

Canada-USA-Bahamas Cross Border Flying By Private Aircraft

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DISCLAIMER

This document provides general guidance only. For official regulations and procedures, contact the appropriate government agency.

Flying To The USA

Electronic Passenger Manifests

The USA now requires electronically submitted Passenger Manifests for ALL flights *entering and departing* the USA. You must have permission to make the flight before take off.

Sign up for the Electronic Passenger Information System eAPIS:

<https://eapis.cbp.dhs.gov> click Enroll. You will need to enter typical address information and provide a password. The password must begin with a digit, be at least 8 characters long and include some non-alphanumeric characters. It could take up to two weeks for you to receive your activation information, but it is typically a couple of days. Follow the link in the e-mail. Save your login and password information.

Consider using a web-accessible e-mail address, since your permission to fly will be received by e-mail (at least until a future upgrade). This will allow you to use a computer while traveling to submit manifests. Also, to avoid the permission e-mails getting discarded as spam, whitelist *.dhs.gov

To activate, login at the same website. Your login name is called the Sender ID.

Update/Create Crew and Pilot information. Follow this link to enter yourself, address, passport and pilot license information. You do this once, and copy it to the manifest for the pilot information each time. If you have a frequent passenger, the only current way to save the data is to call them a crew member. A future upgrade promises features such as saving and recalling manifests, which will reduce the tedium of submitting them.

Every time you cross the border, either entering or leaving the United States, you must electronically file a Passenger Manifest at least one hour in advance. This can only be done with the eAPIS web site. You will receive a confirmation number indicating the submission of the Manifest.

This does not mean that you have correctly submitted all the information and it does not mean you are permitted to fly.

You will thereafter receive an e-mail confirming your permission to make the flight.

It is recommended you print the Manifest, Confirmation, and Permission to Fly e-mail in case there is confusion on arrival. Print the web page immediately prior to clicking Submit, since the next screen is the confirmation number and now you have no way to go back.

Although you must submit the manifest a minimum of one hour in advance of the flight, you are permitted to submit multiple manifests, days or months in advance. So a few days before your trip, after finalizing your plans, enter both your Arrival and Departure Manifests. You may call CBP to make minor changes prior to flight, such as the time you will be departing the USA, avoiding the necessity of requiring access to a computer before coming home. If you are delayed (eg. for weather), call the border office and ask them to update the information on your manifest. In theory, they should be able to update your submitted manifest, rather than you submitting another one, but that will somewhat depend on the training received by the officer you are talking to, at least initially.

After submitting a manifest, typically within a few minutes, but possibly up to an hour, you will receive your e-mail response. If not received after a half hour or so, check your spam box. Call the border point to ask if you have been cleared, since they can see the manifest.

Among a lot of legal gumbo indicating that your clearance is based on information you submitted that they cannot verify the accuracy of, the e-mail will indicate that you are cleared to fly. The departure manifest is quite specific, stating you are "cleared" to depart. However, the arrival manifest is quite vague, indicating 2 of 2 people have been "processed", which means 2 people have not been found on the "No Fly" or "Most Wanted" lists. If you submitted 3 people, call and ask, because something is wrong !! Also, this *does not* mean that these people are accepted for admission to the USA. Depending on nationality and residence, they may require visas or permits. If there is any question at all, call the border and ask, to avoid an ugly situation on arrival.

If an additional person is added to a flight after the arrival manifest has been submitted, it is necessary to submit another manifest, with same flight times, tail number and pilot, and the new passenger(s). The other passengers should not be resubmitted. The two manifests will be associated together based on the pilot and tail number.

If extenuating circumstances prevent you from filing a manifest electronically, the office should accept the information by phone, but this is somewhat at the discretion of the officer. Better to submit the manifest prior to leaving home, and just make changes by phone.

Although the pilot remains legally liable, with nasty penalties for non-compliance, you may designate someone to enter your manifest for you. It is recommended you enter the information yourself, but have your designated person call you to confirm receipt of the e-mail indicating your permission to make the flight. A partially completed manifest will be saved until submitted. Once submitted, there is no way to recall it for changes.

Passenger Manifests require:

- aircraft info, including owner and operator
(tail number cannot contain special characters, so enter CGABC rather than C-GABC)
- designated pilot (chosen from among the previously enter Crew information, or added)
- information for each passenger, including passport number, location and date of birth, home address and address while in the USA.
- departure airport and other foreign airports landed at during the previous 24 hours
- time and location at which you plan to fly across the border
- arrival airport
- estimated time of arrival

For arrival manifests, the arrival airport must be an Airport of Arrival (see below) and is chosen from the official list, which is obtained by clicking the blue arrow icon.

For departure manifests, the departure airport is chosen from the list of official airports of entry. Pick the one closest to your actual departure airport for the data field, and then enter the actual airport in the remarks field. You do not need to depart the USA from an airport of entry.

Note that the list pops up when you click on the blue arrow. Although it looks alphabetically coded by airport code, the codes are actually CBP codes. *Most* of the time, the CBP code is the airport identifier, but sometimes it is not. After clicking the blue arrow, choose by airport name which will be more helpful. For example Sanderson Field at Sault Ste Marie is CBP code KY62, instead of KANJ which is what you would expect. Under the By Name list, it is under Sault Ste Marie.

