

The Newark Airport Customs and Border Protection Office.

Foreign Destination:

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If your native country is other than the U.S. and you are scheduled to fly there, you will probably make the usual preparations for an international flight. You will search for the Aeronautical Information Publication (AIP) and hope to find it in a language you can understand. As an international pilot, you have a basic understanding of English, but perhaps the “American usage” isn’t exactly as you learned it in school.

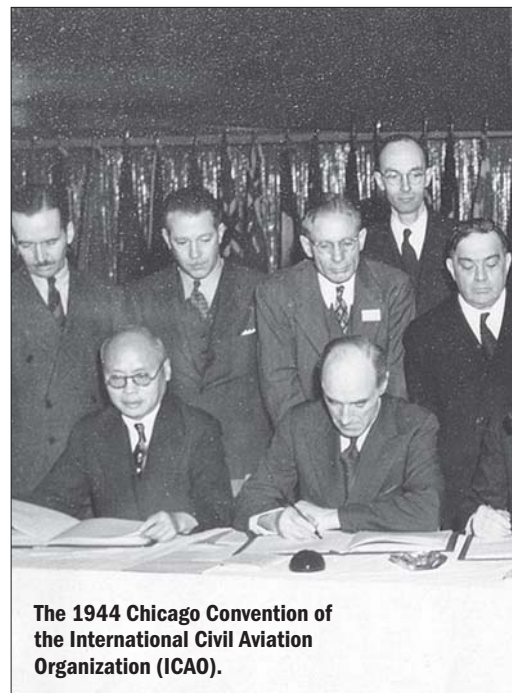
After reviewing the AIP, you will venture to Ac-U-Kwik and other apps and websites for more tips about what to expect when flying in the “good ol’ US of A.” Among the best resources, of course, will be other pilots you know with recent experience. In short, you will do everything I do before flying to your country, before you fly to my country. Having flown extensively domestically and internationally, perhaps I can be that “someone” with a few pointers and shortcuts to get you started.

The process of learning how to fly to

and within the U.S. is not unlike doing so for other foreign countries, except we might have a few extra steps when it comes to selecting an airport of entry. Our Customs, Immigration and Quarantine (CIQ) system can be confusing, even for us natives. But even after you’ve made it here, operating within our borders may involve a change in “aviation philosophy” to ensure you do so safely. But first things first: Why can’t flying in the U.S. be the same as flying anywhere else in the world?

Flying in the U.S. Is Different

World War II highlighted the need for some standardization in the way aviators operate in the airspace of other nations and in the airspace over the high seas. In 1944, 52 nations met in Chicago to agree on a set of rules that have become known as the “Chicago Convention” and on the establishment of the



The 1944 Chicago Convention of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).

International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). There are now 191 signatory nations to the Chicago Convention, and each has agreed to comply with these standardized rules. But there is a caveat worth noting. All signatories are allowed to deviate from the ICAO standards so long as they publish these differences in an Aviation Information Publication (AIP).

The U.S. AIP is available online and is massive, nearly 1,700 pages long. The link tends to move around; lately it has been at: https://www.faa.gov/air_traffic/publications/. If that doesn't work, try typing "US AIP faa.gov" in your favorite search engine. The document includes more than 100 pages of differences with the ICAO standards. But a key point before studying these differences is to realize your home country probably has its differences, too. So, you have to first learn how to fly the ICAO way by noting your home country's differences. Then you have to learn the ways procedures in the U.S. differ from that standard. Of course, this is no different than

Designated Airports for Arrival from Certain Areas South of the U.S.

