



Destinations sign at Union Glacier Airport, Antarctica Credit: Shutterstock

As professional pilots, we become so well practiced at flying to airports we've never seen before it becomes almost second nature. We know what questions to ask: Is the runway long enough and will it support the weight of our aircraft? What instrument approaches are available there any obstacle considerations? What local support is available?

The questions go on, but we know most of the answers are available from any computer with an internet connection or, sometimes, by way of a quick phone call.

But is it that easy for all airports? There are some destinations that require more than what our usual planning requires because we don't even know the right questions to ask.

### **What Does Ac-U-Kwik Have About the Destination?**



Final approach to Queenstown Airport, New Zealand Credit: Phillip Capper

Like many pilots, my starting point is [www.acukwik.com](http://www.acukwik.com), where I get the usual airport and FBO information.

But I go beyond that by digging further into the various provided links. Going to Queenstown Airport (NZQN), New Zealand, for example, you might have heard the approaches require a dive over mountains from all quadrants.

Ac-U-Kwik provided links to the airport's FBOs and one of those led to this gem: <https://aircenterone.co.nz/services/flight-videos/>, with videos of the approaches.

For obstacle analysis, a photo might be worth a thousand words, but a video would be worth a thousand photos. The AirCenter One website also promised a briefing packet with an email request; the provided information was invaluable.

### **Is Destination-Specific Training Required?**



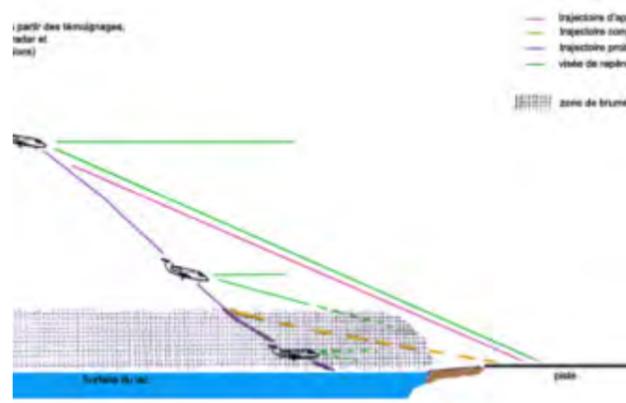
A Global 5000 departs Innsbruck Credit: Rob Hodgkins

We know some destinations are going to be a special challenge just because their names evoke visceral images of tall mountains and deep valleys.

When we were first scheduled into Innsbruck Airport (LOWI), Austria, we suspected we wouldn't be allowed to go without special training. A quick look at [www.acukwik.com](http://www.acukwik.com) confirmed our suspicions. We sent our two scheduled pilots and a backup pilot to the Innsbruck training course offered by FlightSafety International. The ground school and simulator sessions were invaluable.

Approach and missed approach procedures are not intuitive and the best way to learn about this airport is to fly everything in day, visual meteorological conditions. The synthetic view of the towering mountains was excellent preparation for the real thing.

### **Does the Destination Have an Accident History?**



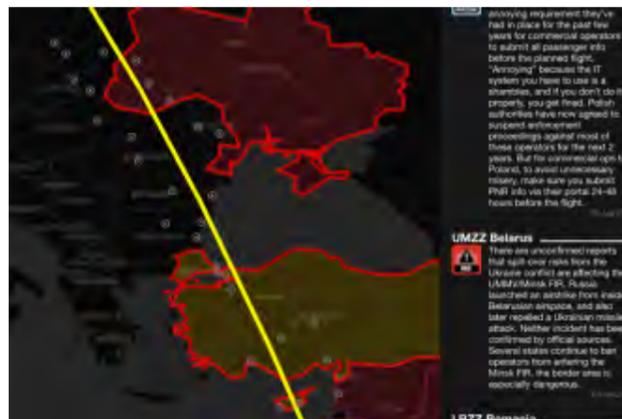
Credit: Gulfstream GIII-VP -- BLN's trajectory short of Chambéry Airport (LFLB), France

I think many airports have insidious challenges that have claimed unsuspecting pilots before and lay in wait to do it again.

The Flight Safety Foundation has an excellent database for researching aviation accidents at [www.aviation-safety.net](http://www.aviation-safety.net). Selecting Database, ASN Accident Database and Airport will make short work of your search. Looking for Chambéry Airport (LFLB), France, for example, returns four accidents. The 1998 crash of a Gulfstream GIII reveals that mist over the Lake of le Bourget can result in the loss of visual references, so it is critical to remain on the ILS even if you think you have the runway in sight well before minimums.

