

Brazilian Astronaut Has Already Ticket for Space Trip: March 23

Contributed by Marina Sarruf
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The journey of the first Brazilian astronaut to space already has a set date. Marcos Pontes, lieutenant colonel at the Brazilian Air Force (FAB), will fly to the International Space Station (ISS) on the 23rd of March in 2006, inside the Russian spaceship Soyuz.

The official contract for the mission will be signed by the presidents of the Brazilian Space Agency (AEB) and the Russian Space Agency (Roskosmos) on the 18th of October, during the visit by the Brazilian president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva to Russia.

The two agencies have signed a pre-contract in the beginning of October. Pontes should help in the maintenance and set up of the ISS and will carry out experiments created by Brazilian institutions during the mission. The astronaut will be in space for 15 days.

Pontes, who was in training at the North American Space Agency (Nasa), has already left to the Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Center, in Moscow, also known as the Star City. According to an interview given by the astronaut in August, the training is made up of technical classes on systems, simulators, assembly and disassembly of components, complementary systems and techniques, operational procedures, communications procedures and technical documentation.

For the flight, the Brazilian government will pay the Russians from US\$ 12 million to US\$ 15 million. As well as that, the government has committed itself to invest US\$ 80 million directly on the national industries, during six years, for the production and exports of parts and equipments to be used in the station. This investment is part of the international agreement made with another 16 countries for the assembly and maintenance of the ISS.

The ISS is a scientific project developed by Russia, United States, Japan, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Switzerland, England, Denmark, Belgium, Norway, Holland, Spain and Brazil.

Profile

Marcos Pontes was born in Bauru, city in the interior of the southeastern Brazilian state of São Paulo, and started working as an electrician at the Federal Railroad System at the age of 14 to pay for his studies. As well as graduating as a military pilot at the FAB, Pontes also studied aeronautical engineering at the ITA (Technological Institute of Aeronautics, the Brazilian Air Force university). In 1998 he enrolled for the astronaut selection and was chosen.

The astronaut will take to space a Brazilian flag and the hat of the Brazilian aviator Alberto Santos-Dumont. In 2006 is celebrated the centennial of the historical flight of the 14-Bis at the Bagatelle Field, aircraft built by Santos-Dumont and the first to take off and land on its own means.

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