



## Delicate touch

Fujian artisans carry forward ancient craft of carving seashells [LIFE, PAGE 17](#)

## Zelensky goes on rare visit abroad to UK

[WORLD, PAGE 12](#)



## Knockout place

Filming locations of TV drama gaining popularity among fans [CHINA, PAGE 5](#)

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# Shenzhou XV crew get ready for spacewalk

'Dream-chasing' astronauts to carry out their first mission outside space station

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The Shenzhou XV mission crew, who are now inside the Tiangong space station, are scheduled to carry out their first spacewalk in the coming days, according to the China Manned Space Agency.

The agency said in a brief news release on Wednesday afternoon that the Shenzhou XV astronauts — mission commander Major General Fei Junlong, Senior Colonel Deng Qingming and Senior Colonel Zhang Lu — had lived inside the Tiangong station for 70 days as of Wednesday and were in good spirits.

"The Tiangong space station is in stable condition. All necessary elements for extravehicular activity have been put in place. The 'dream-chasing' crew are about to make their first spacewalk," the release said.

Sources close to the Tiangong program said that two astronauts in the crew are expected to install and fine-tune equipment outside the massive station and this will be challenging for them because this will be the first time they will work outside of an orbiting spacecraft. "A spacewalk is never easy. It requires courage, energy and skills. I am sure that after so many years of training and preparations, the astronauts will conduct a perfect spacewalk," said Pang Zhihao, a retired researcher at the China Academy of Space Technology and a renowned writer on spaceflight.

"I look forward to seeing Deng flying in space. After all, a spacewalk is likely to be the final piece to realizing his dream," he said.

In the Shenzhou XV crew, Deng is probably the most popular among the public thanks to his moving story of persevering with his training for decades for the opportunity to go into space.

Fei's team arrived at the station on Nov 30. They are scheduled to stay until May, when they will be relieved by the crew of Shenzhou XVI.

The Shenzhou XV marks Fei's return to space after a 17-year wait. The 57-year-old veteran was part of the Shenzhou VI flight in October 2005.

This is the first space journey for both Deng, 56, and Zhang, 46. Deng is the last serving member of China's first group of astronauts to take part in a spaceflight while Zhang had been the only one in the second-generation of astronauts without spaceflight experience before the mission.

The Shenzhou XV crew are tasked with staying in orbit for six months to carry out a number of assignments, such as conducting spacewalks to mount equipment outside the station, installing and testing scientific cabinets, and conducting scientific experiments and technological demonstrations, mission officials said.

As one of the largest-ever space-based assets, the Tiangong station now consists of the Tianhe core module, the Wentian and Mengtian science capsules, the Shenzhou XV spacecraft and the Tizhou 5 cargo ship.

It has an overall weight of nearly 100 metric tons and is expected to operate in orbit for about 10 years and will be open to foreign astronauts in the near future, according to space officials.