

# Private flight with 2 Saudi astronauts returns from space station with Gulf of Mexico splashdown

May 31 2023, by Marcia Dunn

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In this frame grab from video broadcast by SpaceX, recovery crews lift and secure the SpaceX Dragon capsule after it splashed down into the Gulf of Mexico, just off the Florida Panhandle, late Tuesday, May 30, 2023. The private flight carrying two Saudi astronauts and other passengers returned to Earth after a nine-day trip to the International Space Station. Credit: SpaceX via AP

A private flight carrying two Saudi astronauts and other passengers returned to Earth late Tuesday night after a nine-day trip to the [International Space Station](#).

The [SpaceX capsule](#) carrying the four parachuted into the Gulf of Mexico, just off the Florida panhandle, 12 hours after undocking from the orbiting lab.

The Saudi government picked up the multimillion-dollar tab for its two [astronauts](#): Rayyanah Barnawi, a stem cell researcher who became the first Saudi woman in space; and fighter pilot Ali al-Qarni.

Barnawi wiped away tears as she wrapped up her experiments and prepared to leave the space station.

"Every [story](#) comes to an end and this is only the beginning of a new era for our country and our region," she said Monday.

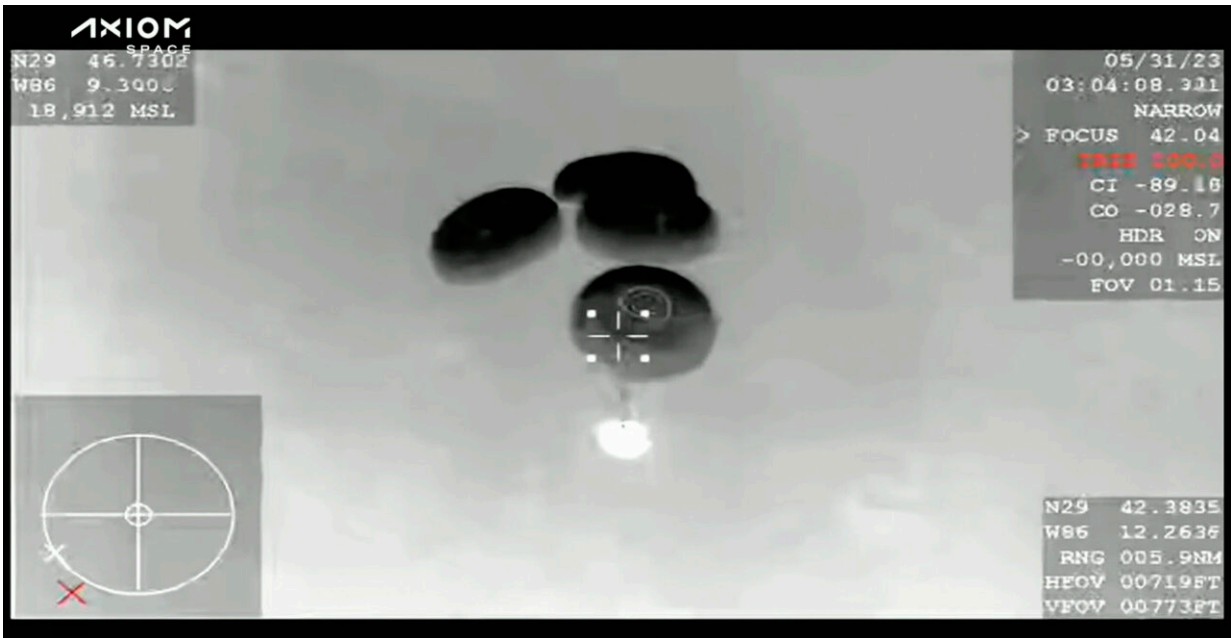
A Knoxville, Tennessee, businessman who started a race car team, John Shoffner, paid his own way to the space station.

The ticket-holders were accompanied by retired NASA astronaut Peggy Whitson, who now works for the Houston company that chartered the flight, Axiom Space.

They rocketed into orbit last week on Axiom's second chartered flight to the [space station](#). The company plans to send up more clients by year's end.



In this image taken from video broadcast by SpaceX, crew members wave after the SpaceX Dragon capsule splashed down into the Gulf of Mexico, just off the Florida Panhandle, late Tuesday, May 30, 2023. The private flight carrying two Saudi astronauts and other passengers returned to Earth after a nine-day trip to the International Space Station. Credit: SpaceX via AP



In this frame grab from thermal video broadcast by SpaceX, the SpaceX Dragon capsule is seen with parachutes deployed just before it splashes into the Gulf of Mexico, just off the Florida Panhandle, late Tuesday, May 30, 2023. The private flight carrying two Saudi astronauts and other passengers returned to Earth after a nine-day trip to the International Space Station. Credit: SpaceX via AP





In this photo provided by NASA, Axiom Mission-2 and Expedition 69 crew members gather for a portrait together during dinner time aboard the International Space Station on Tuesday, May 23, 2023. At center front row is Expedition 69 crew member and United Arab Emirates astronaut Sultan Alneyadi flanked by, from left, Axiom Mission-2 crew members Commander Peggy Whitson, Mission Specialist Ali Alqarni, Pilot John Shoffner, and Mission Specialist Rayyanah Barnawi. In back from left are Expedition 69 crew members Roscosmos cosmonaut Dmitri Petelin, NASA astronaut Stephen Bowen, Roscosmos cosmonauts Andrey Fedyaev and Sergey Prokopyev, and NASA astronaut Woody Hoburg. Not pictured is NASA astronaut Frank Rubio. Credit: NASA via AP



In this frame grab from video broadcast by SpaceX, the SpaceX Dragon capsule splashes into the Gulf of Mexico, just off the Florida Panhandle, late Tuesday, May 30, 2023. The private flight carrying two Saudi astronauts and other passengers returned to Earth after a nine-day trip to the International Space Station. Credit: SpaceX via AP



In this frame grab from video broadcast by SpaceX, the SpaceX Dragon capsule is seen just before it splashes into the Gulf of Mexico, just off the Florida Panhandle, late Tuesday, May 30, 2023. The private flight carrying two Saudi astronauts and other passengers returned to Earth after a nine-day trip to the International Space Station. Credit: SpaceX via AP

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