

# International Flying

By Rick Gardner

**F**lying General Aviation aircraft allows you to experience international travel in a way unlike any other form of transportation. You can travel to fascinating destinations on your own schedule and select those airports that best suit you. However, at the same time, international operations, particularly south of the border can be more complex and expensive than what most pilots may be accustomed to. It is therefore a good idea to do some research, including contacting experts in the field, to get the latest updates and insights before launching on your first international adventure. After all, this trip should be a fun and memorable experience. So, here are some pointers:

## **FLIGHT PLANNING AND PREPARING FOR THE TRIP**

Documents: To legally make an international flight,

make sure that you have the following:

- Aircraft Airworthiness certificate
- Aircraft Registration Certificate that has not expired (no pink temporary registrations, these are not valid for international flights)
- Aircraft Insurance policy that covers you while in, or overflying, the countries along your route. Typically, a US\$ 1 million liability coverage amount is sufficient. Note that for private flights, Mexico will accept a US issued policy. Contact Caribbean Sky Tours for the details. Always bring the original copy of the policy with you.
- Aircraft Operating Limitations including your weight and balance
- US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) decal for the aircraft
- Radio Station License for the aircraft

- Pilot License with the “English Proficient” endorsement on the back (required for international flights)
- Valid Medical Certificate, no Basicmed unless traveling to The Bahamas
- Restricted Radio Operator Permit (or better) for at least one crewmember
- Suitable charts for the entire trip
- Updated databases for GPS and Flight Planning devices that cover the geographic areas you will be traveling to
- Valid passports for crew and passengers with an expiration date more than 6 months after the arrival in the foreign country that you plan to visit

APIS: Advanced Passenger Information System. Implemented by the USA in 2009 and also in use by countries like Mexico, Cuba, Colombia and 9 other Caribbean countries, it is a system promoted by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) that requires electronic manifests to be submitted in advance of a flight. The USA system is known as eAPIS and CBP provides a free portal for users to create their own eAPIS account to file their manifests online. You can also file your eAPIS manifest using

the services of third parties. eAPIS manifests can be filed at any time but no later than 1 hour before departing the USA for a foreign country. Changes to aircraft, dates of travel or to persons on board the aircraft require a new eAPIS filing. Changes to departure/arrival times or airports of entry can be made via telephone with the intended CBP port of arrival. Once you have submitted your eAPIS manifest, you must receive an email from the Department of Homeland Security that states that your flight is cleared for departure before departing. Other countries have a variety of different methods and requirements for filing their APIS manifests so it is a good idea to find out in advance if the countries you plan to visit have this requirement and to find out how to comply.

You can depart the USA from any airport, provided that you have properly submitted a Departure eAPIS manifest and filed a VFR or IFR flight plan. VFR Flight plans should be filed directly with Miami Flight Service at +1 (305) 233-2600. IFR flight plans can be filed via Flight Service or using electronic methods like Fltplan.com. If your route will take you over water beyond 12 Nm from the USA

coastline, you will need to file your flight plan using the ICAO International Flight plan format.

When departing/arriving in the USA, you will cross the Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) which lies just off the USA coast or along the USA-Mexico bor-



der. The ADIZ is denoted on VFR charts by magenta lines with small dots running along them. To cross through the ADIZ, you need to be on an active flight plan, squawking a discrete transponder code and be in contact with ATC. You must also have 12 inch tall tail numbers on the aircraft that are 2 inches thick of a color that contrasts with the background. These

can be improvised using 2 inch thick vinyl tape if your aircraft does not have 12 inch numbers. When departing the USA, VFR flights need to be sure to contact Flight Service to activate their flight plans regardless if they depart a towered airport.

If you plan to leave the USA with items of value like cameras, electronics or jewelry that you plan to bring back with you, you should stop by a CBP office to file CBP Form 4457 so that these items will not be considered dutiable on your return to the USA. If possible, you should do this with CBP at the airport you plan to use for your return.

