

ISS crew set to return to Earth on thursday

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Washington: Three Expedition 43 crew members are all set to return to Earth on Thursday after their 199-day stay on the International Space Station (ISS).

Commander Terry Virts and flight engineers Anton Shkaplerov and Samantha Cristoforetti will board the Soyuz TMA-15M spacecraft for landing in Kazakhstan at 7.13 p.m. (India time).

Virts had ceremoniously handed over control of the ISS to veteran cosmonaut Gennady Padalka.

Originally scheduled for May 13, the mission was extended for one month because of a Russian rocket failure in April.

European Space Agency (ESA) astronaut Cristoforetti has set a new space record.

She moved past NASA astronaut Sunita Williams, who logged 195 days aloft in 2006-07, to become the world's most experienced female astronaut.

The male record for a single flight, set by cosmonaut Valery Polyakov during a stay aboard the Mir space station in 1994-95, stands at 438 days, CBCnews.com reported.

Expedition 44 commander Padalka, NASA astronaut Scott Kelly and cosmonaut Mikhail Kornienko plan to spend a full year in space to help researchers learn more about the long-term effects of weightlessness and exposure to space radiation.