LOCATION	NAME
Beaumont, Texas	Jefferson County Airport
Brownsville, Texas	Brownsville International Airport
Calexico, California	Calexico International Airport
Corpus Christi, Texas	Corpus Christi International Airport
Del Rio, Texas	Del Rio International Airport
Douglas, Arizona	Bisbee-Douglas International Airport
Douglas, Arizona	Douglas Municipal Airport
Eagle Pass, Texas	Eagle Pass Municipal Airport
El Paso, Texas	El Paso International Airport
Fort Lauderdale, Florida	Fort Lauderdale Executive Airport
Fort Lauderdale, Florida	Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport
Fort Pierce, Florida	St. Lucie County Airport
Houston, Texas	William P. Hobby Airport
Key West, Florida	Key West International Airport
Laredo, Texas	Laredo International Airport
McAllen, Texas	Miller International Airport
Miami, Florida	Miami International Airport
Miami, Florida	Opa-Locka Airport
Miami, Florida	Tamiami Airport
Midland, Texas	Midland International Airport
New Orleans, Louisiana	New Orleans International Airport (Moissant Field)
New Orleans, Louisiana	New Orleans Lakefront Airport
Nogales, Arizona	Nogales International Airport
Presidio, Texas	Presidio-Lely International Airport
San Antonio, Texas	San Antonio International Airport
San Diego, California	Brown Field
Santa Teresa, New Mexico	Santa Teresa Airport
Tampa, Florida	Tampa International Airport
Tucson, Arizona	Tucson International Airport
West Palm Beach, Florida	Palm Beach International Airport
Wilmington, North Carolina	New Hanover County Airport
Yuma, Arizona	Yuma International Airport

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preparing to fly to any country not your own. Once you've done that, you are ready for the next step in the process: finding an airport of entry.

Finding an Entry Airport (Yes, You'll Need Permission to Land)

As a seasoned international pilot, you know your first point of arrival needs to be a qualified airport of entry. You may have understandably assumed that any airport with the word "international" is so designated. But that isn't true in the U.S. There are only 58 qualified airports so designated by Title 19 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Section 122.13.

Chances are you will be using a "landing rights" airport. The distinction is somewhat minor except that you need permission to land at a landing rights airport. That permission comes from

the appropriate customs officer with acknowledgement of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the Public Health Service, and the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service of the Agriculture Department.

You secure that permission following transmission of an electronic data interchange system known as the Electronic Advance Passenger Information System, or eAPIS. You will need to enroll in the system first, but that is easily done online at <https://eapis.cbp.dhs.gov>. Commercial operators must also get permission or a permit from the U.S. Transportation Department, Office of International Aviation (X-40). Whether private or commercial, getting an eAPIS reply means you've satisfied the permission aspect of your airport search. But there is more to it than that for some aircraft arriving from some areas south of the U.S.

Private aircraft arriving from certain

areas south of the U.S. must also furnish a notice of intended arrival to the Customs service at the nearest designated airport to the point of first border or coastline crossing. They must then land at this airport for inspection, unless they have an “SBOE,” or Southern Border Overflight Exemption. The arrival areas include:

(a) The U.S./Mexican border or the Pacific Coast from a foreign place in the Western Hemisphere south of 33 deg. north latitude.

(b) The Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic Coasts from a foreign place in the Western Hemisphere south of 30 deg. north latitude, from any place in Mexico, or from the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The requirement to land, the details in the notice to Customs, and the process to obtain an exemption is covered in the U.S. AIP, Section GEN 1.2, Paragraph 4. The list of designated airports is given in Paragraph 5. Further restrictions for flight to and from Cuba are given in Paragraph 7.

Once you’ve found a suitable airport to enter the U.S. and have approval to do that, the next step is often called “CIQ,” customs, immigration and quarantine. Perhaps ICQ would be better, because you cannot understand the CQ without covering the “I” first.

Customs, Immigration, Quarantine (More Than Just a Passport)



The “I” of CIQ is immigration and governs the people you attempt to bring into or out of the country. Section GEN 1.3 of the U.S. AIP makes it clear that a valid passport is always required and that a visa is almost always required, but it leaves you guessing about some of

the details of those requirements. Fortunately, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (USCBP) website provides an excellent guide, called the “Carrier Information Guide: United States Documentary Requirements for Travel.” You can download the guide at: <https://www.cbp.gov/document/guides/carrier-information-guide-english>

The guide notes that passports must be valid for the duration of the stay, but for a few countries an additional six months of validity is needed. It also states that a visa is required except for some exempted visitors, including those enrolled in the Visa Waiver Program (VWP). This program allows citizens of 38 countries to bypass the need for a visa when travelling on a signatory carrier after having been approved by the Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA).

There are two pitfalls for pilots when arriving or departing with passengers who believe their VWP status allows them to travel without a visa. First, they must travel on a signatory carrier to enter the U.S. without a visa. Not too long ago, only scheduled common carriage carriers (airlines) were allowed to be signatory carriers. A few years ago, U.S. private operators were allowed to sign up. Foreign private carriers without a U.S. subsidiary are only allowed to participate commercially. Second, it is up to the passenger to log in and obtain an ESTA travel authorization. These authorizations are normally good

and hefty fines for your passengers.