There is additional information, including checklists and a simulation program to learn how to submit manifests, here:

http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/inspections_carriers_facilities/apis

Airport of Arrival (Airport of Entry)

Choose an airport the USA border to land and clear customs at. If arriving from Canada, you may choose any convenient airport with available customs services. So, you can overfly Buffalo and clear customs at Greensboro, North Carolina if you choose. Should you need to land earlier than planned, due to deteriorating weather, for example, it will not create a huge problem, except that you may not get out of the airplane until the customs officers arrive. This could be hours, depending on what out of the way airport you landed at. If arriving from Bahamas, Mexico etc., you must land at the first opportunity to clear customs after flying through the ADIZ.

http://www.cbp.gov/linkhandler/cgov/travel/pleasure_boats/private_flyers/private_flyers_guide.ctt/private_flyers_guide.pdf

The above guide includes a list of International Airports (for CBP purposes - don't be fooled by the word International in the common name of an airport). It is somewhat outdated, for example Form 178 is no longer required, being replaced with the eAPIS manifest.

<http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/toolbox/contacts/ports>

The above link is an online search tool that provides additional, up to date, port information. Watertown, NY is not listed – call Alexandria Bay.

International Airports - no charge for customs processing, customs available at scheduled times.

Landing Rights Airports - need specific permission to land here, usually easily obtained, but ask about clearance fees.

User-Fee Airports - fees are charged for customs clearance, so do not plan to land here without calling to confirm rates (sometimes the fee is \$0.00 for single engine aircraft, so it is worth calling)

Call the weekday before your flight and tell them you are planning your trip and will be arriving by private aircraft, since at some locations, they must schedule an officer to drive to the airport from the automobile border point. Confirm they will be open at the time you plan to land and can meet you. Acceptance of your eAPIS manifest does not confirm availability of a customs agent to clear you.

If any question about admittance documentation, ask. You do not want to arrive to discover that one of your passengers is not a Canadian or US citizen and is missing a necessary visa. Current passports are required. Ask where on the field you should taxi to, and how much advance notice of your arrival they require (this frequently differs from published, but is typically 2 hours). Feel free to ask lots of questions. I once discovered, only by asking, that I would probably wait at Chippewa County Airport for a couple of hours before the customs officers might arrive, because they were understaffed at the border point due to a big concert that weekend. I was assured of much faster service if I landed at Sault Ste Marie, since it was only a few minutes away.

When you are ready to depart, call in your flight plan, check weather, TFRs, NOTAMs etc. Then call CBP to “provide notice of arrival by private aircraft”. Refer them to your Arrival Manifest and have them update your ETA if necessary. Ask for the officers badge number (as proof you called).

You need to arrive +/- 15 minutes of the time you state. Potentially the fine is \$5000 for the first offense !! If you will be late, you may be able to contact them via cellphone if you are flying low enough. Also, I am told Flight Service can pass along a message, but without confirmation that it was received by customs, you are taking a risk. DO NOT land in the USA if you will be quite late and cannot contact them. Land nearby in Canada and call them with a new time (they may want 2 hours notice again if an officer has to drive to the airport). Include circuit and taxi time at large airports. I typically plan my departure to be 20 minutes early. As I approach, I use the GPS and slow my flight to arrive just less than 15 minutes early. With taxi time, I arrive quite close to my notification time.

In spite of all the onerous rules, the officers are generally very friendly and you will find the “inspection” takes only a moment and you are cleared quickly and easily.

Penalties are not applied at the whim of the officer. They may recommend a penalty, which will be considered by the Program Manager at the central office and mailed to you. You will have an opportunity to offer your side of the story if you receive a penalty. Their intention is not to inspire pilots to do unsafe things to meet the requirements. If you intentionally flaunt their rules, you will be fined. If you are late or do something wrong in spite of your best efforts to comply, you will not have to pay a fine.

When you land, request “taxi to xxx for customs clearance”. CBP often monitors the ground frequency, since the officer is usually waiting on the tarmac as I taxi up. If not, *wait in the plane* until the notification time arrives. Slightly after that time, use your cell phone to call them to politely let them know you have arrived, perhaps you are parked out of sight or in the wrong location. If your cell phone does not function, *only the pilot* may depart the aircraft, to use the pay phone to call, and then *immediately* return to the aircraft. Until your have met the customs officer, nobody gets out !

Your entire aircraft will likely first be inspected for radiation with a sophisticated Geiger counter. You should tell them when you call if you have had a recent medical procedure, such as a bone scan that could trigger the detector. Stay in your aircraft until the officer tells you they are finished and wants to inspect your documents.

The Arrival Report Form 178 has been replaced with the information on the eAPIS Arrival Manifest.

Be prepared to show the following documents (they commonly ask for only the bolded items):

- **Passport** for all on board
- **Pilot License, Medical**, and Radio Operator Certificate for crew members
- **Certificate of Registration**
- Proof of Insurance
- Journey Log
- Certificate of Airworthiness
- Letter of authorization of owner you borrowed or rented the aircraft from

The ICAO English language proficiency rating must be indicated on your pilot license. Your new passport format license will have this.

