

# Space Shuttle Discovery Blasts Off

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Space shuttle Discovery leaps from its launch pad Tuesday morning to start STS-120. Photo courtesy of Reuters/Scott Audette

The space shuttle Discovery and its seven-member crew lifted off Tuesday, Oct. 23, from NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida at 11:38 a.m. EDT to continue construction of the International Space Station.

Launch Director Mike Leinbach said the launch team at NASA's Kennedy Space Center was able to study a potential problem of ice buildup without jeopardizing the shuttle while still launching on time.

"It was one of the cleanest countdowns we've had since I've been launch director," Leinbach said.

During the 14-day mission, designated STS-120, Discovery's crew will continue construction of the space station with the installation of the Harmony connecting module, also known as Node 2. The crew, led by Commander Pam Melroy, will conduct five spacewalks during the mission, four by shuttle crew members and one by the station's Expedition 16 crew.

Discovery is scheduled to dock to the station on Thursday, Oct. 25. The addition of the Harmony module sets the stage for the arrival of new research laboratories from the European Space Agency and the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency in upcoming shuttle missions. During the mission, the STS-120 crew also will move the station's Port 6 segment of the station's backbone, or truss, and its solar arrays to a permanent position at the end of the truss' left side.

Joining Melroy on the STS-120 crew are Pilot George Zamka, mission specialists Scott Parazynski, Doug Wheelock, Stephanie Wilson, Daniel Tani and European Space Agency astronaut Paolo Nespoli. Tani will serve as mission specialist aboard Discovery and join the Expedition 16 Commander Peggy Whitson and Flight Engineer Yuri Malenchenko, who arrived at the station aboard a Russian Soyuz spacecraft Oct. 12.

Tani will rotate positions with station resident Clayton Anderson. After five months on the station, Anderson will return with Discovery's crew at the conclusion of the STS-120 mission.

This is the 120th space shuttle flight, the 34th flight for Discovery and the 23rd U.S. flight to the International Space Station.

Source: NASA

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