

We first started planning our trip to Orlando, Florida in Sept 2008 when Shuttle Atlantis was suppose to launch in Oct 2008. Shuttle Atlantis will take seven astronauts for 11 days to update Hubble Space Telescope (HST) with new instruments and repair old ones. This update will extend HST's lifespan for next 5-6 years. Shuttle launch was postponed in Oct 2008 due to technical problems. Launch was re-scheduled for May 11, 2009.

10th May.

We (NPH and PNH) left Ontario at 1.00am. We reached Houston at 5.30am and after 1.5 hours stop, we left for Orlando at 7.00am. We landed in Orlando at 11.00am. We spent next 6 hours at Orlando airport as we had to wait for our 8 friends from Phoenix, Davis and Baltimore. First party came at 5.00pm, second at 5.30pm and third at 8.30pm. We all left Orlando airport at 9.00pm in two rented vans. Our hotel (Best Western at Cocoa) was about 45 miles from airport so we reached hotel around 10 pm.

11th May.

Today is the launch day. Shuttle will lift-off at 2.01pm. We left hotel at 10am. There were few places from where you can see shuttle launch. Nearest place is ~3 miles from the launch pad and is reserved for all NASA VIPs and astronauts family members. Rogier (NPH's ex-advisor) was invited by NASA to view shuttle launch from this location. Next nearest place is ~6 miles away. This place is for people who have worked on shuttle and HST instruments. Again this place is for invitees only. We all went to best public viewing place about ~10 miles from the shuttle launch pad. Large number of people were eagerly waiting for the launch. After some wait exactly at 2.01pm shuttle lifted-off from Kennedy Space Center. We were able to see shuttle for 2-3 minutes but because of cloudy weather we could not follow it for longer. It was fun. Later that day we all went to see Rogier and his friends for some celebration.

12th and 13th May.

Both 12th and 13th were backup days for shuttle launch so if it was delayed on 11th then it could go on 12th or 13th. So we had booked our return flights for 14th .. just in case. Because shuttle was successfully launched on 11th we had two days to do some sight seeing. We visited Kennedy Space Center on 12th. We took 3 hours bus tour showing all about US space programs (from 1960s Mercury, Gemini, Apollo to 1980s Shuttle missions), various exhibits and we were able to see launch pads from nearby. We also enjoyed simulation ride

giving experience of shuttle launch -- how you will feel during the launch if you are an astronaut in a shuttle. On 13th we took Twister boat ride (boat with a big fan on back) on a river and saw alligators in water. It was fast and fun, and saw many alligators. We also spent some time at Astronaut Hall of fame museum -- it has all equipments, vehicles and information about how they train. Later in the day we spent some time at Cocoa beach - nice warm water compared to California beaches.

14th May.

In morning we all went back to Kennedy Space Center because we did not get chance to see IMAX shows on 12th. From space center some of us (who had early flight) left for airport. Our flight left Orlando at 3.00pm and after spending 1.5 hours at Houston airport, we reached Ontario at 8.00pm.

We all had great fun together....