Canadian Amateur Built and ultralight aircraft also need to “display” a Streamlined Special Flight Authorization: http://www.faa.gov/aircraft/gen_av/ultralights/sfa

Technically they can ask to see the Radio Station License for the aircraft. However, the DOC exempted these for Canadian aircraft in Canada and the FCC exempted them for US aircraft in the USA, so nobody has one. However, there is no official bilateral agreement, so International rules apply crossing the border, and thus you could be required to have it. The Radio Station License Mobile Aeronautical is renewed each for April 1st for \$38.00 by Industry Canada. Since the CBP does not enforce FCC regulations, it is extremely unlikely you will be asked for it. Application Form IC-2367 <http://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/smt-gst.nsf/eng/sf08061.html>

Although mostly pertinent to Air Commerce, it is possible you will be issued a “Permit to Proceed from One Airport to Another” at some ports of entry. I was also recently issued a Outward/Inward General Declaration at Port Huron. This airport, by the way, has a reputation of doing a lot of tedious paperwork, so the clearance process, while not difficult, can take a long time. I think it took 45 minutes for us last time. In Buffalo, perhaps they do all that paperwork, but not while we wait watching them. We are frequently cleared in just a few minutes without leaving our airplane. As always, your own experience will vary !

User Fee Decal

The aircraft requires a User Fee Decal (\$27.00US per calendar year). The number is required on the the Arrival Manifest if you have one. Order online: <https://dtops.cbp.dhs.gov> In the past, these decals were usually available for purchase on arrival, but apparently this is no longer the case, but if you don't have one, ask.

DTOPS is the new web site to purchase User Fee Decals. You will need to register as a new user, but after you have completed this, you can link your previous account to pull up your aircraft information.

Nearby International Airports

Central number (can make appointment when local office closed)	800-973-2867
Outside USA	407-975-1740
Greater Buffalo International Airport, New York KBUF	716-632-4727
After Hours (only if above number not answered)	716-284-5174 ext 1
Niagara Falls International Airport, New York KIAG	716-282-1400
After Hours (only if above number not answered)	716-284-5174 ext 1
Richard Field International Airport, Massena, New York KMSS	315-769-3091
Watertown International Airport, Watertown, New York KART	315-482-2261
Port Huron / St Clair County International Airport, Michigan KPHN	810-985-9541 ext 235
Sault Ste Marie - Sanderson Field, Michigan KANJ	906-632-2631

Flying Across the Border

To fly across the border in either direction, you *must*:

- **Have filed a Passenger Manifest electronically**
- **Be on an active flight plan** (do not check off ADCUS, call CBP directly)
- **Be squawking an assigned transponder code** (not 1200)
- **Be in contact with ATC** (either country is ok, may be Flight Service if no radar coverage)

Generally with flight following, the last two are already in place. Sometimes flight plans get lost. Confirm while airborne that you have an active flight plan. Note that US flight plans are not activated automatically.

Overflights

It is not necessary to clear customs or provide a Passenger Manifest if you cross the border and back while en route. However, the same rules for crossing the border apply:

- Active flight plan, Squawking assigned transponder code, In contact with ATC
- In the Remarks section of the flight plan include “USA overflight – no landing”

Flying Back To Canada

Passenger Manifest

You require an electronically submitted Departure Manifest in order to receive permission to make the flight departing the USA. Departure manifests are very similar to Arrival manifests (see above).

Canada Customs

1-888-CAN-PASS - this may not work with your cell phone, if so call direct to the following numbers:
 613-659-2301 Lansdowne 519-257-6471 Windsor
 905-679-2073 Hamilton 250-363-0222 Victoria

Call Canada Customs at least 2 hours in advance, to tell them you plan to arrive by private aircraft, the airport you will land at and your intended time of arrival. Be prepared to provide complete details of the passengers, including citizenship, date of birth and passport numbers if asked. You will be declaring any purchases you have made.

You must arrive at an Airport Of Entry. Some customs offices are only open weekdays during business hours, so check in advance (the CFS may be incorrect). The procedure is similar to arriving in the USA, without the dramatic penalties if you are late. You can call them on your arrival, rather than waiting for your ETA. Customs may choose to clear you by phone. When you have been cleared (phone or in person), you will be given a clearance number, which is your proof you have legally entered Canada. Write it down ! (the Journey Log is a good place). You may receive this number when you call to provide notice.

Apply for **CANPASS - Private Aircraft** membership. It costs \$40 and is valid for five years. If *all* passengers are members, customs processing is streamlined. You frequently do not undergo a customs inspection and you may land after hours when customs is closed and at some additional designated airports. If you frequently travel by commercial aircraft as well, then a NEXUS membership provides the same privileges.

<http://www.cbsa-asfc.gc.ca/prog/canpass/privateair-eng.html>

This site links to a list of Airports of Entry and CANPASS-Only Airports

NAV Canada

866-WXBRIEF does not work from the USA. The following numbers work throughout North America to allow you to call a specific FIC. The 866 numbers may not work from a Canadian cellphone depending what the roaming arrangements are.

866-541-4107	867-667-8427	Whitehorse
866-541-4101	250-376-8392	Kamloops
866-541-4102	780-890-8386	Edmonton
866-541-4103	204-893-8407	Winnipeg
866-541-4109	705-476-0024	North Bay
866-541-4104	519-452-4040	London
866-541-4105	418-871-8678	Quebec
866-541-4106	902-873-1365	Halifax

Although US flight service stations will attempt to give you a briefing for the weather in Canada, they have little knowledge of the geography and little familiarity with the Nav Canada data. So get a briefing from Nav Canada as well. You must file your flight plan with US Flight Service.

