

Space shuttle Discovery, with Yamazaki aboard, blasts off

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Space shuttle Discovery successfully lifted off and entered the Earth's orbit as scheduled Monday, carrying Japanese astronaut Naoko Yamazaki and six other crew members on board.

Three women are aboard Discovery, and another already is at the space station, making for an unprecedented foursome. The shuttle should arrive at the orbiting outpost Wednesday.

Discovery, launched from Kennedy Space Center at 6:21 a.m., will take supplies and experimental equipment to the International Space Station during the 13-day flight and is scheduled to return to Earth on April 18.

The 39-year-old Yamazaki, the first Japanese mother to fly into space, is in charge of ensuring smooth transportation of the supplies and operating robotic arms, according to NASA.

The mission will last nearly two weeks and coincide with the 29th anniversary of the first shuttle flight on April 12.

