

Russian cosmonauts to take torch to space

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Prominent Russian ice dancers, World and Olympic champion, Tatiana Navka (R), and Olympic silver medalist, Ilia Averbukh, pose for pictures with the Sochi 2014 Olympic Torch in Moscow, on January 14, 2013. Russian cosmonauts will in November take the Olympic torch to the International Space Station and on a space walk ahead of the 2014 winter games.

Russian cosmonauts will in November take the Olympic torch to the International Space Station and on a space walk ahead of the 2014 winter games hosted in Sochi, Russia's space agency announced Monday.

The spectacular stunt will be the first time the Olympic torch has left the Earth's atmosphere, and will be a dramatic curtain-raiser to the games, which Russia is hosting in its Black Sea beach resort.

"No one has done this before us," the head of Russia's Olympic committee, Dmitry Chernyshenko, said in a statement.

"When a [Russian cosmonaut](#) goes out into open [space](#) with the Sochi 2014 torch, it will enter the history of the Olympic games and show the whole world how our country is striving for new victories."

It comes after Canadian astronaut Chris Hadfield scored a huge hit on YouTube by performing a personalised version of David Bowie's "Space Oddity" while floating in the ISS in May.

On Monday, Roscosmos chief Vladimir Popovkin handed the torch to venerated 79-year-old cosmonaut Alexei Leonov, the first man ever to take a spacewalk, who then handed it to the captain of the spaceship who will take it to the ISS, Mikhail Tyurin.

The Olympic torch will be taken up to the ISS in a manned Soyuz spaceship in early November and then carried into open space by cosmonauts Oleg Kotov and Sergei Ryzansky, the Roscosmos agency said.

"For reasons of safety, it is not planned for the torch to be lit," [Roscosmos](#) added, presumably referring to the torch's voyage in the Soyuz.

The torch will then be returned to Earth by [cosmonaut](#) Fyodor Yurchikhin, who is currently on the ISS.

Russia boasts that the route of its Olympic torch rally will be the longest

ever, taking in 65,000 kilometres on transport ranging from planes to reindeer-drawn sledges. The ISS orbits at a height of around 400 kilometres above Earth.

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