US flight plans **MUST** be manually activated. There have been quite a few cases of people arriving in Canada without an active flight plan. Also, flight plans are sometimes not passed to Nav Canada. Transport Canada is no longer being lenient with pilots forgetting to activate their flight plans and are enforcing fines. Confirm your flight plan has been activated prior to border crossing. Make a note of how you activated the flight plan and with whom. See Flight Service Stations (below) for additional details regarding flight plans.

Flight Planning

Join COPA. <http://www.copanational.org> Members Only -> COPA Aviation Guides -> AOPA/COPA Guide to Cross Border Operations

Join AOPA. A discount is available for COPA members. Their monthly magazine is excellent. <http://archive.copanational.org/non-members/AOPA.htm> AOPA has a new web-based flight planner.

US Airport Info

<http://www.aopa.org/airports>

Usually includes airport diagrams, taxi diagrams, FBO information and services, local restaurants and hotels. The diagrams can be printed out in knee board format. Call AOPA and ask them to mail you the Guide to Airports.

Call the FBO, who can tell you if there is a discount available at a nearby hotel and if they have a shuttle. Often the FBO can arrange to get you there, or loan you a Courtesy car (put some gas in it and remove your trash). The courtesy car is frequently an ancient beater, but is much more convenient and cheaper than a taxi.

Fuel Prices vary widely from one airport to another, but so do services. Compare fuel prices and note the reporting date.

Regional airports frequently are well equipped. Although the fuel prices are higher, more services (like a courtesy car) are often provided, so slightly higher priced gas is usually worth it. I generally select airports that are close to towns for food and lodging, if needed. For long trips, you might have to overnight due to weather, so having checked out the best locations for this, makes changing plans en route easier.

Useful airport information resources:

<http://www.100LL.com> Search for the best fuel prices.

<http://www.airnav.com/airports> This site has quite a lot of information, including comments (take those with a grain of salt). Activity statistics provide an idea of how busy the airport is.

Flight Planning Software

<http://www.flightprep.com> Golden Eagle Flight Prep 2007 is what I am currently using. It is free, although there are pay for options to display sectionals etc. I like that I can type in an identifier, to enter my route, rather than zoom, pan, zoom, pan click. Like all the other free packages, it cannot plan a multiple leg flight with fuel stops. It cannot plan VFR altitudes. You will need your DUATS access code. See <http://www.duats.com> You will need to call them with your Canadian pilot's license number, since the on-line registration only works with US licenses. Note also, that DUATS and DUAT are two different organizations, both private companies competing to provide flight planning services.

AOPA has new web-based flight planning software: <http://www.aopa.org/aifp/welcome.cfm>

<http://www.aeroplanner.com>

<http://www.fltplan.com>

The real advantage of web flight planning software is that the TFRs and MOAs are shown. All of the packages are free (you must be an AOPA or EAA member for those two) and additional features can be had for an additional fee.

In general, the flight planning software is not good at handling multiple leg VFR flight planning. I plan the whole trip as a single leg, then determine approximate locations I need to stop for fuel. I then re-route my trip based on my fuel and overnight stops. I save it, then delete way points to chop it down to single legs, which I print individually. A print of the entire thing is convenient to have if you are making changes en route.

A small map showing the boundaries of the States with major cities shown is very helpful when listening to a weather briefing.

On-Line Maps

<http://skyvector.com>

This is a convenient way to look at maps on the screen while planning a flight, which saves buying maps before you need them.

Aircraft Spruce is carrying a lot more inventory in Brantford now. If they have the map you want in stock, this will be the cheapest way to get it.

You can order the next release of US maps in advance online at: <http://www.AvShop.com> although I have never tried this. Have them sent by US Priority Mail which will save you paying brokerage fees to a courier company. You may need to pay GST to the Post Office when you pick up your mail though.

Most Canadian sources seem to have trouble getting recently issued maps quickly. They are shipped by mail and seem to get stuck in customs clearance for weeks. VIP Pilot Centre <http://www.vippilot.com> in Montreal is more likely to have them.

US maps are issued every six months.

NOTAMs, TFRs and Restricted Airspace

AOPA

<http://www.aopa.org/whatsnew/notams.html>

FAA Temporary Flight Restrictions

<http://tfr.faa.gov>

FAA Special Use Airspace

<http://sua.faa.gov>

Avoid flight over power plants and stadiums. Read the standard TFRs so you know the rules. AOPA has a plain English interpretation which is very helpful.

Stadiums – remain minimum 3nm 3000' agl from 1 hour before to 1 hour after event

Power plants, etc. - avoid and no loitering

Washington, DC includes very special airspace ! Flying east of the mountains, likely means flying **within 60nm**. This requires completion of the online course ALC-55 “Washington DC Special Flight Rules Area”, (updated 2011-11-30). You may be asked to show the Certificate of Achievement showing you passed the course. Note that the **Special Flight Rules Area is 30nm**, so if it appears you will pass by, well clear, you may still be close enough to require the course. The course and exam took me approximately 1 hour to complete. You can refer to the course material during the exam, for which you continue correcting the answers until you achieve 100%, at which point, you can print your certificate. You will need to register on the site to take the course. Check NO for airman certificate, since it verifies against the FAA database for a match. You may have to enter a random number as your zip code. <http://www.faasafety.gov>

Temporary Flight Restrictions

TFRs are restricted airspace, for a temporary purpose, such as over forest fires and where the President is visiting. Many have some notice, but rarely they are declared while you are in flight. Some are not temporary at all, for example, you may not fly low over power plants, dams or stadiums. If you violate a TFR, they may escort you away with a jet fighter. If you are intercepted, contact ATC immediately on 121.50. Using flight following is good insurance that you are staying in legal airspace, as you will usually be vectored around restricted airspace if you stray too close (although this is not guaranteed if they are busy).

