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By: Gabriel Gache, Science News Editor



Image of the space shuttle Atlantis landing during 2006
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NASA Schedules Last 10 Missions for Space Shuttle

May 31, 2010, the final launch of a space shuttle

The date of retirement for NASA's famous space orbiter draws ever closer by the day; thus, the US space agency has decided to publish the dates of launch for the last eight space shuttle missions expected to take place in 2009 and 2010. The other two flights that will be carried out by the space shuttle this year were previously scheduled and involve a maintenance and repair mission to the Hubble space telescope and a resupply and inspection mission to the International Space Station, during which the rotary joints of the solar arrays will be fixed. October 8 and November 10 are the dates the last two space shuttle missions of the year will launch into space. Atlantis' STS-125 mission to the Hubble Space Telescope was originally scheduled earlier; however, due to improvements regarding the insulation shield of the external fuel tanks, it had to be delayed to October 8. Endeavor is next to fly in the STS-126 mission to the space station on November 10, although in case STS-125 cannot return safely to Earth, STS-126 could be delayed as Endeavor may have to rescue the crew repairing the Hubble telescope. The damage to the flame trench caused by the Discovery space shuttle during the launch in the STS-124 mission came somehow as a shock to NASA engineers, albeit repairs have already started and should end by the time Atlantis flies to reach Hubble. Atlantis, Endeavor and Discovery - this is all that remains out of the fleet of six space shuttle built by NASA. Enterprise was never meant to fly into space, while unfortunate events led to the destruction of Challenger and Columbia during 1986 respectively 2003, taking their crews along with them. The space shuttle is expected to exit service in 2010, with the last flight scheduled for May 31, 2010. STS-133 will be carried out by Endeavor and will conclude more than a decade of international collaboration destined to construct the International Space Station with the delivery of critical spare parts that will be left outside the station. The end of the era of the space shuttle will see the loss of up to 4,000 jobs at the Kennedy Space Center alone. To minimize the impact, NASA has already started the transition towards the Constellation program. Meanwhile, the spacecraft destined to take the role of the space shuttle, the Orion spacecraft, is still in the testing and development phase, and is expected to come into service somewhere around 2015.