

THINKING OF FLYING ABROAD – GUIDANCE NOTES AND TIPS

I have had a few requests asking for a summary of actions and guidance notes for venturing abroad. This is something I have deliberated doing previously but shied away from as it is a bit of a mine field, and leaves yourself wide open if you miss something out or it is not exactly correct as per the law... So here is the disclaimer! Whilst every attempt has been made to verify the information any good aviator will do his or her own planning and confirmation. These are guidance notes and only seek to consolidate and give sound advice; they do not replace the official rules and publications. As ever there are many ways of achieving the same aim and I will gratefully receive further tips and advice.

Typically most people go to France so that is where I will focus although many of the points hold true for anywhere in Europe.

FLIGHT PLANS (FP) - I do not intend to cover the completion of the FP, which initially looks quite daunting but in reality is simple and covered extensively on numerous web sites. Completion is not a black art and done once the veil of mystery is lifted, suffice to say you will need one! I am happy to give advice and assist individuals. Many on their first trip overseas go via Headcorn who will complete and activate it for you. That said you can fly from any airfield out of the UK deep into France if you have the fuel range. I frequently fly direct from BFC to Blois in 4 hours (we will cover Customs in a moment).

Assuming you are going to do your own FP then firstly it is worth noting that as of the 28 Jan 09 the filing process you may be familiar with, or have in a dated publication has changed. You can no longer fax or phone your FP to Heathrow as before; you can still fax the FP but it must now go to Swanwick ATC (Fax number below). You should note we are in a transitory phase with the introduction of AFPEX and are being encouraged to use this system – great if you have a computer! AFPEX is basically a software programme for electronic filing of the FP via the Internet which you have to register and have an account to use. See www.flightplanningonline.co.uk for further detail and login / password etc. I must admit I am not enamoured by AFPEX and much prefer the old, if you do go this route then I recommend you get one of the readily available “idiots guide” as there are pit falls particularly in the completion of the en-route addresses. As ever practice will make perfect.

Normally the lead time from filing the FP to activation is one hour in the UK but once in France this is much more negotiable. Last year in Le Touquet I filed a FP electronically, walked out to the plane to do a few checks and the tower waved me over and said they were in receipt and were happy for me to depart immediately. Now that is a good flexible service!

You can activate the FP several ways other than leaving from a designated airfield; where they do it for you, (but I always remind them on the VHF to confirm activation). Call London Information on the VHF and request activation – giving time airborne in UTC. Or a responsible person can do it for you on the phone, note you are not supposed to do it yourself just prior to departure...

Fax the FP to Swanwick ATC Centre: 01489 612793

The two 24hr helpline phone numbers are: 0845 601 0483 or 01489 612792

You can also ring these numbers to confirm receipt, activate, cancel and close the FP.

Note if you arrive in France and are having difficulty in closing your FP then you can call the UK to close it.

Once you arrive in France then close your FP, do not assume it has been done (in theory the French will let you close it via the VHF). Many airfields display the local number but needless to say unless you speak good French you will be thwarted. The number to call

(24hrs) for an English service is **0810 437837** and if on a UK mobile use the International prefix code **0033 and drop the first zero.**

Your FP on return to UK is done much the same way (the French FP is laid out in identical format, as it is across the world). Top tip: On your first foray your return route will likely be the same as the outward, so keep your original FP and much detail can simply be reversed. You can use the above French number to file a FP on the phone, activate and cancel; it is also possible to file in flight in abbreviated format over the VHF. If you do it by phone then do the decent thing and have it prepared and read it in sequence without discussion or debate, the Frenchman on the other end will much more helpful!

Note once you arrive in the UK there is no requirement to close your FP (the UK just assume your safe arrival and will not come looking for you unless the alarm is raised). But I must admit I always call to close out of courtesy and to avoid any potential false alarm. This should be a sufficient prompt to ensure your nominated responsible person is not fictitious, is reliable and well briefed as to your plans. Nothing worse than leaving Cherbourg for the UK with 70 miles of water, have Mr Rotax give up the ghost, probably be out of VHF range and just as you go for a swim you realise there is nobody to sound the alarm... what a bugger!

CUSTOMS – UK Customs first. Leaving not a problem, just go and no need to go from a designated airfield. Coming back is easy if you are flying into a Customs approved airfield – typically Headcorn then they will give you the form to complete on arrival but make sure you check the airfield PPR time for Customs and don't just turn up as some require 4 or 12 hours warning. My top tip if returning direct to your home microlight field (or any other small field) is complete the General Aviation Report (GAR) prior to your departure giving all the details of your outward and return journey. Even if you are not certain when you are actually returning just give it a best guess, then when you are sat in Abbeville in the rain you just ring the UK Customs and amend your return date / time and even field with a simple short phone call. Saves much time and expense, all you need to do is give them 4 hours warning.

UK Customs Duty Officer (24hr) phone: 0870 785 3600 don't forget the prefix 0044 for the UK.

Fax your GAR to 0870 240 3738 or e-mail to ncu@hmce.gsi.gov.uk

By the way it's the same form to complete if you are heading to Isle of Man, Channel Islands, NI, Eire and back to the UK to comply with the Terrorism Act 2000.