Military Operating Areas

MOAs are places where the military conducts flights. They are referred to by names such as “Bulldog”. Often they are specific to an altitude range, such as 1000 feet and below, for nap of the earth flight and helicopter training, or 8000 feet and above. Flight Planning software provides the details, which are also listed at the bottom of the maps. The MOAs are very often not in use, even when scheduled, so plan to fly through them. You can ask ATC en route if they are active. If they are, you need a clearance to enter, which will likely be denied, but it is better to stay out anyway, since you do not want to mess with fighter aircraft doing exercises. MOAs are indicated on maps with a hashed magenta border.

Prohibited, Restricted or Warning Areas

Airspace you **must not fly through** is indicated on the map with a blue hashed border. These areas are usually numbered, such as R8201. Although some restricted areas are not restricted at all times, I don't find it difficult to plan my route to avoid these areas, which are usually quite small.

Alert Areas

Alert areas look like restricted areas (blue hashed border) on the map, but indicate busy airspace, such as where there is a lot of student training.

Obtaining Special Use Airspace Information In Flight

Contact frequencies and controlling agencies (usually ATC) are published on the bottom of the map, allowing you to determine during flight if a MOA is active.

Flight Service seems unable to look up specific MOAs and determine if they are active. Frequently MOAs are active for very short time periods, so planning in advance would not be accurate anyway.

Using flight following is good insurance that you are staying in safe airspace.

Basic Route From Toronto To Florida

This is the basic route I draw on the sectionals:

KBUF, BFD, TON, AOO, LDN, HOODE, 0V4, DAN, LIB, CTF, CASAT, COINT, ALD, AMG, TAY, OCF, KLAL. This avoids restricted airspace.

Then I identify likely fuel/overnight stops near the route, approximately 1 hour apart. Each year, these differ, depending on fuel prices, which vary quite a lot. Depending on the headwind or tailwind, I fly 2, 3 or 4 stops in a single leg. If you modify your route to include your fuel stops, and delete unnecessary waypoints, then you will find your route crossing through restricted airspace. Multiple changes will make this a frustrating experience. Following the basic route, with "diversions" for stops is much more flexible.

Weather

ASOS - Automated Surface Observation System

AWOS - Automated Weather Observation System

These have slightly different capabilities, but basically broadcast weather observations updated each minute at airports without an ATIS.

NOAA National Weather Center <http://adds.aviationweather.gov>

AOPA Weather <http://www.aopa.org/members/wx>

The Java Tools are especially nice, since you can mouse over airports to see METARs and TAFs as well as selecting the information to be displayed.

When you phone to file a flight plan, ask the briefer for a "Standard Weather Briefing" and you will receive *lots* of information. Have an idea what States you will be flying through and the big cities you will be flying past so you will understand the information provided. Know the identifiers of large airports along your route of flight, so you can ask about enroute weather.

An "Outlook Briefing" will get you information for a flight proposed for a day or more in advance and an "Update Briefing" would get you changes to a "Standard Weather Briefing" you already received.

The briefers prefer if you listen to all of their information (write it down) and ask questions after.

Be sure to ask about Notams and TFRs, so you have your request on tape if something ugly should occur.

Flying In The USA

Communicating With ATC

On first contact, identify your aircraft in full, eg. Charlie Golf Mike Whiskey India. Say this clearly and slowly, taking about two seconds to say it all. Some controllers have a lot of trouble with alphabetic registrations and you will need to frequently correct them. Near the Canadian border the controllers seem to like Canadian Golf Mike Whiskey India, but this sometimes results in confusion with Flight Service when they are looking up your flight plan.

Clearance Delivery

Large airports have "Clearance Delivery". Ground handles only taxi control. Listen to the ATIS, then call Clearance Delivery, essentially to get clearance to transit the control zone when you take off. Request to depart VFR to *destination* giving them a heading and desired altitude and request VFR Advisories (flight following). You will be given a transponder code and told to contact ground when ready to taxi. You must read back *all* of your clearance (and you will be told "read back is correct"). Now do your run up and then contact ground to taxi. After take off, tower may pass you to Departure Control, who will pass you to the Traffic Control Center (Center) as you get farther away. On arrival at a large airport, Center may hand you to Approach Control.

GCO – Ground Communication Outlet

Some airports have a GCO which is a radio to telephone patch, so you can radio from the aircraft (only while on the ground, due to limited range). These are similar to Canadian RCOs only very local.

Click one second on, one off. 4 times for Clearance Delivery or 6 times for FSS. After the dialing connection is made, key your transmitter to talk to Flight Service as you normally would.

VFR Advisories (Flight Following)

After departing an uncontrolled airport, to request VFR Advisories, your first call is something like "Potomac Approach, Charlie, Golf Mike, Whiskey India". Information on untowered airports will include the frequency for the nearest ATC, since IFR flights need it, so it is easy to find.

Then, "Skyhawk Charlie Golf Mike Whiskey India, 5 miles north of Danville, three thousand two hundred, climbing to five thousand five hundred, VFR flight plan to University Park, request VFR Advisories please." Practice this, since the more terse and professional your initial call, the more likely it is you will receive service if the controller is busy. If you are long winded, confused or uncertain where you are, it ties up their frequency, so they are unable to keep two IFR aircraft separated.

