

Brazil's First Astronaut Celebrates Brazilian Aviation's Father

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A new, two-man crew of the International Space Station (ISS) and a Brazilian astronaut were greeted by the current crew on the ISS on Saturday, April 1st, when they arrived at the space station after two days of hurtling in space.

The Soyuz TMA-8 ship carrying Russian cosmonaut Pavel Vinogradov, U.S. astronaut Jeffrey Williams and Brazilian astronaut Marcos Pontes docked with the ISS two days after it streaked into the sky over the Central Asian steppe. They brought a fresh load of supplies, equipment and experiments.

Pontes, Brazil's first astronaut, entered the orbiting laboratory first, followed by Vinogradov and Williams, after the hatches between the spacecraft and station were opened more than one and a half hours after the docking.

At the Mission Control outside Moscow, families of the astronauts and space officials offered their congratulations as the astronauts from the spaceship and space station greeted one another.

Dozens of Brazilian, American and Russian officials fell into hushed silence at Russia's Mission Control Center in Korolyov, outside Moscow, as the capsule neared the station, then broke into applause when contact was made.

"Well, gentlemen, I congratulate you," a Mission Control announcer said.

"This is the international space station. The train does not go any further, please leave the cars," he said, imitating the announcement made at the end of each line on the Moscow subway system.

Cosmonaut Pavel Vinogradov and astronaut Jeffrey Williams, who will replace the current crew for six months on the orbiting station, were joined on the trip by Brazil's first man in space, Marcos C. Pontes, who will return to Earth on April 9.

Marcos Pontes, Brazil's first astronaut, has won the global attention that he feels his country deserved a century ago.

Pontes, who docked with Russian Cosmonaut Pavel Vinogradov and U.S. astronaut Jeffrey Williams at the international space station on Saturday, dedicated his flight to the memory of Brazilian inventor and aviator Alberto Santos Dumont, who is called Aviation's Father in Brazil.

Pontes planned to take with him a Panama hat used by Santos Dumont, the Brazilian who as all schoolchildren here learn was said to have invented the airplane but didn't get credit for it.

"At the moment of takeoff, I want to recall that 100 years ago another Brazilian took off, also outside Brazil, in France, for another important mission," Pontes told local media in an interview before his Soyuz TMA-8 took off Thursday from Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan.

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