

SpaceX launching Saudi astronauts on private flight to space station

May 21 2023, by Marcia Dunn



A SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket, with the Crew Dragon spacecraft, stands ready for launch to the International Space Station on pad 39A at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Fla., Sunday, May 21, 2023. Credit: AP Photo/Terry Renna

SpaceX's next private flight to the International Space Station awaited

takeoff Sunday, weather and rocket permitting.

The [passengers](#) include Saudi Arabia's first astronauts in decades, as well as a Tennessee businessman who started his own sports car racing team. They'll be led by a retired NASA astronaut who now works for the [company](#) that arranged the 10-day trip.

It's the second charter flight organized by Houston-based Axiom Space. The company would not say how much the latest tickets cost; it previously cited per-seat prices of \$55 million.

With its Falcon rocket already on the pad, SpaceX targeted a liftoff late Sunday afternoon from NASA's Kennedy Space Center. It's the same spot where Saudi Arabia's first astronaut, a prince, soared in 1985.

Representing the Saudi Arabian government this time are Rayyanah Barnawi, a stem cell researcher set to become the kingdom's first woman in space, and Royal Saudi Air Force fighter pilot Ali al-Qarni.

Rounding out the [crew](#): John Shoffner, the racecar buff; and Peggy Whitson, who holds the U.S. record for most accumulated time in space at 665 days.



The crew of the SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket, with the Crew Dragon spacecraft, from left, Saudi Arabian astronaut Rayyanah Barnawi, commander Peggy Whitson, pilot John Shoffner and Saudi Arabian astronaut Ali al-Qarni arrive at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Fla., before their launch to the International Space Station, Sunday, May 21, 2023. Credit: AP Photo/John Raoux



A SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket, with the Dragon capsule, stands ready for launch on pad 39A at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Fla., Sunday, May 21, 2023. Credit: AP Photo/John Raoux



A SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket, with the Crew Dragon spacecraft, stands ready for launch to the International Space Station on pad 39A at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Fla., Sunday, May 21, 2023. Credit: AP Photo/Terry Renna



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Members of the crew of the SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket, with the Crew Dragon spacecraft, commander Peggy Whitson, left, and pilot John Shoffner arrive at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Fla., before their launch to the International Space Station, Sunday, May 21, 2023. (AP Photo/Terry Renna)
Peggy Whitson



This combination of photos provided by Axiom Space in 2023 shows astronauts, from left, Peggy Whitson, John Shoffner, Ali al-Qarni and Rayyanah Barnawi. SpaceX's next private flight to the International Space Station awaited takeoff Sunday, weather and rocket permitting. Credit: Axiom Space via AP



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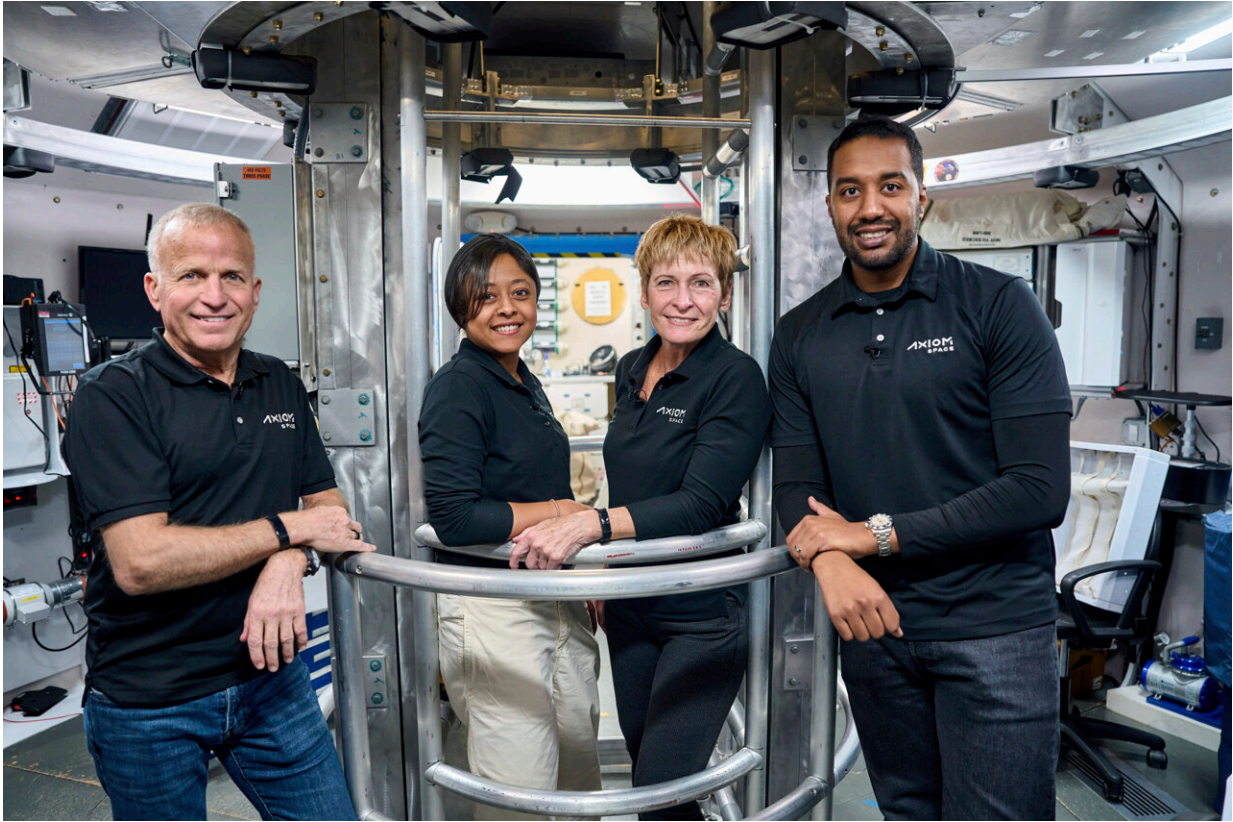
This photo provided by Axiom Space in 2023 shows astronauts, from left, Ali al-Qarni, Rayyanah Barnawi, Peggy Whitson and John Shoffner. Credit: Axiom Space via AP



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This photo provided by Axiom Space in 2023 shows astronauts, from left, John Shoffner, Rayyanah Barnawi, Peggy Whitson and Ali al-Qarni. Credit: Axiom Space via AP



Photographers set up remote cameras to cover the SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket, with the Crew Dragon spacecraft, before a scheduled launch to the International Space Station on pad 39A at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Fla., Sunday, May 21, 2023. Credit: AP Photo/John Raoux

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