

Key dates in history of space exploration

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In this July 20, 1969, file photo, provided by NASA, Apollo 11 astronauts Neil Armstrong and Edwin E. "Buzz" Aldrin, the first men to land on the moon, plant the U.S. flag on the lunar surface. The family of Neil Armstrong, the first man to walk on the moon, says he has died at age 82 on Saturday, Aug. 25, 2012. Armstrong commanded the Apollo 11 spacecraft that landed on the moon July 20, 1969. He radioed back to Earth the historic news of "one giant leap for mankind." (AP Photo/NASA, File)

Notable events in the history of human space exploration:

- Oct. 4, 1957: First artificial satellite, Sputnik I, is launched by Soviet Union.
- April 12, 1961: Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin completes the first [manned space flight](#), orbiting the Earth in 108 minutes.
- May 5, 1961: U.S. launches first American astronaut, Alan Shepard Jr., into space, on a 15-minute, 22-second suborbital flight.
- May 25, 1961: President Kennedy declares the American space objective to put a man on the moon and return him safely by the end of the decade.
- Feb. 20, 1962: John Glenn becomes first

American to orbit Earth, completing three orbits.

- June 16-19, 1963: Cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova, the first woman in space, completes 48 orbits.
- March 18, 1965: Cosmonaut Aleksei Leonov takes man's first space walk.
- Jan. 27, 1967: Astronauts Gus Grissom, Edward White and Roger Chaffee die when a fire sweeps the Apollo I command module during a ground test at Kennedy Space Center.
- April 24, 1967: Cosmonaut Vladimir Komarov is killed when his Soyuz I spacecraft crashes on return to Earth.
- Dec. 21, 1968: First manned spacecraft to orbit moon, [Apollo 8](#), comes within 70 miles of lunar surface.
- July 20, 1969: Man walks on the moon. Neil Armstrong and Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin of Apollo XI spend 21 1/2 hours on the moon, 2 1/2 of those outside the capsule.
- June 29, 1971 - Three cosmonauts, Georgy Dobrovolsky, Vladislav Volkov and Viktor Patsayev, die during re-entry of their Soyuz 11 spacecraft. A government commission disclosed that the three died 30 minutes before landing because a faulty valve depressurized the spacecraft.
- Dec. 7-19, 1972: [Apollo 17](#) mission that includes the longest and last stay of man on the moon—74 hours, 59 minutes—by astronauts [Eugene Cernan](#) and Harrison Schmitt.
- May 14, 1973: Skylab I, first U.S. orbiting laboratory, launched.
- July 17-19, 1975: U.S. astronauts and Soviet cosmonauts participate in Apollo-Soyuz Test Project, docking together in space for two days.

— April 12, 1981: Shuttle Columbia becomes first winged spaceship to orbit Earth and return to airport landing.

— June 18, 1983: Sally Ride becomes first American woman in space.

— Feb. 7, 1984: Astronaut Bruce McCandless performs man's first untethered spacewalk with a Manned Maneuvering Unit off the Challenger space shuttle.

— Jan. 28, 1986: Challenger shuttle explodes 73 seconds after launch, killing its crew of seven.

— Nov. 15, 1988 - Soviets launch their first space shuttle. The 3-hour, 20- minute flight of the shuttle Buran is unmanned.

— Dec. 21, 1988 - Cosmonauts Vladimir Titov and Musa Manarov return to Earth from Soviet [space station](#) Mir after man's longest space flight - 365 days, 22 hours, 39 minutes.

— March 14, 1995: Norman Thagard becomes first American to be launched on a Russian rocket. Two days later, he becomes first American to visit the Russian space station Mir.

— June 29, 1995: Atlantis docks with Mir in first shuttle-station hookup.

— Sept. 26, 1996: Shannon Lucid returns to Earth after 188-day Mir mission, a U.S. space endurance record and a world record for women.

— Oct. 29, 1998: Glenn, now 77, returns to space aboard shuttle Discovery, becoming the oldest person ever to fly in space.

— May 29, 1999: Discovery becomes first shuttle to dock with the international space station, a multinational, permanent, orbiting research laboratory.

— Nov. 2, 2000: An American and Russian crew begins living aboard the international space station.

— Feb. 1, 2003: Shuttle Columbia breaks apart over Texas, 16 minutes before it was supposed to land

in Florida.

— July 21, 2011—Final [space shuttle](#) mission ends when Atlantis arrives at [Kennedy Space Center](#).

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