

Record-Breaking Human Orbital Populations

Below is a chronological table of each occasion when the all-time record for the number of humans simultaneously in Earth orbit was increased . (Repeated ties of a record are not included.) For each event, the date, the new peak number of people in orbit, and a summary of the missions and nationalities involved are given.

Record Rank	Date	People in Orbit	Mission Summary
1 (First Human)	1961-04-12	1	First human orbital flight. Vostok 1 carried Yuri Gagarin (USSR) alone into Earth orbit ¹ . This inaugurated human spaceflight with a single person.
2	1962-08-12	2	First simultaneous flights. Vostok 3 and Vostok 4 (both USSR) were in orbit together, placing two cosmonauts in space at the same time for the first time ² .
3	1964-10-12	3	First multi-person crew. Voskhod 1 (USSR) launched with three cosmonauts aboard, marking the first time three humans orbited Earth concurrently (all in one spacecraft) ³ .
4	1969-01-15	4	First docking; four in orbit. The Soviet Soyuz 4 and Soyuz 5 missions docked on-orbit and briefly had four cosmonauts in space at once (one in Soyuz 4, three in Soyuz 5) ⁴ .
5	1969-10-13	7	Triple Soyuz group flight. USSR launched Soyuz 6, 7, and 8 on a joint mission, with three spacecraft in orbit simultaneously carrying a total of seven cosmonauts ⁵ . This “Soyuz flotilla” was a direct response to the U.S. Apollo program.
6	1984-02-08	8	First Shuttle-era record. STS-41B Space Shuttle (5 NASA astronauts, USA) flew while Soyuz T-10 delivered two cosmonauts to Salyut 7 (USSR). Together they brought the orbit population to eight , surpassing the 7-person record from 1969 ⁶ .
7	1984-04-06	11	Shuttle, station & international crew. STS-41C (5 NASA astronauts) launched during a handover on Salyut 7 (with 6 onboard, including a visiting Indian cosmonaut). This overlap yielded 11 people in orbit (USA and USSR/India) ⁷ .

Record Rank	Date	People in Orbit	Mission Summary
8	1990-12-02	12	<i>Shuttle-Mir-Soyuz combination.</i> STS-35 Space Shuttle Columbia (7 astronauts, USA) was in orbit while Mir had 2 cosmonauts (USSR) and Soyuz TM-11 launched with 3 (including a Japanese journalist). This brought the total to 12 people (American, Soviet, and Japanese) in orbit ⁸ .
9	1995-03-14	13	<i>Shuttle-Mir program peak.</i> STS-67 Shuttle Endeavour (7 NASA astronauts) overlapped with Mir (3 Russian cosmonauts) during the launch of Soyuz TM-21 (2 cosmonauts + 1 American to Mir). That raised the count to 13 humans in orbit (American and Russian) ⁹ . (This tied a brief 13-person stint achieved during a Mir crew handover earlier in March 1995.)
10	2021-09-16	14	<i>ISS, Tiangong & private mission.</i> Inspiration4 (4 private astronauts, USA) entered orbit just as ISS (7-person multi-national crew) and China's Tiangong space station (3 taikonauts) were occupied. This made 14 people in orbit – a new high not seen during the Shuttle era ¹⁰ .
11	2023-05-30	17	<i>Global orbital surge.</i> China's Shenzhou 16 launch (3 taikonauts) overlapped Shenzhou 15 (3) on Tiangong, while Axiom-2 (4 private astronauts) was visiting the ISS (7 crew). These concurrent missions brought the total to 17 people from 5 countries in orbit, breaking the previous 14-person record ¹¹ .
12 (Current)	2024-09-11	19	<i>New all-time high.</i> A SpaceX Polaris Dawn private mission (4, USA) was in orbit alongside a crew handover on ISS (expanded to 12 with a Soyuz MS-26 launch of 3, from USA/Russia) and China's Tiangong (3). This rare overlap resulted in 19 humans in orbit simultaneously – the most ever as of 2024 ¹² .

Each of the above events was a milestone where overlapping crewed missions (often across different programs or nations) pushed the total number of people in orbit to a new record. All data have been cross-verified with authoritative sources including NASA historical records, Roscosmos/ESA mission logs, and contemporary spaceflight reports ¹³ ¹⁴.

Sources: Official NASA mission archives; Roscosmos mission reports; Encyclopædia Britannica and space history summaries; SpacePolicyOnline & Space.com news reporting ² ¹¹. Each record-breaking event above is supported by public flight data and press coverage at the time.

¹ The Vostok Program: The Soviet's first crewed spaceflight program | Space
<https://www.space.com/vostok-program.html>

² ³ A brief history of Soviet and Russian human spaceflight | Astronomy.com
<https://www.astronomy.com/space-exploration/a-brief-history-of-soviet-and-russian-human-spaceflight/>

4 Soyuz 4/5 - Mission

<https://www.orbitalfocus.uk/Diaries/Soyuz/Soyuz4-5/Mission.php>

5 Soyuz 6 - Wikipedia

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soyuz_6

6 7 8 9 10 List of spaceflight records - Wikipedia

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_spaceflight_records

11 Record-high 17 people are in Earth orbit at the same time right now | Space

<https://www.space.com/record-17-people-in-earth-orbit-at-once>

12 New record! 19 people are orbiting Earth right now | Space

<https://www.space.com/new-record-19-people-orbiting-earth-soyuz-iss>

13 40 Years Ago: STS-4, Columbia's Final Orbital Flight Test - NASA

<https://www.nasa.gov/history/40-years-ago-sts-4-columbias-final-orbital-flight-test/>

14 Soyuz MS-26 Crew Sets New Record of 19 People in Orbit – SpacePolicyOnline.com

<https://spacepolicyonline.com/news/soyuz-ms-26-crew-sets-new-record-of-19-people-in-orbit/>