

ESA and Chinese astronauts train together

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Samantha in Chinese pressure suit. Credit: ESA–Stephane Corvaja, 2017

ESA astronauts Samantha Cristoforetti and Matthias Maurer joined 16 Chinese astronauts earlier this month for nine days of sea survival training off China's coastal city of Yantai. The ultimate goal is for ESA to establish a long term cooperation with China and ESA astronauts to fly on China's space station.

Returning from space, [astronauts](#) need to be prepared for any eventuality – including landing in water. Sea survival is a staple of all training but this is the first time that other astronauts had joined their Chinese counterparts.

Working in groups of three, the astronauts donned pressure suits and entered a mock Shenzhou capsule that was then released into the sea. The astronauts had to swap their flightsuits for insulation and buoyancy suits before jumping into inflatable boats. They then practised rescue procedures with both a ship and a helicopter.

Samantha says: "The training was superbly planned and conducted. It was a great opportunity to refresh my skills and a first time practising capsule egress in the ocean with decent waves.

"Most importantly, we were welcomed as colleagues and friends by the 'taikonauts' and the instructors. Language and cultural differences are obviously a challenge, but also adds value, as we are all focused on the common goal of space exploration."

Matthias agrees: "The reception was warm. We truly felt the spirit of belonging to one universal astronaut family, sharing the same values, goals and vision.



Sea survival training China. Credit: ESA–Stephane Corvaja, 2017

"Language was, as expected, the single most challenging obstacle, which we overcame with great enthusiasm and team spirit, speaking a mixture of Chinese and English."

Team work

Accompanying Samantha and Matthias were an ESA flight surgeon and training specialist to gain insights into the different cultural nuances and approaches.

ESA's head of astronaut training, Rudiger Seine, adds, "I see this as

another milestone towards establishing good cooperation with China as a space partner."

While this is the first time ESA astronauts have trained in China, it is not the first collaboration. Last year, Chinese astronaut Ye Guangfu joined ESA's caving course in Sardinia to experience an extreme environment as part of a multicultural crew.



Matthias with capsule. Credit: ESA–Stephane Corvaja, 2017

Both activities stem from the 2015 agreement to boost collaboration between ESA and the China Manned Space Agency, with the goal of flying European astronauts on the Chinese [space station](#) from 2022.

In the meantime, other training opportunities and joint activities are in the pipeline to get to know each other better.

The course was organised by the Astronaut Center of China in cooperation with the Ministry of Transport's Beihai Rescue Bureau.

Matthias concludes: "I am very much looking forward to expanding our cooperation with our Chinese friends into [space](#)."

Provided by European Space Agency

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