Further research revealed the ILS glidepath is 4.46 deg., just shy of the 4.5-deg. limit for many aircraft. While a practice run in a simulator isn't required by the airport, it proved a useful precaution. The approach requires you to configure early, stay on speed and glidepath, and resist the temptation to fly visually too early.

### What Are the Threats?



Ops.group alerts from Warsaw on a particular day in August.

Some airports don't have mountains to worry about, but threats of other kinds abound.

My favorite source of timely and critical flight information comes from ops.group. A membership is required, but there is no better source of vital intelligence.

I recently planned a trip from Warsaw Chopin Airport (EPWA), Poland, to Ben Gurion Airport (LLBG), Israel, and discovered a few things I didn't know to add to the obvious war threats I did know of. Besides the war in Ukraine, I learned that many operators are also avoiding the airspace over Belarus, there are reports of GPS jamming over Romania, there are bomb threats at several Moldova airports, Syria is an active conflict zone, there are missile threats in Damascus, and there have been rockets fired into Israel earlier in the month. Many of these threats are absent from Notice to Airmen (NOTAMs) or are published well after the threat has begun.

Besides the war threats, ops.group also tells us about mandatory permits needed in Poland and Israel, as well as overflight permits for many of the countries between our departure and destination, and permits for landing at many of our possible alternates. If you fly internationally, there is no substitute for ops.group. Its subscriber base includes hundreds of airlines and thousands of other operators, which provide the best intel of all.

For example, I have been a frequent visitor to Paris Le Bourget (LFPB), France. I once discovered through ops.group that the airport was closed every night for a week, something the NOTAMs didn't know until a few days after the closures started. Subscriptions to ops.group run \$35/month for an individual or \$10/person/month for a team plan. It is money well spent.

*In Part 2, we'll discuss using social media contacts to get more information about your new destination.*

# Flying to a New Destination, Part 2

**James Albright** August 29, 2022



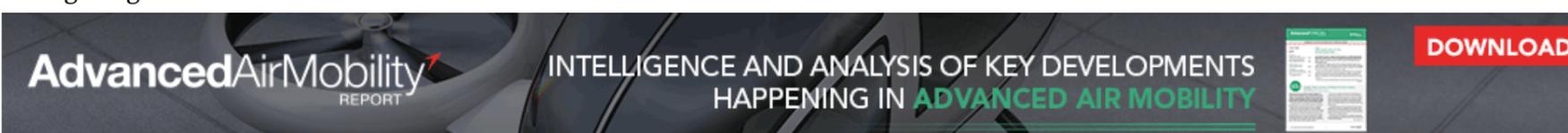
An Illyushin IL-76 takes off from Union Glacier Blue-Ice Runway in Antarctica Credit: Christopher Michel

*In Part 1, we discussed some resources to use to find information about new destinations.*

If a destination has proven to be a challenge for other pilots, chances are one of those who beat the challenge has posted a report on social media.

Simply typing in the airport name and “pilot report” can yield a treasure trove of information and new contacts with recent information. For our Tel Aviv trip, for example, I learned about the need to call ahead to Nicosia Control 10 min. before entering its airspace. I also learned there are special customs and immigration rules at Ben Gurion unlike those at any other country, and those procedures are subject to change at any moment.

Having a social media contact who has been to your destination recently can save you time and money, as well as a little embarrassment from being caught unaware of the latest restriction.



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The NBAA ([www.nbaa.org](http://www.nbaa.org)) and Universal Weather & Aviation Inc. ([www.universalweather.com](http://www.universalweather.com)) offer timely information submitted by recent visitors. Blogs can be illuminating as well as entertaining. Facebook offers many groups with many professional aviators willing to answer your latest questions.

For the sheer volume of participants, it is hard to beat the Facebook “Professional Jet Pilots” group with over 15,000 members. If you have a question about a particular destination, at least one of those members should be able to help you out. Once you are in the group, you can search for discussions by the airport name and then you can send a private message to the writer to get even more help.

It is hard to imagine a more out-of-the-way destination than Union Glacier (SCGC), Antarctica, just 7 deg. South of the geographic South Pole (coordinates: 79°46’40”S, 83°19’15”W) I challenge you to find any information about this airport at your usual aviation websites.

From the Facebook Professional Jet Pilots group we learn: The flight plan has to be filed locally; there are no ARINC latitude/longitude “short code” waypoints, so coordinates are needed; HF hardly works at all so a satphone or CPDLC are necessary; the airport doesn’t exist in most databases, so you might have to manually program pressurization systems and your enhanced ground proximity warning system; and you are unlikely to find instrument approach plates.

