

Brazil's First Astronaut Ending One-Week Space Jaunt

Contributed by Flávio Dieguez
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American, Russian, and Brazilian specialists expect to meet today, April 7, in the city of Kustonay, in Kazakhstan, Russia, for the final arrangements before Brazil's first astronaut returns from space with Russian and American colleagues.

The group in charge of coordinating the space mission informed that the purpose of the meeting is to prepare the recovery plan for the return of the astronauts.

They are Brazilian Marcos César Pontes, who has spent a week in space, and his colleagues, Valery Tokarev, from Russia, and William McArthur, from the United States, who were part of the International Space Station (ISS) Mission 12 and have been in space for six months.

Two hours after their arrival, the astronauts will be taken by military helicopters to an undisclosed spot in Kazakhstan. From there they will board a Russian military plane for Moscow.

The three astronauts will make the final leg of their journey in a round capsule weighing 2.9 tons containing four square meters of interior space.

The ground "rescue" team, consisting of nine MI-8 Russian helicopters and three all-terrain vehicles, has established three windows for touchdown which should occur near the city of Arclalic in Kazakhstan.

The first "window" is at 3:56 am (Moscow time) on Sunday, April 9 (which is 9:56 pm on Saturday night, April 8, in Brasilia; (7:56 EST)).

Each different "window" corresponds to a different orbit by the landing capsule and as each orbit has a different trajectory the landing area can vary widely. For that reason, the rescue helicopters have a range of over 400 kilometers.

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