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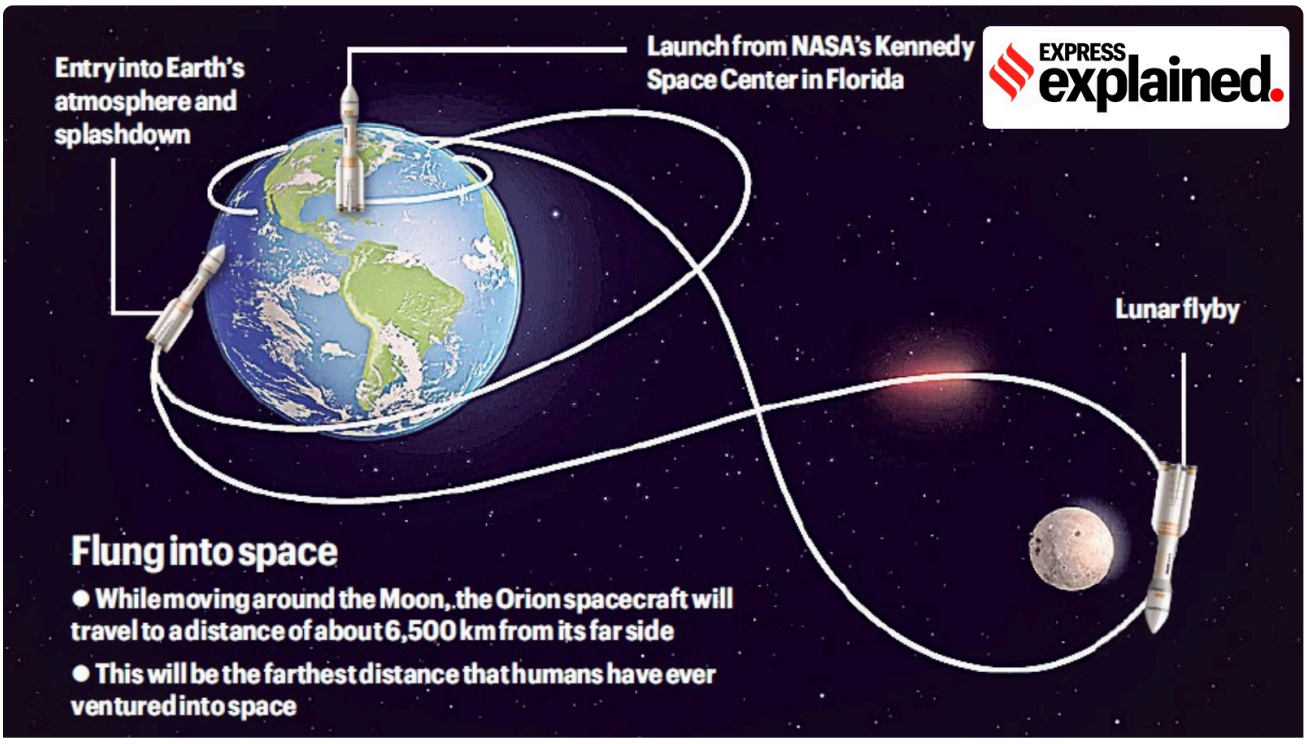
How NASA will fly astronauts to the Moon and back for Artemis II

A successor mission, planned for 2028, is scheduled to make a Moon landing with another set of four astronauts.

Written by: Amitabh Sinha 3 min read New Delhi Updated: Apr 1, 2026 06:57 AM IST



Artemis II is sort of a test-ride mission, meant to test and validate all systems before astronauts finally make the landing on the Moon in 2028.

NASA's Artemis II mission, carrying four astronauts on a flyby mission to the Moon, is all set to be launched on Wednesday. This will be the first time humans will get to

the Moon's neighbourhood after the last Apollo mission in 1972. The Artemis II mission will not land on the Moon but circle it and return to Earth after a 10-day journey. A successor mission, planned for 2028, is scheduled to make a Moon landing with another set of four astronauts.

Longer vs shorter routes

The Artemis II mission will take three to four days to reach the Moon's neighbourhood — roughly the same time the Apollo missions took to land on the lunar surface. Many other recent uncrewed lunar missions, including India's Chandrayaan-3, took much longer, between a few weeks and a few months, to get to the Moon.

Longer routes are more fuel-efficient and economical, while quicker routes require more powerful rockets. The SLS (Space Launch System) rockets being used for the Artemis missions are the most powerful launch vehicles available to NASA right now. The Apollo missions used Saturn V rockets, which are the most powerful rockets ever built.

Both the SLS rocket and the Orion spacecraft being used for this mission are relatively new. The two had debuted on the Artemis I mission in 2022, which was uncrewed but followed roughly the same path to the Moon and back, though it stayed in space for a longer duration, about 25 days, to carry out tests. This is the first time that the SLS rocket and Orion spacecraft are being used to carry astronauts.

The path

The Artemis II Mission will make two rounds of the Earth before embarking on its journey towards the Moon. Once there, it will go around the Moon before starting

the return journey to Earth. While moving around the Moon, the Orion spacecraft will travel to a distance of about 6,500 km from the far side of the Moon. This will be the farthest that humans have ever ventured into space.

The Apollo missions that landed on the Moon reached an altitude of just about 110 km from the far side of the lunar surface, while moving around it.

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The mission's launch was aborted earlier. As of Monday, NASA said there was an 80% chance that the weather would be favourable for a smooth launch on April 1.