### Can You Do a ‘Dry Run’ From Your Computer?



Juneau International Airport (PAJN), Alaska, at the end of the Gastineau Channel Credit: Christopher Michel

Some destinations must be seen to be believed. A friend was planning a trip from Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport (PANC), Alaska, to Juneau International Airport (PAJN), Alaska, and wanted to see what an approach to Runway 8 would look like.

He used the “3-D view” available in any of ForeFlight’s Performance Plans from the Airports View menu. This opens an interactive window that allows you to pan and zoom the airport area to familiarize yourself with the surrounding terrain and obstacles.

Additionally, an instrument approach “3-D Procedure Preview” option is available when the instrument approach is selected from the Maps FPL window. A third feature, a 3-D Preview for the entire route of flight, is selectable from the Maps FPL window. This gives you a chance to view the flight beforehand, including the finer details of the instrument procedures.



Flying To New Destinations: Part 1

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Caption: A ForeFlight 3-D view of a flight from Anchorage to Juneau\*\*\*

The approach into Juneau's Runway 8 appears straightforward, but that isn't the case with Runway 26, which requires aircraft to fly the narrow Gastineau Channel with mountains towering on either side. The only instrument approach from the south is the required navigation performance (RNP) procedures with authorization required (AR).

When I became RNP AR trained to qualify for the C384 authorization, the simulator didn't have the Juneau approach available. But I still wanted to see the approach in all its 3-D glory to fully appreciate the challenge and thought Google Earth's animation might help.

The easiest way to preview a flight is to take the FlightAware history of someone's previous flight. You simply search the route by entering the origin and destination and select a flight that has already occurred. I was interested in the RNP AR approach into Juneau, so I looked for a flight from Seattle to Juneau and was presented with several Alaska Airlines flights. I picked one and then selected "View track log" and the Google Earth button, which sent a KML (Keyhole Markup Language) file to my computer.

I imported that into Google Earth Studio and got a 3-D view of that airliner's flight. After viewing a few tutorials, I learned how to turn that into a video suitable for training my fellow pilots on what was in store for us. Learning to do this may take several hours, but once you've got the process down, it only takes a few minutes and will be an invaluable tool in your arsenal. Google Earth Studio is available free of charge at <https://earth.google.com/studio>, and the site includes many tutorials.



## Flying To A New Destination: Part 2

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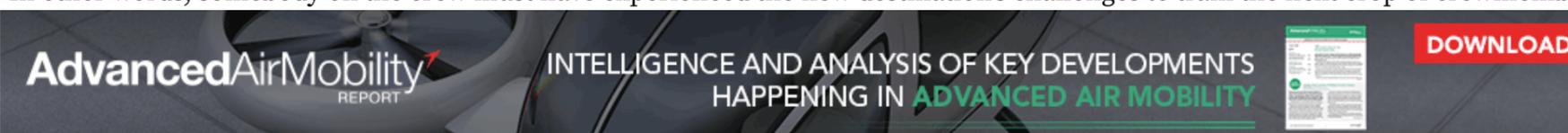


Caption: A Google Earth 3-D view of a flight through the Gastineau Channel to Juneau\*\*\*

### You Can't Go Unless You've Been?

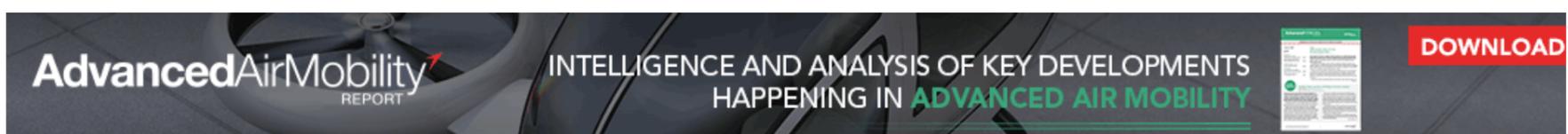
Back in the days when the U.S. Air Force had bases spread all over the world for its fighters and bombers, we in the Military Airlift Command were tasked with flying to far-flung airports that few of us had ever seen or heard of. The conventional scheduling process was "You can't go unless you've been."

In other words, somebody on the crew must have experienced the new destination's challenges to train the next crop of crewmembers of



So too it is with us in business aviation. We are often the first who we know to go. The advantage we have today, however, is that we have the resources to hear from those who have gone before us. Our challenge is to know where to look and then, simply, ask.

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The banner features a dark background with a close-up of a propeller on the left. On the right, there is a small thumbnail image of a report cover. A red button with the word 'DOWNLOAD' in white capital letters is positioned in the bottom right corner of the banner.