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Living in space

A science laboratory 360 kilometres from Earth?

A preparation for a flight to Mars?

A cathedral in the sky?

The International Space Station, or ISS, is all of these.



At this very moment, **the ISS is orbiting the Earth at a distance of 360 kilometres.** It is flying at 28,000 km/hr (kilometres per hour). It goes round the Earth 16 times a day. It took more than \$100 billion and 14 years to develop. It is the most expensive thing ever built.

The station

The first part of the station went into space in 1998. Astronauts started to live on it in November 2000. There are usually three astronauts on board, and they stay for about six months at a time. Over the years there have been over 200 visitors from 15 different countries. Supply ships arrive about eight times a year.



Aims

Space agencies in the United States, Russia, Japan, Canada, and Europe are working together. They are using the zero gravity of space to do experiments in biology, physics, and astronomy. They are learning about living in space over a long time, and the effects of this on the human body. The astronauts are growing plants to make oxygen. They are studying the Earth's weather and geography. And they are looking at planets and stars to understand the origin of the universe.

An astronaut's day

Astronauts work for ten hours a day during the week and five hours on Saturday. The rest of the time they are free.

They wake up at 6.00 and have breakfast. There is a meeting, and they decide the day's plans. They have an hour for lunch, then more work till dinner at 7.00. Lights out is at 9.30. They do two hours' exercise every day, because weightlessness affects the body's muscles and bones.

Food

There isn't a real kitchen, but there is a kitchen table. All food comes in tins or packets. There is fresh fruit only when a supply ship comes.

Astronauts eat with a spoon. It is a good idea to have food with a sauce so that it stays on the spoon and doesn't float away! They like spicy food because in space the sense of taste isn't very strong.



Personal lives

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They have their own sleeping compartment. They sleep in bags attached to the wall. Because there is no up or down in space, they sleep 'standing up'. They have their own clothes and books and laptops. The temperature is always 72°F, so astronauts usually wear shorts and a T-shirt.

There isn't a shower, but there are two toilets. In their free time they send emails home, read, and play games. But what they like to do best is look out of the windows at Earth below.



Future of the ISS

The ISS is the first of many space stations. There isn't a date yet for a manned trip to Mars, but space agencies are already talking about it. One thing is sure – at some time in the 21st century it will certainly happen.