You will be given a transponder code, or be told "Unable", in which case, you are on your own.

After as much as ten minutes, you will be told "Radar contact, remain VFR", which means you will now be given traffic advisories, workload permitting, but the controller is making it clear you are still responsible for your flight.

You may also be asked to advise of course or altitude changes. In general, it is a good idea to advise ATC of altitude changes. "Potomac Approach, Charlie Golf Mike Whiskey India is descending to four thousand, five hundred." or "Potomac Approach, Charlie Golf Mike Whiskey India is beginning descent now for University Park." You will likely be told to "Report the airport in sight", at which time you will be told "Radar service terminated, squawk VFR, frequency change approved".

Being handed off from one controller to the next works well within the same territory (eg, from Center to Approach). When told to contact the next controller, you will be told "Contact Washington Center on 134.15". You keep your same transponder code and your initial call is simply "Washington Center, Charlie Golf Mike Whiskey VFR six thousand five hundred" ("with you" is discouraged slang).

Going from one Center to the next is sometimes problematic, but seems to be improving. You will be told "Radar service terminated, squawk VFR" and probably given a frequency to contact for further flight following.

Ask who to contact for further VFR Advisories if not. You may well be given the wrong frequency. On your initial call, you may need to provide info as for the initial call up.

When you begin your flight and ask for flight following, ask them if possible, to put you “in the system”, which means you will be given a transponder code you can use from center to center and the hand off will be easier. This will already be the case if you departed from a towered airport. Your flight will be listed on <http://flightaware.com>

The airport information usually lists all the ATC frequencies you will need, although it is not uncommon for ATC to identify you, but give you a different frequency to contact for your location.

Listen to ATC via the Internet <http://www.liveatc.net>

VFR Radio Procedures In The USA - RMC Inc. is a useful booklet.

Flight Watch

(almost everywhere at high altitudes) on 122.00 (06:00 to 22:00 local time)

Provides enroute weather updates, and take PIREPs.

They dearly want PIREPs, so call each hour with a position report and give whatever info you have.

They **do not** handle flight plans at all.

Call “Atlanta Flight Watch, Skyhawk Charlie Golf Mike Whiskey India, Columbus VOR”

Flight Service Stations

Flight Service handle flight plans and weather briefing. It is easiest to file flight plans on the ground. Many airports have “Briefing Rooms” with computers for weather and a telephone.

You may file more than one flight plan, and quite a while in advance. Flight plans **automatically expire and disappear** if not activated 2 hours after proposed departure time, rather than opening automatically like they do in Canada. This means you **must** activate your flight plan manually. You must do it with FSS, since ATC does not and cannot do it (although sometimes they might tell you they will do it). Americans say “activate” rather than “open”. If your departure will be delayed, phone and change your flight plan to avoid it expiring and disappearing.

Search and Rescue begins **30 minutes** after your ETA, and I have had them call the FBO at my destination looking for me earlier than that.

Our Canadian flight plans are similar to ICAO Flight Plans. The USA flight plans are a little different from ours and are used within the USA, or crossing the Canadian-USA border. An ICAO (or International) Flight Plan is needed when flying through an ADIZ zone, such as from the Bahamas to Florida. For a regular US flight plan, some information we usually provide will not be asked for. You will also be asked where the home base of the aircraft is. The equipment code is also different. In Canada, we might say GOV/C, but in the USA, with a GPS, it is just /G. Getting an update to your GPS data is worthwhile, since many databases include TFRs.

At some airports, you can radio FSS from the ground while taxiing to activate and close flight plans, which is easiest when in range. Ask at the local FBO the best way to connect with Flight Service to activate your flight plan. I have had trouble reaching FSS just after take off, when I would rather be contacting ATC for flight following. The airport information lists the frequency for FSS as well. Recently, I have been using a cheap US cellphone (check out <http://www.tracfone.com>) to call to activate my flight plan from the airplane, just prior to engine start. This is convenient.

In the air, it is challenging to contact Flight Service. In some areas, a single frequency listed for a local airport will work. However, Flight Service often has to resort to using the local VOR broadcast to talk with you.

Using a VOR To Talk With Flight Service

Identify the closest VOR. The little box under the VOR information is the FSS office. For example Leesburg. The frequency listed above the VOR information, is the one you broadcast on to call them.

If the frequency *does not* have a capital **R** after it, often 122.2 (available almost everywhere if you are high enough, ie 5000') or 122.6, you can try to talk with Flight Service on that frequency. The signal may be very weak, so to hear the response, turn the squelch feature of your radio off and turn up the volume, so you hear continuous background hiss (older King radios, turn the switch from On to Test, newer Garmin products, push the volume control).

If the frequency **includes** a capital **R** (for receive) after it, such as 122.1R, that indicates the frequency Flight Service can receive on, while you simultaneously listen on the VOR frequency ! Tune your Com radio to the R frequency and turn the volume down. Also tune your Nav radio to the VOR frequency. Confirm the Morse code identifier and turn up the volume, since the voice may be quieter than the beeps. Call "Leesburg Radio, Skyhawk Charlie Golf Mike Whiskey India, receiving Lynchburg one zero nine point two" (they use point instead of decimal). Expect to wait, since the operators are monitoring as many as 40 channels ! Unfortunately, the receive feature of some VORs has failed and not been repaired. They seem to have no way to track this, so they don't know to fix them. Perhaps report problems when you close your flight plan.