If you plan to travel with a minor that is not accompanied by both parents, you should bring a notarized letter of permission from the missing parent authorizing the travel to foreign countries in the company of the present parent or guardian(s). If the aircraft is not registered in your name, you should also bring a notarized letter signed by the owner of the aircraft authorizing operations to foreign countries by the crew as well as identifying the relationship of the passengers and crew to the owner. This clarifies that the aircraft is not stolen and that the flight is not for commercial purposes.

### **OPERATING IN FOREIGN COUNTRIES**

Generally speaking, the Civil Aviation regulations of foreign countries are comparable with those in the USA, however, the following are some notable exceptions. Foreign countries require that you enter AND depart the country through an Airport Of Entry (AOE). Some countries require permits for overflying them or to land in them. In addition, they may also require an additional permit for making flights within the country. Countries may also assess airspace fees for using their airspace which must be paid to avoid back taxes, interest and possible further actions on future flights to/over that country.

Most countries will require that you present multiple copies of a General Declaration or "Gen Dec" on arrival and again on departure. You will always be provided with a copy stamped by the local customs authorities. When flying from one foreign country to another, authorities at the arrival country will usually want to see the stamped Gen Dec for the country you departed from. Flights within a country or to another country will require flight plans to be filed using the ICAO flight plan format. Flight plan approval may require that you present your permits and aircraft and

crew documentation. Many countries have extremely strict laws regarding firearms, ammunition and un-prescribed drugs. You should ensure that you do not have any of these aboard. Foreign countries can also have very strict regulations regarding the entry of animals or pets. If you plan to travel with a pet, you should become informed before risking the confiscation and quarantine of your pet. With very few exceptions, nighttime VFR flights are not authorized in foreign countries.

### **RETURNING TO THE USA**

Before departing the foreign country for your return to the USA, be sure to file your eAPIS Arrival manifest no later than 1 hour before takeoff. When returning to the USA from The Bahamas, Caribbean, Mexico, Central America or South America, you must make your first landing at the "Designated Airport" closest to your point of coastline or border crossing. "Designated Airports" are specifically listed in CBP regulations and are typically found along the USA-Mexico border, Gulf Of Mexico or southern Florida. In addition to selecting a "Designated Airport", you must also contact CBP at that airport to ensure that they will be available to process you and to confirm your

ETA. Make sure that you record the time and name or initials of the officer that approved your arrival in case there are any questions.

You will also have to file an ICAO flight plan with the local ATC authorities. The Bahamas and Turks and Caicos Islands are exceptions to this rule and you can file flight plans from those countries back to the USA directly with Flight Service in the USA. When approaching the USA, VFR flights need to contact Flight Service by radio to obtain their discrete transponder codes for crossing into the ADIZ. If you are under IFR, you are in compliance by default. If your arrival time will vary by more than 15 minutes from what you provided CBP, ask Flight Service to update your ETA with them.

#### **OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

Most airports in foreign countries will have fees that may be new to many pilots. Landing fees, parking fees, ramp fees, departure taxes, permit fees and airspace fees are typical. However, FBO's in foreign countries can charge exorbitant fees that can damage the budget. Therefore, it is a good idea to get quotations in advance from any FBO's that you plan

to use before arriving. If you are planning a hunting trip to a foreign country, you should be certain that you have the necessary authorizations to bring your firearms into the country. You should also plan to take any oil, fuel additives, spare parts, chocks and tie downs as it is likely that none will be available. You should carry adequate survival equipment including a raft and life jackets if flying over water. A 406 MHz Personal Locator Beacon (PLB) is an excellent item for the survival gear list. You should also identify a source for international weather as this may be non-existent in foreign countries.

International Flying can appear overwhelming at first, but as with everything that is unfamiliar and new, it will get easier as you become familiar with the procedures of each country. Start your planning by seeking the advice of reputable and experienced international flying association or service provider. These companies can not only provide you with advice but can also assist with obtaining the required permits and paperwork for you.