

## SpaceX | Commercial Crew Program



In the Gulf of Mexico, off the coast of Panama City, Florida, support teams work around the SpaceX Crew Dragon Resilience spacecraft shortly after it landed in the water, with NASA astronauts Mike Hopkins, Shannon Walker, and Victor Glover, and Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency astronaut Soichi Noguchi on Sunday morning. NASA's SpaceX Crew-1 mission was the first crew rotation flight of the SpaceX Crew Dragon spacecraft and Falcon 9 rocket with astronauts to the International Space Station as part of the agency's Commercial Crew Program. Bill Ingalls/NASA



# FOUR ASTRONAUTS RETURN IN RARE NIGHT SPLASHDOWN

BY MARCIA DUNN  
AP Aerospace Writer

**C**APE CANAVERAL, Fla. — SpaceX safely returned four astronauts from the International Space Station on Sunday, making the first U.S. crew splashdown in darkness since the Apollo 8 moonshot.

The Dragon capsule parachuted into the Gulf of Mexico off the coast of Panama City, Florida, just before 3 a.m., ending the second astronaut flight for Elon Musk's company.

It was an express trip home, lasting just 6½ hours.

The astronauts, three American and one Japanese, flew back in the same capsule — named Resilience — in which they launched from NASA's Kennedy Space Center in November.

"We welcome you back to planet Earth and thanks for flying SpaceX," SpaceX's Mission Control radioed moments after splashdown. "For those of you enrolled in our frequent flyer program, you've earned 68 million miles on this voyage."

"We'll take those miles," said spacecraft commander Mike Hopkins. "Are they transferrable?" SpaceX replied that the astronauts would have to check with the company's marketing department.

Within a half-hour of splashdown, the charred capsule — resembling a giant toasted marshmallow — had been hoisted onto the recovery ship, with the astronauts exiting soon afterward. NASA and SpaceX managers marveled at how fast and smooth the operation went. The company's senior adviser, Hans Koenigsmann, said "it looked more like a race car pit stop than anything else."

Hopkins was the first one out, doing a little dance as he emerged under the intense spotlights.

"It's amazing what can be accomplished when people come together," he told SpaceX flight controllers at company headquarters in Hawthorne, California. "Quite frankly, you all are changing the world. Congratulations. It's great to be back."

The 167-day mission was the longest for a crew capsule launching from the U.S. The previous record of 84 days was set by NASA's final Skylab station astronauts in 1974.

Saturday night's undocking left seven people at the space station, four of whom arrived a week ago via SpaceX.

"Earthbound!" NASA astronaut Victor Glover, the capsule's pilot, tweeted after departing the station. "One step closer to family and home!"

Hopkins and Glover — along with NASA's Shannon Walker and Japan's Soichi Noguchi — should have returned to Earth last Wednesday, but high offshore winds forced SpaceX to pass up a pair of daytime landing attempts. Managers switched to a rare splashdown in darkness, to take advantage of calm weather.

SpaceX had practiced for a nighttime return, just in case, and even recovered its most recent station cargo capsule from the Gulf of Mexico in darkness. Infrared cameras tracked the astronauts' capsule as it re-entered the atmosphere; it resembled a bright star streaking through the night sky.

All four main parachutes could be seen deploying just before splashdown, which was also visible in the infrared.

Apollo 8 — NASA's first flight to the moon with astronauts — ended with a pre-

dawn splashdown in the Pacific near Hawaii on Dec. 27, 1968. Eight years later, a Soviet capsule with two cosmonauts ended up in a dark, partially frozen lake in Kazakhstan, blown off course in a blizzard.

That was it for nighttime crew splashdowns — until Sunday.

Despite the early hour, the Coast Guard was out in full force to enforce an 11-mile (18-kilometer) keep-out zone around the bobbing Dragon capsule. For SpaceX's first crew return in August, pleasure boaters swarmed the capsule, a safety risk. Leisure boats stayed away this time.

Once finished with their medical checks on the ship, the astronauts planned to hop on a helicopter for the short flight to shore, then catch a plane straight to Houston for a reunion with their families.

"It's not very often you get to wake up on the space station and go to sleep in Houston," chief flight director Holly Ridings told reporters.

The astronauts' capsule, Resilience, will head back to Cape Canaveral for refurbishment for SpaceX's first private crew mission in September. The space station docking mechanism will be removed, and a brand new domed window put in its place.

A tech billionaire has purchased the entire three-day flight, which will orbit 75 miles (120 kilometers) above the space station. He'll fly with a pair of contest winners and a physician assistant from St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, his designated charity for the mission.

