

British astronaut docks with ISS as country cheers debut trip (Update)

15 December 2015

Tim Peake, the first British astronaut to travel to the International Space Station, on Tuesday docked with the orbiting laboratory with two other spacemen, to cheers and excitement back home.

Peake, 43, joins Russian space veteran Yury Malenchenko and Tim Kopra of NASA for a six-month mission onboard the ISS.

Their launch from the Moscow-operated Baikonur cosmodrome went according to plan, but after their six-hour journey the astronauts docked with the ISS manually due to a technical glitch, a spokesman for the Russian space agency said.

"The commander switched to manual control and everything went well," the spokesman told AFP, adding they docked with the ISS at 1733 GMT.

"It was great to watch Tim Peake blast off on his mission to join the International Space Station," British Prime Minister David Cameron said on Twitter.

His spokeswoman said the British cabinet had hailed Peake's mission as "an inspiration for people up and down the country, particularly young people and children looking to study science".

Queen Elizabeth II's official Twitter account @BritishMonarchy retweeted the UK Space Agency saying "We have liftoff! @astro_timpeake is on his way to space! #GoodLuckTim, the #UK is with you!"

Fire from the boosters of the Soyuz rocket cut a bright light through the overcast sky at the cosmodrome in Kazakhstan as the spacecraft launched on schedule at 1103 GMT.

"Don't Stop Me Now" by the rock group Queen was blaring in the Soyuz roughly half an hour before blastoff as the astronauts listened to their favourite music in preparation for the mission.

Former army major Peake—a European Space Agency flight engineer—begins a 173-day mission at the orbiting research outpost along with Malenchenko and 52-year-old Kopra.

Malenchenko, who will celebrate his 54th birthday aboard the ISS next week, has already logged 641 days in space, while Kopra has chalked up 58.

'Quite emotional'

Peake's mission has generated excitement in Britain.

Crowds gathered in the Science Museum in London to witness the launch, with thousands of people including around 2,000 schoolchildren breaking into screams and waving British flags as giant screens showed the rocket blasting off.

The Chichester Observer, local paper in Peake's hometown, quoted his former physics teacher Mike Gouldstone as saying: "This is every physics teacher's dream, to have had a future astronaut in front of you.

"It is all quite emotional for me."

While Peake is not the first Briton to visit the ISS, he is the first qualified astronaut to enter space on a British passport.

Michael Foale, a holder of both British and American citizenships, first went into space in 1992 and even commanded the ISS in 2003, but flew all his missions as an astronaut of NASA which does not admit non-American citizens.

Helen Sharman became the first British citizen in space when she visited the Mir space station in 1991, with her launch backed by private companies.

Christmas in space

Peake himself was relaxed ahead of his first voyage into space, talking about his expectations of a festive season aboard the ISS during a pre-flight news conference at the Cosmonaut Hotel in Baikonur on Monday.

"We'll be enjoying the fantastic view of planet Earth and our thoughts will be with everyone on Earth enjoying Christmas and with our friends and family," he said.

Britain unveiled an ambitious new space policy on the eve of Peake's departure, aiming to more than triple the value of the sector to the national economy to £40 billion (\$60 billion, 55 billion euros) by 2030.

Business Secretary Sajid Javid said the new policy will "turn science fiction into science fact" while helping London increase its share of the global space market to 10 percent from seven percent.

Space travel has been one of the few areas of international cooperation between Russia and the West that has not been wrecked by the Ukraine conflict.

The Soyuz trio will join up with three astronauts already at the ISS—Scott Kelly of NASA and Russians Sergei Volkov and Mikhail Kornienko.

Three other astronauts—NASA's Kjell Lindgren, Japan's Kimiya Yui and Russia's Oleg Kononenko—returned to Earth on Friday.

The ISS [space](#) laboratory has been orbiting the Earth at roughly 28,000 kilometres (17,500 miles) an hour since 1998.

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