

Astronauts Are Finally Back on Earth After 9 Months Stuck in Space

Stuck in space no more, NASA astronauts Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams returned to Earth on Tuesday, hitching a different ride home to close out a saga that began with a bungled test flight more than nine months ago.

Their SpaceX capsule parachuted into the Gulf of Mexico in the early evening, just hours after departing the International Space Station. Splashdown occurred off the coast of Tallahassee in the Florida Panhandle, bringing their unplanned odyssey to an end.

Within an hour, the astronauts were out of their capsule, waving and smiling at the cameras while being hustled away in reclining stretchers for routine medical checks.

Astronomical faith!

CBS News reporter Mark Strassmann to astronaut Butch Wilmore: What is your life lesson or takeaway from these nine months in space?

“My feeling on all of this goes back to my faith. It's bound in my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He is working out His plan...”

– Tony Perkins (@tperkins) March 17, 2025

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It all started with a flawed Boeing test flight last spring.

The two expected to be gone just a week or so after launching

on Boeing's new Starliner crew capsule on June 5. So many problems cropped up on the way to the space station that NASA eventually sent Starliner back empty and transferred the test pilots to SpaceX, pushing their homecoming into February. Then SpaceX capsule issues added another month's delay.

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Sunday's arrival of their relief crew meant Wilmore and Williams could finally leave. NASA cut them loose a little early, given the iffy weather forecast later this week. They checked out with NASA's Nick Hague and Russia's Alexander Gorbunov, who arrived in their own SpaceX capsule last fall with two empty seats reserved for the Starliner duo.

Wilmore and Williams ended up spending 286 days in space – 278 days longer than anticipated when they launched. They circled Earth 4,576 times and traveled 121 million miles (195 million kilometers) by the time of splashdown.

"On behalf of SpaceX, welcome home," radioed SpaceX Mission Control in California.

"What a ride," replied Hague, the capsule's commander. I see a capsule full of grins ear to ear."

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Dolphins circled the capsule as divers readied it for hoisting onto the recovery ship. Once safely on board, the side hatch was opened and the astronauts were helped out, one by one. Williams was next-to-last out, followed by Wilmore who gave two gloved thumbs-up.

Wilmore and Williams' plight captured the world's attention, giving new meaning to the phrase "stuck at work" and turning

“Butch and Suni” into household names. While other astronauts had logged longer spaceflights over the decades, none had to deal with so much uncertainty or see the length of their mission expand by so much.

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