Let’s say you have a French passenger who frequently travels from Paris to New York aboard Air France without a visa but has completed the ESTA. Since Air France is a VWP signatory carrier, the passenger may think a visa simply isn’t required. If you are not a VWP signatory and that passenger shows up in New York without a visa, he or she will be detained and possibly fined. (I know of an example in which the delay was about an hour and the fine was \$4,000.)

But entry is even more complicated than that. I know of a case in which a British national arrived into the U.S. on British Airways without a visa, which was legal because the airline is a VWP signatory carrier. Then that person went to Canada on a private jet but wasn’t allowed to return to the U.S. because that private jet operator was not a signatory. The passenger was forced to find his way to another Canadian airport to return to the U.S. on Air Canada, which is a signatory carrier.

As of this writing the U.S. AIP (Section GEN 1.3) still requires the submission of paper arrival/departure cards (Form I-94) for many passengers, imposing another responsibility on many aircraft captains. The USCBP guide, however, states paper form I-94s are no longer required for travelers in the air because the necessary information is automatically captured from other electronic sources. If they desire, these travelers can access their I-94s on arrival at <http://www.cbp.gov/I94>

Once you’ve ensured immigration concerns are met (the “I”), you can next turn to Customs (the “C”). While immigration concerns who enters the country, Customs concerns what they bring with them.

The U.S. AIP makes it clear that all incoming passengers are required to complete a Customs declaration, but it provides little help on how to do this. The USCBP does provide an example CBP Declaration Form 6059B with instructions online at <https://www.cbp.gov/travel/clearing-cbp/traveler-entry-form>

The question of what you can bring into the country is closely related to what you are prohibited from bringing, which leads us to the “Q” of CIQ.

A quick read of the U.S. AIP leads you to believe you cannot bring any meat or meat products, and that you will need permits to bring in most fruits and vegetables. But there are lots of exceptions and there are also lots of additional prohibitions. The U.S. Department of

A passport is required, a visa is almost always required.

for two years. If the passenger allows the approval to lapse, the waiver is no longer valid. Both of these pitfalls can result in significant delays, detention

Agriculture offers an online resource at: <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/home> Click “Resources” and then “Travelers.”

If your passengers plan on bringing any firearms, there are specific procedures required by the Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms Division of the Internal Revenue Service and the Transportation Security Agency, as well as the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. See the U.S. AIP, Section GEN 1.4, for where to begin.

Another quarantine concern deals with passenger health. Disembarking passengers are not required to present a vaccination certificate unless coming directly from an area infected with cholera, yellow fever or smallpox. A smallpox vaccination is necessary only if, within the 14 days before arrival, the traveler has been in a country reporting smallpox.

The pilot-in-command of an aircraft destined for a U.S. airport must immediately report the death of any person on board to the Quarantine Station at or nearest the destination airport.

The pilot must also report any ill persons among passengers or crew. An ill person is defined as someone with a temperature of 38C (100F) or greater accompanied by rash, glandular swelling or jaundice, or which has persisted for more than 48 hr.; or diarrhea, defined as the occurrence in a 24-hr. period of three or more loose stools or of a greater than normal (for the person) amount of loose stools. In this situation, the pilot-in-command is responsible for detaining the aircraft and persons

pending release from officials of the Public Health Service.

Penalties for violating any of these CIQ regulations can be severe. Failing to declare noncommercial agricultural items, for example, can be as high as \$60,000 per violation.

Once you’ve landed, it can be easy to simply forget the need to clear through Customs. Tower or ground control has no idea you need a Customs clearance and your FBO might be at the opposite end of the airport. It is up to you to remember this last step on your first flight into the U.S.

There are several options for clearing Customs, depending on the airport. In some locations, passengers and crew will have to disembark and travel to the airline terminal. At others, the Customs office is a large complex with its own ramp requiring you to shut down for clearance, and then restart and taxi to your FBO. At some airports, the Customs office might be nothing more than a trailer. Some locations allow you to taxi directly to your FBO and the Customs officer will come to you. As random as this may seem, what happens next is also varied.