Weather SIGMETs and such are broadcast on the VOR signals. ATC often announces to all traffic that such a message is available, but is terse and assumes you know to which VOR to tune in. Only VORs with a **capital H** in the top right corner of the information box broadcast this information.

You can request to leave the ATC frequency during flight following for a few minutes to contact Flight Service or Flight Watch.

1-800-WX-BRIEF

The Lockheed-Martin system asks you the State you are in with voice recognition software. You can wait for a local briefer, or choose to talk with the first available one. You can speak your departure state or say "any" (useful for closing flight plans) to get the first available briefer. You can also use the touch tone keypad to enter the digits corresponding to the 2 character state code for mailing letters. Lots more hints here: <http://www.afss.com>

It is a good idea after getting established with flight following, to confirm with FSS that your VFR flight plan is active. This is a requirement if you will be crossing the border back into Canada.

1-800-WX-BRIEF now can be called from a Canadian cellphone.

Call 1-800-432-4718 to be connected directly to Miami to file an International Flight Plan and get a weather briefing for flying to Bahamas and the Caribbean.

Also new is IFR Clearance 888-766-8267. The intention is that you talk directly to someone who can provide an IFR clearance with your Canadian cell phone.

If you have a problem, such as a lost flight plan, AOPA wants you to call the FAA Complaint Line 888-358-7782, since the information is not kept for long in the system.

The following numbers provide direct access to the new FSS hubs and can be called from anywhere, but you pay the long distance. This is the same as calling 800-WXBRIEF, so you can easily close a flight plan or get a briefing. The Miami number puts you through to a briefer who is familiar with flying south of Florida.

INTERNATIONAL BRIEFING DIRECT ACCESS	HUB SUPERVISORS
817-697-6110 Fort Worth, TX	703-724-4288 East
928-778-0314 Prescott, AZ	703-724-4338
305-233-2600 Miami, FL	817-541-3468 Central
800-432-4716 Miami, FL (from within USA)	817-541-3470
505-243-7831 Albuquerque, NM	928-583-6154 West
	928-583-6152

Airspace and Maps

Download the Aeronautical Chart User's Guide to understand the US map symbology.

http://avn.faa.gov/index.asp?xml=aeronav/applications/digital/aero_guide

Class B airspace is around very large, busy airports and is identified on the map with a thin solid blue ring. You must establish contact and obtain a clearance prior to entering Class B.

Class C airspace is around busy airports. It is identified with a thin solid magenta ring on the map. Prior to entering Class C, you must *establish contact* in advance.

A response of "Charlie Golf Charlie Delta November stand by", is established contact.

"*Last aircraft calling, standby*", is specifically **not**.

Class D airports have a tower and the airspace is indicated with a thin dashed blue line.

Many untowered airports are within Class E, which is shown on the map with a thick hazy magenta ring (E above 700').

The airport symbol is blue if towered and magenta if uncontrolled.

Procedural Differences

Controllers are required to issue runway crossing instructions. eg. "C-GABC runway 32, taxi alpha, bravo, cross 15, hold short 32". *Do not cross any runway without clearance.*

The preferred uncontrolled circuit (Americans say pattern) entry is 45° prior to mid-downwind. You may also join downwind from midfield crosswind (which is the Canadian overhead join) – give way to other traffic, or use a straight-in approach, but yield right of way to all other traffic (don't count on large aircraft yielding to you though). Twin and turbine aircraft may use a 1500' circuit altitude, so be extremely careful overflying the field. It is safer to do this at 2000' AGL. As always, broadcast your movements and intentions on the aerodrome frequency. Many Americans fly above the departure path and "make a U-turn for the 45 to downwind" rather than flying midfield crosswind. Just hope departing aircraft don't have an Extra style climb rate !

VFR OTT - must apply to the FAA for approval.

Special VFR at night requires an IFR rating.

Some airports have interesting metal *landing direction indicators* in addition to wind socks. These are essentially strange looking weather vanes. There may be a segmented circle surrounding them with bars to indicate the traffic pattern, which is far easier to determine from the airport diagram. The advantage of these over wind socks is that they are sluggish, and indicate the prevailing wind when it is shifty, and thus they indicate the active runway.

There is no equivalent to the 126.7 enroute VFR frequency that we use in Canada to listen for aircraft position reports.

The AOPA Air Safety Foundation has some fabulous on-line courses and information which are very useful for learning about the US procedures and rules. <http://www.aopa.org/asf/index.html>

Air Safety Reporting System

If you make an unintentional mistake and violate a regulation, file an ASRS form within 10 days. Carry forms on every flight in the USA. You receive immunity from FAA enforcement, but only if what you did was inadvertent and was not an accident, crime or lack of qualification. The purpose is to allow pilots to submit material to make safety improvements without fear of reprisal. You will receive a receipt that you must save as your Get Out Of Jail Free card in case the FAA initiates action. You can avoid enforcement once in five years.

<http://asrs.arc.nasa.gov/docs/general.pdf> PDF to mail in.

<http://asrs.arc.nasa.gov/report/electronic.html> on-line submission.

Flying To The Bahamas

Obtaining Information

The Island governments do not produce official aviation maps or airport publications.

Bahamas & Caribbean Pilots' Guide

The best source is Pilot Publishing Inc. They produce the Bahamas & Caribbean Pilot's Guide and maps.

