# Astronauts return to Earth after extended mission aboard the ISS



Astronauts Sunita Williams and Butch Wilmore, along with NASA's Nick Hague and Russian cosmonaut Aleksandr Gorbunov, have safely returned to Earth following a nine-month mission aboard the International Space Station (ISS). Their capsule, the SpaceX Crew-9 Dragon, splashed down off the coast of Florida at 5:57pm ET on Tuesday, marking the conclusion of an extraordinary mission that extended far beyond its initial timeframe.

Originally slated for an eight-day stay on the ISS following their launch on June 5, 2023, the astronauts faced numerous setbacks and malfunctions with Boeing's Starliner spacecraft, which was intended for their return trip. Issues included the failure of five of the spacecraft's 28 thrusters prior to launch, along with helium leaks and thruster problems during the launch. Consequently, by June 18, it became evident that the Starliner would not be able to return them on schedule, prompting NASA to delay their departure while engineers attempted to rectify the spacecraft's ongoing malfunctions.

The astronauts' extended mission led to increasing health concerns. Living in microgravity poses significant health risks, including weight loss and muscle deterioration. Reports indicated that onlookers expressed worries about Williams’ condition, with a source stating that she appeared 'gaunt', and her inability to maintain the high-caloric diet needed in space. Despite these concerns, Williams later rebutted the rumours in a live video, claiming she had actually built muscle during her stay.

NASA's decision to ultimately send Williams and Wilmore home via the SpaceX Crew-9 Dragon capsule came in August when the Starliner was deemed too risky for the return journey. The crew of four was scheduled to remain on the ISS until a replacement crew could arrive, which extended their time in space significantly.

NASA’s subsequent praise of Donald Trump in their mission statement attracted attention and sparked debate. The agency noted that the successful return was made possible under Mr Trump’s "direction", and claimed the mission was concluded a month earlier than anticipated due to a "unique mission plan".

Recovery teams assisted the returning astronauts as they emerged from the capsule after its retrieval from the water, ensuring they received immediate health checks before being transported to NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston for further assessments. If deemed fit, they will soon be reunited with their families after a separation lasting 286 days.

The operational challenges and political implications surrounding this mission highlight both technological hurdles in space exploration and the interplay between space agencies and political figures in the pursuit of advancing human presence in space.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://spaceflightnow.com/2025/03/18/nasa-spacex-undock-crew-9-from-space-station-begin-17-hour-journey-to-earth/> - This article confirms the return of astronauts Sunita Williams, Butch Wilmore, Nick Hague, and Aleksandr Gorbunov to Earth via the SpaceX Crew-9 Dragon capsule. It also details the mission's extension due to issues with the Boeing Starliner.
* <https://www.justice.gov/archives/sco/file/1373816/dl?inline=> - This document does not directly relate to the space mission but is mentioned in the context of political implications. However, it does not support any claims about the space mission itself.
* <https://www.mass.gov/guide-to-evidence/article-xi-miscellaneous> - This resource does not support any claims about the space mission. It pertains to legal proceedings and evidence rules.
* <https://www.courts.michigan.gov/4903ae/siteassets/publications/benchbooks/cvrb/cvrb.pdf> - This document does not support any claims about the space mission. It focuses on crime victim rights and legal procedures.
* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jkjWBpV9JMU> - This video provides coverage of the SpaceX Crew-9 return to Earth, including the splashdown and mission details.
* <https://www.noahwire.com> - This is the source article itself and does not serve as external corroboration. However, it outlines the mission's challenges and political context.