

SPACE NEXT

Timeline of Space Exploration

Circa 1600 BC:

Babylonian records indicate an understanding that the morning star and evening star are a single object, what we know as the planet Venus.

AD 800-1300:

The Chinese invent gunpowder, fireworks, and rockets.

March 16, 1926:

Robert Goddard launches the first liquid-fueled rocket.

October 24, 1946:

A V-2 missile launched from White Sands Missile Range in New Mexico provides first photos of Earth from space.

October 4, 1957:

The Soviet Union launches Sputnik 1, the first artificial satellite of Earth. Sputnik broadcasts the first signal from space.

January 31, 1958:

The United States launches Explorer 1, its first satellite. Explorer 1 returns data from orbit, confirming the existence of the Van Allen radiation belts.

October 1, 1958:

The newly formed NASA, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, takes over the US space program from the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics.

April 12, 1961:

Cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin of the Soviet Union becomes the first man in space while orbiting the Earth a single time.

May 5, 1961:

Alan Shepard's suborbital flight makes him the first American in space.

February 20, 1962:

John Glenn becomes the first American to orbit the Earth, circling three times.

December 21, 1968:

Apollo 8 launches on a six-day mission, becoming the first crewed spacecraft to the moon. Astronauts Frank Borman, James Lovell, and William Anders orbit the moon ten times.

July 20, 1969:

Neil Armstrong of Apollo 11 is the first man to walk on the moon.

May 14, 1973:

NASA launches Skylab, the first US space station.

July 17, 1975:

The last Apollo module to travel to space docks with Soyuz 19 in the first US-Soviet joint space mission.

July 20, 1976:

The first successful Mars lander, Viking 1, touches down on the red planet.

April 12, 1981:

The first launch of the Space Shuttle. Columbia orbits for two days before gliding to a landing in California at Edwards Air Force Base.

January 24, 1986:

Voyager 2 makes its closest approach to Uranus, the only spacecraft to have visited the seventh planet.

January 28, 1986:

Loss of Space Shuttle Challenger seventy-three seconds after launch. A shuttle would not fly again until Discovery launch on September 29, 1988.

August 25, 1989:

Voyager 2 makes its closest approach to Neptune, the only spacecraft to visit the eighth planet.

April 25, 1990:

The Hubble Space Telescope is placed in orbit by Space Shuttle Discovery.

July 4, 1997:

Mars Pathfinder lands on Mars with Sojourner, the first successful planetary rover (the Soviets deployed robotic lunar rovers in the 1970s).

November 20, 1998:

Russia launches Zarya, the first module of the International Space Station.

April 28, 2001:

Multimillionaire Dennis Tito becomes the first space tourist when he launches to the International Space Station aboard Soyuz TM-32.

February 1, 2003:

Loss of Space Shuttle Columbia during reentry. The shuttle again grounded until Discovery launch on July 26, 2005.

June 21, 2004:

SpaceShipOne's first suborbital spaceflight is also the first privately funded crewed flight to space.

September 28, 2008:

SpaceX's Falcon 1 becomes first privately funded liquid-fuel rocket to achieve orbit.

July 21, 2011:

The Space Shuttle program comes to an end as Space Shuttle Atlantis touches down at the Kennedy Space Center after its final mission.

August 25, 2012:

Voyager 1, which launched on September 5, 1977, officially enters interstellar space, the first spacecraft to do so. At the time it was approximately 11.2 billion miles from the sun.

November 12, 2014:

The European Space Agency's robotic lander Philae makes the first soft landing on a comet.

March 6, 2015:

The space probe Dawn is the first to visit a dwarf planet as it enters orbit of Ceres, the largest object in the asteroid belt.

July 14, 2015:

New Horizons makes its closest approach to Pluto.