Europe – Customs. You have to route via an approved Port of Entry, many just go to Abbeville from Headcorn on a FP but you should note the last time I looked it was 12 hours notification... It is probably worth noting the French appear indifferent to the Custom requirement which can lure you into taking a risk, but at your peril as their on the spot fines are huge. You pay your money and take your chance. Le Touquet requires 2 hrs notification and this can be e-mailed to: aeroport-le-touquet@wanadoo.fr they will need Registration, pilot / passenger names, passport number and ETA in UTC. For Blois it is designated as a Customs Port of Entry for the duration of the show but you must tell them you are coming.

Once you are in Europe (the Schengen signatories) then passage between countries require no Customs but you do need a FP. Note the UK is not in Schengen. In theory when departing from a European airfield for the UK it needs to be from a designated airfield unlike the UK but to be honest the French do not appear too interested. I have found Cherbourg and Le Touquet to be efficient and friendly, importantly open longer hours with fuel available and they take a credit card. You will know what I mean when you land at Abbeville at 1200 hrs, everything closed, no fuel etc.

TRANSPONDERS MODE S – Currently the situation is confused and I will not even attempt to cut through the confusion. You will probably all know the stance of the UK CAA but I have not been able to identify quite what the French current stance is (found lots of conflicting documents). I suspect you could travel within France and never need a transponder but you really limit your options. You do require a Transponder with mode C to enter Class D airspace i.e. Le Touquet. See AIC A 04/08 France ref the introduction of radar and VHF traffic being under FIS and allocated a squawk. Certainly Holland has embraced Mode S, and in Germany they just assume you have it, plus they have lots of mandatory squawk areas. To be honest the world of aviation has fundamentally changed and unless you have violent objections the time has come to fit a transponder if travelling long distances. Once you have it you will wonder what all the fuss was about and enjoy simplified zone transits and Flight Information Service. Just think when Mr Rotax dies in that mid-channel scenario the whole world will know exactly where you are swimming!

CHARTS – The French half mil IGN maps are the most popular but you should note they only cover airspace up to 3000ft. So on first look the airspace looks largely wide open, this plus the temperatures and thermal activity means many go quite high and frequently enter controlled airspace unwittingly. There is a one-mil chart available which shows the upper airspace, military air corridors (usefully with the info when they are active) and many of the VRP's not covered on the half mil. I have found this extremely valuable and can recommend it. Finally many flyers swear by the Jepperson charts when crossing into different countries as they have a common format, where as each country uses a different format on its own national charts.

DOCUMENTATION – You need to take all your aircraft documents including insurance and licence, I think legally they must be the originals but I only ever carry quality copies for obvious reasons and having been checked a few times these have always past muster. Top tip: Take a spare set of copies so if you have an accident abroad you can leave a copy with the other party / airfield operator. This is from the voice of experience as many years ago a mad French man in a Jodel taxied into my parked Shadow and this greatly simplified matters. Of interest many airfields in Germany insist on seeing your noise certificate and have a sliding scale of charges with quite a huge jump in price if you are unable to produce.

EUROPEAN HEALTH INSURANCE CARD (EHIC)

The EHIC replaced the E111 in Jan 2006, which is no longer accepted (but many unwittingly still carry it). The EHIC gives you access to the same level of medical care, as you would get in the UK NHS at no cost. But note you will still need holiday insurance covering microlight flying etc to cover rescue, repatriation and the like which is not covered by the EHIC. Apply on line at: www.ehic.org (takes max of 7 day) or visit the Post Office for snail mail application in 21 days, alternatively phone **0845 606 2030** and get in 10 day.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS – To be honest the preparation is half of the fun and there is lots you can do to ensure a fun and stress free holiday.

- Obviously up to date charts are important, as are airfield-landing plates.
- Check NOTAMS both in the UK and France. An excellent site is: www.sia.aviation-civile.gouv.fr here you will also find the AIC for Blois etc.
- Download a list of key aviation phrases in French so at least you can vaguely understand what others are doing.
- Carry a list of International dial codes.
- Check your phone is enabled for Europe.
- Warn your credit card company you are going overseas otherwise the unusual activity will result in a card freeze, likewise carry the 24hr free help line to get it turned back on again!
- Carry a copy of the GetMet booklet which is a great reference document and excellent to decode the METAR and TAF's.

- Likewise the NATS leaflet makes NOTAM deciphering simple both also have all the web site addresses for the weather etc when you wander into the Internet café.
- Ring the Freephone number **0500 354 802** before returning to UK and check on airspace restrictions, saves blundering into the Red Arrows!
- Try these sites for further information; they are a wealth of information, tips and places to go.

www.pilotfriend.com/flightplanning/flight%20planning/france_airfields.htm

www.flyer.co.uk/france.php

www.flyinfrance.free.fr/

<http://www.francoflyers.org/>

I hope this has been of use and clarified what needs to be done without putting you off. It's a great feeling when you complete your first overseas trip from your own efforts and it can become addictive... **Merv.**

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