<http://www.flytheislands.com>

This thick book is updated and published annually. It is full colour throughout. It includes reviews of attractions, activities and accommodations, and has a photo of every airport, with details of available services. It also includes chapters of regulations and procedures for flying between the US and the Bahamas, as well as survival information. An iPad version is now available.

Map – Islands of the Bahamas and Turks & Caicos Islands

This map is in WAC chart scale and shows islands, distances, airspace, nav aids and airports.

The Miami sectional covers only the north-east half of the Islands. At this scale, much of the map is water.

Airports

These are approximately 58 airports. Some are designated as Airports of Entry. Your first arrival and last departure from the Bahamas must be to one of these airports.

Avgas is available at only eight airports, but it depends on supply. Marsh Harbour, George Town and Stella Maris are reliable.

Most airports have no tie-downs, so bring your own chocks.

Government Airports

All private aircraft are welcome at airports owned and operated by the government. Most have no landing or parking fees for single engine private aircraft. Many airports have a security guard.

Private Airports

Most of these are owned by resorts and welcome visiting pilots. Ask about fees.

Restricted Airports

Some airports are for exclusive use of their owners or have hazardous surfaces. Avoid these.

Required Equipment

- Insurance – check with your insurance agent to ensure you are covered in the Bahamas. If not, the endorsement will be inexpensive to add.
- Pilot's license with English Proficiency
- Medical Certificate
- Aircraft Registration
- Airworthiness Certificate
- Radio
- Approved life vest for each person
- Passport
- 12 inch tail numbers (electrical tape works)

Optional Equipment

- Survival kit, including food and water
- Aviation approved CO2 manually inflatable life jackets (Mustang MD1127)
- Life raft
- VHF marine radio
- EPIRB
- Oil
- Chocks and control locks

Flight Procedures

VFR

Controlled airspace – Ceiling 1500' and 5 miles visibility.

Uncontrolled airspace – Ceiling 1000' and 1 mile visibility, clear of cloud, in sight of land or water.

Maintain standard VFR altitudes.

Maintain 500' from people, vessels, vehicles and structures.

VFR flight is prohibited from sunset to sunrise.

Fly along the right hand side of the islands to minimize traffic conflicts.

AIRPORTS

Pass overhead at 1000' MSL for a left traffic pattern.

Announce on Unicom 122.80.

Strong and varying winds (typically from the southeast) will be encountered. The best flight conditions are early morning and late afternoon.

Flight Following

Flight following is only available near Freeport or Nassau. Miami Oceanic Control Area handles airspace 6000' and above. Local hops between islands are typically done without flight following or flight plans. Buddy flying is a good idea. Typically 123.45 is used for plane to plane communications.

Mayday

Broadcast a Mayday call if you experience an emergency, since 99% of ELT signals are false. A search is rarely done based only on an ELT signal. Of course a 406MHz ELT is a good idea, or alternatively, an EPIRB or a SPOT.

Flight Plans

Flying To The Bahamas

Include extra time in your flight plan to allow you the opportunity to close it, if you choose to close it using the blue phone at the customs office. Otherwise, you will need to close it at altitude prior to landing. You may need to relay through an aircraft at a higher altitude. Miami Radio has remotes at Nassau and Grand Turk on 118.40. Nassau Radio has remotes on some islands, so try both 124.20 and 128.00.

Departing From the Bahamas

File an International Flight Plan with US Flight Service using the blue phone at the Customs office, or file in the air with Nassau or Freeport Radio on 124.20 or 128.00 (flight plan will be immediately activated and transferred to the US).

You require a unique transponder code to penetrate the ADIZ. If you have flight following with Miami, they will have given you a code. Otherwise, contact Miami Radio on 126.70. You won't be able to do this until reaching Bimini or West End, which is quite close to the ADIZ boundary.

Bahamas Customs

Customs officers are generally pleasant and helpful.

There is a blue phone in the office which can be used to contact US Customs and US Flight Service, although it may be quite difficult to hear.

Arriving

Hours are typically 9:00-17:00, however, it is recommended that you arrive well before 17:00. Land at an Airport of Entry. Proceed with your luggage and passengers to Customs and Immigration. It is the responsibility of the pilot to find the officer and clear customs before any people or baggage leave the airport. You might be asked to remove everything from the aircraft for inspection.

Although the following paperwork is expected, procedures vary. I brought filled in forms, but was asked to fill in identical ones.

Immigration Card

Each person needs to fill in one Immigration Card. Your copy is your permit to remain in the Bahamas.

C7 General Declaration

3 copies filled in by the pilot on arrival. Usually you keep one to prove you have cleared Customs.

OR

C7A Inward Declaration/Cruising Permits

4 copies filled in by the pilot if you will be traveling between islands. Request this in lieu of the C7s, although you may be told to fill in C7As when you are actually departing to another island. Usually you keep one stamped copy with you. A commercial Transire may be used if C7A forms are not available.

Departing

Depart from an Airport of Entry.

Surrender C7A or Transire to Customs.

Surrender Immigration Cards for everyone.

Complete one C7 General Declaration.

Pay departure tax of \$25 for each person.

US Requirements

All the requirements for border crossing, including flight plans, communication with ATC, transponder codes, eAPIS manifests and notifying customs apply. You must land at the first available customs airport, such as Fort Lauderdale Executive or Fort Pierce.

When you land in Florida, take your baggage from the aircraft and proceed inside to Customs. This is different than most other locations.