conference ahead of the expedition to the International Space Station at the Gagarin Cosmonauts' Training Center in Star City outside Moscow, Russia, on Oct. 14, 2021. During an interview with the Associated Press on Monday, Dec. 13, 2021, Maezawa said he experienced motion sickness after arriving at the space outpost and it took him a few days to adapt to zero gravity. Credit: Shamil Zhumatov/Pool Photo via AP



Space flight participant Japanese entrepreneur Yusaku Maezawa is assisted as he disembarks from a helicopter as he arrives at airport after returning from the International Space Station on the Soyuz MS-20 space capsule, in Zhezkazgan, Kazakhstan, Monday, Dec. 20, 2021. A Japanese billionaire, his producer and a Russian cosmonaut safely returned to Earth on Monday after spending 12 days on the International Space Station. Credit: Shamil Zhumatov/Pool Photo via AP



Roscosmos cosmonaut Alexander Misurkin, right, space flight participants Yusaku Maezawa, center, and Yozo Hirano attend a news conference ahead of the expedition to the International Space Station at the Gagarin Cosmonauts' Training Center in Star City outside Moscow, Russia, Oct. 14, 2021. During an interview with the Associated Press on Monday, Dec. 13, 2021, Maezawa said he experienced motion sickness after arriving at the space outpost and it took him a few days to adapt to zero gravity. Credit: Shamil Zhumatov/Pool Photo via AP



Space flight participant Japanese production assistant Yozo Hirano is assisted as he disembarks from a helicopter as he arrives at airport after returning from the International Space Station on the Soyuz MS-20 space capsule, in Zhezkazgan, Kazakhstan, Monday, Dec. 20, 2021. A Japanese billionaire, his producer and a Russian cosmonaut safely returned to Earth on Monday after spending 12 days on the International Space Station. Credit: Shamil Zhumatov/Pool Photo via AP



Roscosmos cosmonaut Alexander Misurkin, center, is assisted as he disembarks from a helicopter as he arrives at the airport after returning from the International Space Station on the Soyuz MS-20 space capsule, in Zhezkazgan, Kazakhstan, Monday, Dec. 20, 2021. A Japanese billionaire, his producer and a Russian cosmonaut safely returned to Earth on Monday after spending 12 days on the International Space Station. Credit: Shamil Zhumatov/Pool Photo via AP



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He said he felt "a little bit of motion sickness" and it was "a little bit difficult to sleep," adding that future space tourists should be prepared to spend up to five days adapting to zero gravity.

Maezawa said he was happy with the length of his trip, saying that "12 days was about right for me" to adapt to the motion sickness and enjoy the rest of the flight.

After asking the public for ideas before the flight, Maezawa had compiled a list of 100 things to do in space that included playing some sports inside the space station such as badminton, table tennis and golf.

Space Adventures, a Virginia-based company that organized his flight, previously sent seven other tourists to the space station between 2001 and 2009.

Maezawa made his fortune in retail fashion, launching Japan's largest online fashion mall, Zozotown. Forbes magazine has estimated his net worth at \$1.9 billion.

The tycoon has also booked a flyby around the moon aboard Elon Musk's Starship and will be joined on that trip by eight contest winners. He said he plans to undertake that mission in 2023.

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Citation: Japanese space tourists safely return to Earth (2021, December 20) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2021-12-japanese-space-tourists-safely-earth.html>

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