SpaceX's next astronaut launch for NASA will follow in October.

NASA turned to private companies to service the space station, after the shuttle fleet retired in 2011. SpaceX began supply runs in 2012 and, last May, launched its first crew, ending NASA's reliance on Russia for astronaut transport.

Boeing isn't expected to launch astronauts until early next year.

## TODAY

Today is Monday, May 3, the 123rd day of 2021. There are 242 days left in the year.

### Today's Highlights in History:

On **May 3, 1948**, the Supreme Court, in *Shelley v. Kraemer*, ruled that covenants prohibiting the sale of real estate to Blacks or members of other racial groups were legally unenforceable.

In **1802**, Washington, D.C., was incorporated as a city.

In **1916**, Irish nationalists Padraic Pearse, Thomas Clarke and Thomas MacDonagh were executed by a British firing squad; they were among 16 people put to death for their roles in the Easter Rising.

In **1937**, Margaret Mitchell won the Pulitzer Prize for her novel, "Gone with the Wind."

In **1979**, Conservative Party leader Margaret Thatcher was chosen to become Britain's first female prime minister as the Tories ousted the incumbent Labour government in parliamentary elections.

In **1984**, Michael Dell founded Dell Computer Corp. while a student at the University of Texas in Austin.

In **1987**, The Miami Herald said its reporters had observed a young woman spending "Friday night and most of Saturday" at a Washington townhouse belonging to Democratic presidential candidate Gary Hart. (The woman was later identified as Donna Rice; the resulting controversy torpedoed Hart's presidential bid.)

In **1999**, some 70 tornadoes roared across Oklahoma and Kansas, killing 46 people and injuring hundreds.

In **2006**, a federal jury in Alexandria, Virginia, rejected the death penalty for al-Qaida conspirator Zacarias

Moussaoui, deciding he should spend life in prison for his role in 9/11; as he was led from the courtroom, Moussaoui taunted, "America, you lost."

In **2007**, Britain's Queen Elizabeth II arrived in Virginia for the commemoration of Jamestown's 400th anniversary.

In **2009**, Mexican President Felipe Calderon told state television that a nationwide shutdown and an aggressive informational campaign appeared to have helped curtail an outbreak of swine flu in Mexico.

In **2015**, two gunmen were shot and killed by a police officer in Garland, Texas, after they opened fire outside a purposely provocative contest for cartoon depictions of the Prophet Muhammad.

**Ten years ago:** The White House said that Osama bin Laden was unarmed when Navy SEALs burst into his room at his Pakistan compound and shot him to death, a change in the official account that raised questions about whether the U.S. ever planned to capture the terrorist leader alive. Chicago's Derrick Rose became at age 22 the NBA's youngest MVP. Actor-director Jackie Cooper died in Santa Monica, California, at age 88.

**Five years ago:** In a stunning triumph for a political outsider, Donald Trump all but clinched the Republican presidential nomination with a resounding victory in Indiana that knocked rival Ted Cruz out of the race.

**One year ago:** In a televised town hall, President Donald Trump increased his projection for the total U.S. coronavirus death toll to as many as 100,000, but insisted that states could gradually lift lockdowns and still protect people from the pandemic. An incursion by a few dozen Venezuelan military deserters

hoping to overthrow the country's socialist leadership, backed by a former U.S. Green Beret, ended in failure on a Venezuelan beach with six insurgents dead and two former U.S. Special Forces soldiers behind bars.

**Today's Birthdays:** Actor Alex Cord is 88. Singer Frankie Valli is 87. Sen. Jim Risch, R-Idaho, is 78. Sports announcer Greg Gumbel is 75. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., is 72. Pop singer Mary Hopkin is 71. Singer Christopher Cross is 70. Rock musician David Ball (Soft Cell) is 62. Country singer Shane Minor is 53. Actor Amy Ryan is 53. Actor Bobby Cannavale is 51. Music and film producer-actor Damon Dash is 50. Country musician John Driskell Hopkins (Zac Brown Band) is 50. Country-rock musician John Neff is 50. Country singer Brad Martin is 48. Actor Marsha Stephanie-Blake is 46. TV personality Willie Geist (TV: "Today") is 46. Actor Christina Hendricks is 46. Actor Dule Hill is 46. Country singer Eric Church is 44. Actor Tanya Wright is 43. Dancer Cheryl Burke is 37. Soul singer Michael Kiwanuka is 34. Actor Zoe De Grand Maison is 26. Rapper Designer is 24.

— Associated Press

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