

# Italian-Colombian takes virtual walk on Mars

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Italian-Colombian Diego Urbina makes the first of three virtual tours of the surface of Mars as a part of the **Mars500 project** in which astronauts simulate a trip to the red planet.

While in reality the astronauts' walk on the planet merely involved across a sand-pit in Moscow's Star City, their trip is part of a project considered one of the most important carried out by the European Space Agency, **El Tiempo reports**.

Urbina is one of five men who are spending 500 days, **starting in June 2010**, in isolation with only Internet access linking them to the outside world in order to simulate the conditions of a voyage to Mars.

The project, organized by the European Space Agency and its Russian counterpart, will study the physical and psychological behavior of human beings during the approximately 18 months it would take to reach the fourth planet in the Solar System.

Accompanied by Russian Alexandr Smolejevski, Urbina began the walk by placing the flags of the project's organizers: Russia, the European Space Agency and China.

During their expedition the astronauts encountered a few technical problems. The transmission started a few minutes after the astronauts first set foot on the virtual Marian surface and their speech was affected by interference.

Regardless of these technical difficulties, the two astronauts managed to perform all their tasks. They took samples of the virtual Martian soil and found two magnets placed in advance by the experiment's organizers.