

SpaceX adds NASA and Japanese astronauts to pioneering ISS mission

After it passes its first crewed test flight, Crew Dragon could regularly carry a crowd of astronauts to the International Space Station.

The first crews to launch from US soil to the International Space Station since the end of the shuttle era will be trailblazers in a new era of spaceflight.



NASA announced Tuesday that US astronaut Shannon Walker and Japanese astronaut Soichi Noguchi have been added to SpaceX's first operational crewed Dragon mission to the ISS.

JAXA, Japan's space agency, issued a short statement confirming Noguchi's participation. NASA's Michael Hopkins and Victor Glover were already on the mission's crew list.



"This mission will be the first in a series of regular, rotational flights to the station following NASA's certification of the new crewed system following completion and validation of SpaceX's test flight with astronauts, known as Demo-2," NASA said in a statement.

The upcoming Demo-2 launch (not to be confused with the first operational mission) will involve just two astronauts: NASA's Bob Behnken and Doug Hurley. Demo-2 is scheduled for no earlier than May. NASA hasn't announced a date for the four-person operational mission, but said it is targeted for later this year.

Walker is an ISS veteran who stayed at the station in 2010. Noguchi has experience flying on a space shuttle and also spent time on the ISS in 2009 and 2010.

SpaceX successfully sent an uncrewed Crew Dragon to the ISS last year and passed a series of key tests to show its readiness to carry humans into space.

NASA is hoping to end its dependence on Russian Soyuz spacecraft. Boeing is also in the process of developing a crew capsule, though its Starliner has hit more delays than SpaceX's Crew Dragon.

The new spaceflight assignments show that NASA is looking beyond the critical Demo-2 mission to a time when Crew Dragon will be in regular rotation as a ferry for astronauts.

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