



## SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

# US Astronaut Returns to Earth on Russian Spacecraft

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An American astronaut has arrived back to Earth after spending 355 days at the International Space Station, a U.S. record.

NASA's Mark Vande Hei landed in a Russian Soyuz **capsule** on Wednesday in Kazakhstan. He flew back to Earth with Russian Space Agency's Pyotr Dubrov and Anton Shkaplerov. Dubrov had also spent the last year in space.

Vande Hei was the last one out of the capsule. He smiled and waved as he was carried to a chair in the open Kazakh grasslands.

"It's beautiful out here," Vande Hei said.

Despite rising tensions between the United States and Russia over Vladimir Putin's war with Ukraine, Vande Hei's return followed a usual process. A small NASA team of doctors was on hand for the touchdown. The medical workers planned to return immediately to Texas with the 55-year-old Vande Hei.

Even before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Vande Hei said he was avoiding the subject with his two Russian crewmates at the International Space Station.

Vande Hei and Dubrov launched on April 9, 2021. Shkaplerov joined them at the International Space Station last October.

"People have problem on Earth. On orbit ... we are one crew," Shkaplerov said in a live NASA TV broadcast Tuesday. The space station, he added, represents "friendship and cooperation and ... future of exploration of space."

The war tensions have affected other areas of space. Europe has suspended satellite launches on Russian rockets and the Europe-Russia Mars **rover** will be stuck on Earth for another two years.

Vande Hei beat NASA's previous record for the longest single spaceflight by 15 days. Dubrov moved into Russia's top five.

"Broken records mean we're making progress," said retired NASA astronaut Scott Kelly, whose record Vande Hei broke. Kelly ended his own 340-day mission in 2016.

Like Kelly, Vande Hei had medical testing during his long stay to help in NASA's effort to get astronauts back to the moon and on to Mars. Vande Hei said daily **meditation** helped him stay mentally strong during the mission.

"I've had an indoor job 24-7 for almost a year so I am looking forward to being outside no matter what kind of weather," Vande Hei said in a recent NASA video.

He added that he is most looking forward to making a cup of coffee for himself and his wife, Julie.

I'm Ashley Thompson.

*The Associated Press reported this story. Ashley Thompson adapted it for VOA Learning English.*

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## Words in This Story

**capsule** - n. a small part of a spacecraft that is separate from the rest of the spacecraft and that is where people live and work

**rover** - n. a vehicle used for exploring the surface of a moon, planet, etc.

**meditation** - n. the act or process of spending time in quiet thought : the act or process of meditating

