

NASA to announce museums for retiring space shuttles

April 11 2011



The space shuttle Discovery lifting off from Kennedy Space Center in Florida in February 2011. The US space agency said it will announce the museums that will host the three retiring space shuttles on Tuesday during an event to mark the 30th anniversary of the first shuttle launch.

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The US shuttle program is set to close for good later this year, after the final missions by Endeavour in April and Atlantis in June. Discovery ended its last journey to the [International Space Station](#) in March.

The question of where the iconic shuttles will be displayed has prompted a flurry of speculation, as the locations are expected to see a surge in visitor traffic by tourists eager for an up-close look at the journeyed spacecraft.

The prototype Enterprise shuttle, which never carried astronauts into orbit, is already on display at the Steven F. Udvar Hazy Center, a branch of the Smithsonian Institution's National Air and [Space](#) museum that is located in Virginia, just outside the US capital, Washington.

The [Discovery shuttle](#) is said to be headed to the Smithsonian, which also has a popular Air and Space museum location on the National Mall in Washington.

The final announcement will be made by NASA administrator Charles Bolden at 1700 GMT during a ceremony at Florida's Kennedy Space Center. A press conference will follow two hours later.

"During the ceremony, which will feature an astronaut from the first [shuttle mission](#), Bolden also will name the four institutions that will receive a shuttle orbiter for permanent display," NASA said in a statement.

The announcement will be broadcast live on NASA's website and NASA television.

The first launch of the US space shuttle program took place on April 12, 1981. The two-day flight by Columbia was meant to test its ability to carry astronauts -- in this case, two -- into orbit and back safely.

The Columbia shuttle disintegrated on its return to Earth in 2003, killing all seven astronauts on board. The other original member of the five-shuttle space flying fleet, the Challenger, exploded 73 seconds after liftoff in 1986.

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Citation: NASA to announce museums for retiring space shuttles (2011, April 11) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-04-nasa-museums-space-shuttles.html>

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