

# Flying to the Bahamas

By Rick Gardner

If you are pondering making your first international flight or if you wish to experience a truly “General Aviation friendly” international destination, The Bahamas is difficult to beat. An archipelago of islands starting less than 50 Nm off the east coast of Florida, it is a dream destination for pilots. If you are looking for casinos, shopping and nightlife, then Nassau on the island of New Providence and Freeport on Grand Bahama are your destinations. If you are looking for something more moderate and not quite so “touristy” then Marsh Harbour and Treasure Cay on Abaco, Harbour Island off of North Eleuthera or Great Exuma in the Exuma Cays are your best bet. If you want to get off of the beaten path and get away

from it all, then the rest of The Bahamas has plenty to offer. Weather year-round is benign with prevailing winds blowing from the east at around 5-7 knots. During the summer keep your eye out for hurricanes and for cold fronts during the winter.

Once you have selected where you want to go, you need to determine which airport is closest and is suitable for your aircraft. Your first landing and your last takeoff from The Bahamas must be at an Airport Of Entry (AOE). If the airport you select for your destination is not an AOE, then you will need to select an adequate AOE convenient to your route of flight. Fortunately, The Bahamas has 18 AOE's

conveniently located on most of the major islands and 10 of them have fuel which may influence your choice of AOE. However, you should always plan on having enough fuel to reposition to another airport with fuel, just in case. As you will be flying over water, you should arrange to have life jackets and a life raft on board with adequate capacity for all aircraft occupants. There are FBO's on the Florida east coast which rent survival equipment for overwater flights and several are located at one of the 8 US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) "Designated Airports" where you will need to land to reenter the USA. Selecting one of these FBOs can make logistics easier on the return.

International flights require that you pay special attention to crew, passenger and aircraft documentation, please refer to my article on international documentation and note that bringing pets to The Bahamas is more difficult than other countries. Remember, if you are flying a CE500, CE550 or CE560 model aircraft under a single pilot waiver issued by the FAA with a limitation that reads "Not valid outside the US unless approval is obtained by Civil Aviation Authority ", you must obtain a specific approval from The Bahamas

Civil Aviation Department in order to utilize it in The Bahamas. Remember to verify that your navigational database and charts packages include The Bahamas as part of their territory coverage.

The procedures for flying to The Bahamas are pretty straightforward. First, you must properly file your USA eAPIS departure manifest for your outbound flight. If you already know your return itinerary, you should go ahead and file your arrival eAPIS manifest for your return to the USA from the comfort of your home, that is one less thing to worry about. Flying a turbine powered aircraft to The Bahamas means you will probably be flying under IFR which greatly simplifies the Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) crossing requirements as outlined in Part 99. You may file your IFR flight plan for your flight to The Bahamas as you would for a domestic flight which includes using electronic filing or Flight Service. Miami Center controls the airspace above The Bahamas so you will feel right at home as you fly over the beautiful crystal clear waters. There are only 3 towered airports in The Bahamas: Nassau (MYNN), Freeport (MYGF) and Marsh Harbour (MYAM) plus one AFIS in Great Exuma (MYEF). All of the other

airports in The Bahamas are non-towered and the CTAF frequency for all of them is 122.8. Instrument Approach Procedures are only authorized for MYNN and MYGF, so you need to be sure that weather is suitable for a VFR arrival and departure at the other airports which is normally not an issue year-round. As you fly over The Bahamas, communicating with ATC is not a problem and you can also contact Miami Radio for assistance via their Remote Communication Outlets (RCO) located on Grand Bahama (126.9) and New Providence (118.4). You can also contact Nassau Radio on their RCOs on Abaco (124.2) and New Providence (128.0) You can also contact the AFIS in Great Exuma on 118.0. Direct Dial telephone numbers for Miami Flight Service is (305) 233-2600 and Nassau Flight Service can be reached at (242) 377-7116.

If your destination airport in The Bahamas is not MYNN, MYGF, MYAM or MYEF, you will need to decide whether to close your flight plan in the air by radio or on the ground via telephone. As Miami Center only controls the airspace down to 6,000' MSL, you will have to make that decision prior to being cleared down to this altitude. The weather is

almost always severe clear, so most pilots will close in the air and proceed under VFR. Remember to record the Miami Center frequency you were on so that you can contact them to get your IFR clearance when you depart.

When you arrive in The Bahamas, you have 2 forms to fill out: an INWARD General Declaration Form (GENDEC) for the aircraft and an Immigration Form for each person on board the aircraft. Due to a quirk in Bahamas Customs regulations, if your aircraft is registered in the name of a corporation, you may be considered a "commercial" flight for customs purposes and you may be required to complete a Bahamas C7 GENDEC and pay \$ 75 USD. Otherwise, you will complete a C7A GENDEC form and pay \$ 50 USD. In either case, a copy of the C7 or C7A will be stamped by Bahamas Customs and returned to you along with a copy of each Immigration form, don't lose them. You will pay a nominal landing fee as well. That's it! C7 and C7a forms can be downloaded for free from The Bahamas government website or from the Caribbean Sky Tours Member Website so that you can complete them in advance and minimize paperwork delays.

If you plan to fly within The Bahamas, the short distances imply that you will be flying below class A airspace and most pilots will make these flights under VFR which does not require a flight plan unless you are flying to, or within 25 DME of, MYNN. If this is the case, you will have to file a flight plan with Nassau Flight Service. Bahamas Customs regulations require that whenever you depart, or arrive, at an airport where Bahamas Customs is present, you must have your C7/C7A stamped. If the airport has an FBO, Bahamas Immigration and Customs officers are typically located there making the process quick and easy.

Your return to the USA is just as easy. Make sure that you have properly filed your arrival eAPIS manifest, contact CBP at your port of arrival to advise them of your arrival intentions and record the initials of the CBP officer you speak to. Unless you have a CBP Border Overflight Exemption (BOE), you must file your return flight plan to one of the 8 CBP "Designated Airports" on the Florida East coast or Marathon, Florida. You may file your flight plan back to the USA the way you normally do unless you are departing MYNN,

MYGF or MYAM where you will have to file your flight plan locally on paper. If you depart from one of the non-towered airports, you will have to climb above 6,000' MSL into Miami Center's airspace to get your IFR clearance. Never enter the USA ADIZ prior to activating your flight plan and squawking your discrete transponder code. Before departing your Bahamas AOE, you must surrender the C7/C7A that you were issued upon arrival, present an OUTWARD C7 GENDEC and return your immigration forms. you will pay \$ 29 per person (including crew) and if you were issued a C7 upon arrival, you will pay another \$ 75 USD. Upon landing at the Designated Airport in the USA, taxi straight to the CBP station and follow the instructions given by CBP officers or on posted signs.

If you need more information and/or services for flying to The Bahamas, or assistance in obtaining a BOE, you can contact Caribbean Sky Tours at (786) 206-6147 or visit their website at [www.cstflightservices.com](http://www.cstflightservices.com)