

Japan launches mission to bring home a piece of the Martian moon Phobos

Japan launched a \$578 million mission Monday on a five-year expedition to land on the largest moon of Mars and retrieve samples for return to Earth, a daring international project that could yield new insights into the formation of the Solar System.

The robotic Martian Moons eXploration mission, known as MMX, lifted off at 3:41 pm EDT Monday (4:41 am Japan Standard Time Tuesday) from Tanegashima Space Center in southern Japan.

The MMX spacecraft rode into orbit atop a 207-foot-tall (63-meter) H3 rocket, Japan's flagship launch vehicle. The rocket assigned to MMX debuted a new souped-up configuration with four strap-on solid rocket boosters, full-throttle main engines, and an extended payload shroud to accommodate the demands of Japan's heaviest and most ambitious interplanetary mission to date.

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