



# SPACECRAFT BUZZES MERCURY'S NORTH POLE AND BEAMS BACK STUNNING PHOTOS - ASSOCIATED PRESS

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*This image provided by European Space Agency shows close-up photos of Mercury's north pole taken by the European-Japanese spacecraft BepiColombo.*

A spacecraft has beamed back some of the best close-up photos yet of [Mercury's north pole](#).

The [European and Japanese robotic explorer](#) swooped as close as 183 miles (295 kilometers) above Mercury's night side before passing directly over the planet's north pole. The European Space Agency released the stunning snapshots Thursday, showing the permanently shadowed craters at the top of of [our solar system's smallest, innermost planet](#).

Cameras also captured views of neighboring volcanic plains and Mercury's largest impact crater, which spans more than 930 miles (1,500 kilometers).

This was the sixth and final flyby of Mercury for the BepiColombo spacecraft since its [launch in 2018](#). The maneuver put the spacecraft on course to enter orbit around Mercury late next year. The spacecraft holds two orbiters, one for Europe and the other for Japan, that will circle the planet's poles.

The spacecraft is named for the late Giuseppe (Bepi) Colombo, a 20th-century Italian mathematician who contributed to NASA's Mariner 10 mission to Mercury in the 1970s and, two decades later, to the Italian Space Agency's tethered satellite project that flew on the U.S. space shuttles.

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