

Three tourists return from NASA's first foray into space tourism

A Monitor Report

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New York : Three rich businessmen returned from the International Space Station with their astronaut escort on April 25, wrapping up a pricey trip that marked NASA's debut as a B&B host. Flying back in a SpaceX capsule, they splashed down in the Atlantic off the Florida coast to close out a 17-day tour that cost them USD 55 million each.

The trip was supposed to last a little over a week, but dicey weather kept the visitors in orbit almost twice as long as intended.

"Welcome back to planet Earth," radioed SpaceX mission control from southern California. "We hope you enjoyed the extra few days in space." "Amazing mission," said real estate tycoon Larry Connor.

Before departing the space station on April 17, the group thanked their seven hosts, including three NASA astronauts whose own mission is nearing an end.

It was the first time NASA opened its space hatches to tourists after shunning the practice perfected over the decades by Russia.