

《国际空间站三名宇航员返航后发现地球变了》

新冠肺炎疫情期间，国际空间站三名宇航员首次安全返航，但发现地球与他们离开时相比，已变成截然不同的世界。迎接他们的是戴着口罩和手套的工作人员，而且他们还被要求与他人保持安全距离。



US astronauts Jessica Meir (L) and Christina Koch pose in the International Space Station in a photo released Oct 17, 2019. [Photo/Agencies]Two NASA astronauts and a Russian cosmonaut on Friday made a safe return from the International Space Station to find the planet transformed by the coronavirus pandemic.

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Andrew Morgan, Jessica Meir and Oleg Skripochka touched down in central Kazakhstan at 0516 GMT in the first returning mission since the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic in March.

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Morgan had been on the ISS since July last year, while Meir and Skripochka arrived in September.

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"TOUCHDOWN! Welcome home, Oleg Skripochka, Andrew Morgan and Jessica Meir!" Russia's Roscosmos space agency wrote on Twitter.

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Unusually, NASA and Roscosmos did not show live footage of the trio parachuting down in their Soyuz landing capsule.

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This was scrapped "due to technical limitations associated with the epidemiological situation," Roscosmos said.

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Subsequent footage from the landing site showed recovery crews wearing face masks and rubber gloves as they hauled the crew members out of the Soyuz MS-15 capsule, which was lying on its side.

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"Please keep your distance," one ground crew member could be heard telling another.

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While the trio's landing site southeast of the Kazakh town of Dzhezkazgan is the same as for previous crews, the pandemic has forced changes to mission-end protocol.

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The crew will not be flying back home via Kazakhstan's Karaganda airport as usual because it has been shut down, like so many other airports across the world.

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Instead, Skripochka will fly from the Baikonur cosmodrome used to launch missions to the ISS while the NASA duo will take off in a plane from the steppe city of Kyzlorda after a drive of several hours.

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In a media appearance aboard the ISS prior to her departure, Meir said it would be difficult to forego embraces with family and friends as she gets to grips with a new culture of physical distancing on Earth.

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"I think I will feel more isolated on Earth than here," reflected Meir, who made history as one half of the first all-women spacewalk along with NASA colleague Christina Koch in October.

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The International Space Station -- a rare example of cooperation between Russia and the West -- has been orbiting Earth at about 28,000 kilometres per hour since 1998.

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