



Mars500 project crew returns home

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The Mars500 project crew has returned to Earth after 520 days of living inside steel containers to simulate the length of a journey to the Red Planet.

Three Russians, two EU citizens and a Chinese national spent 17 months in a 550-cubic-meter mock spaceship at a Moscow research institute as part of the \$15 million Mars500 experiment aiming to investigate the psychological and physiological effects of a long-duration spaceflight on humans.

The six male volunteers will spend three days in quarantine after greeting and embracing friends and family, Reuters reported.

"It's really, really great to see you all again, rather heartwarming," said shaky and red-eyed Diego Urbina, an Italian-Colombian participant.

"On this mission we've achieved the longest isolation ever so that humankind can go to a distant but reachable planet."

Psychologists say returning to the noise and activity of ordinary life might come as a shock to the group.

"Time seems to have flown by since we closed the hatch last year. But how time really felt to the crew we'll soon know. Probably we'll have a very big difference of opinion," said Igor Ushakov, head of the Russian Institute for Biomedical Problems, which ran the project in collaboration with the European Space Agency (Esa).

The crewmembers wore real spacesuits and walked on the planet surface, the sandy floor of another module at the Moscow-based experiment.

The Mars500 project also introduced a time delay in communications between the crew and their ground controllers outside the modules.

The crew experienced real spaceship conditions. They fed on rations like those of real astronauts, rarely showered, took daily urine and blood samples and were under 24-hour surveillance everywhere except in toilets.

Space officials say there is no way to protect astronauts from cosmic radiation, land them at least 56 million km across the solar system and bring them back home.

Charles, however, said flying to Mars is "the next logical step for human expansion."

"If any catastrophic threat is targeting the Earth, we should be able to seek for a safe haven in another celestial body."

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