In most locations, you will be wise to shut down the engines and keep the doors closed until approached by the Customs officer(s). Other officers will want you to open the door and have the pilot-in-command enter the Customs office. While the official rule says if your APU exhaust is higher than 8 ft. off the ground you can keep the APU running, some locations will insist you completely

power down. At some locations, the aircraft will be scanned with a handheld radiation isotope monitor (“Geiger counter”), at others it won’t. When asked, some officers will explain it is a commercial versus private requirement, at others you will be told all aircraft are subject. Confused? You aren’t alone; we U.S. pilots face the same confusion.

Your best bet is to call the airport Customs office beforehand and ask a series of questions: Should I open the door or wait for you to approach? May I leave the APU running? Should all luggage remain in its hold or baggage compartment before you approach?

You can further speed the process along if crew and passengers have their passports, visas (if required) and other paperwork ready to go. The pilot-in-command should carry copies of the APIS (or eAPIS) transmission and confirmation, and, if applicable, the U.S. Customs bond, TSA Waiver and Southern Border Overflight Exemption. Now that you are in the country, the real fun begins. You will have to learn to fly like we locals do.

Inside Knowledge (Learn From the Locals)

As noted, all ICAO signatories are allowed to deviate from the standard provided they publish those differences in their AIP. The U.S. has many such differences, published in Section GEN 1.7 of the AIP. I recommend you first understand how your home country’s rules



The Hanscom Field, Bedford, Massachusetts (KBED) Customs “shack”

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and regulations differ from the ICAO standard and then skim these pages to see how the U.S. differs. Not every page will pertain to you and some might seem silly. But it is important to at least give them a quick look for the “gotchas” that could be important.

For example, the terms “transition altitude,” “layer” and “level” are not used in domestic U.S. airspace. You may, however, hear “minimum flight level,” which is normally 180. If you are in the habit of setting a standard altimeter setting much lower, you could be hundreds of feet off altitude. But the AIP doesn’t give you all of the “gotchas” that can get you. Here is a brief list of things that might be confusing if you’ve never been warned.

The Metric System. There are only three countries in the world that are not on the metric system (Liberia, Myanmar and the U.S.). While much of the world understands what the imperial system is, many in the U.S. are willfully clueless about kilograms and liters. So, when you order your fuel, do so in U.S. gallons, simply known as “gallons.” An easy way to convert pounds of fuel (not kilograms) is to divide the number of pounds by 10 and add half again as much. For example, 1,000 lb. of fuel becomes 100, and half again (50) becomes 150 gallons.

Filing an IFR Flight Plan. Filing a flight plan in the U.S. is a bit easier than in Europe or most of Asia. You can do this online or by phone (1-800-992-7433) and assume your flight plan will be ready for you at the filed time. There are a few “gotchas” when the airspace gets busy, however. You should file a realistic departure time. While some U.S. pilots routinely file 30 min. early, that could come back to bite you if you get an Expected Departure Clearance Time (EDCT), often pronounced “E-Dict.” If you aren’t able to go by the EDCT, you may find yourself delayed minutes or hours behind a very long line of other aircraft.

So, submit your flight plan as far in advance as you are able, the night before if possible. Filing before 0700 Eastern Time allows you to become “known demand” and might put you ahead of others who filed after this time.

Slots. Departure and arrival slots are rarely imposed in the U.S. For a vast majority of airports, you simply file the flight plan and go. There are exceptions here and there, such as for airports close by a major sporting event. During ski season, for example, you often need slots

for some of the more popular mountain destinations.

Delays. The airspace can be operating smoothly in one part of the country and then become completely bogged down in another, causing things to grind to a halt nationwide. You could, for example, be flying from the New York area to Florida and be held on the ground because the weather in the Midwest is keeping East Coast airports saturated with aircraft waiting to depart.

Submitting a flight plan after an Airspace Flow Program (AFP) or Ground Delay Program (GDP) is instituted can significantly increase delays. If you have an EDCT, do not re-file unless you are filing a “Route Out” option for an AFP — otherwise, the flight becomes a “pop-up,” which can mean further delays. Ask ATC if they can re-plan a route for you. That should be your fastest way forward. You can help things along if you tell clearance delivery what you are willing to do. Saying you are “overwater capable,” for example, can speed you along if the overland routes are congested.

Ground Clearances. You can normally ask for your IFR clearance 30 min. before the filed departure time, though some airports will retrieve it for you early if you need it. (What you call an “ATC Clearance” in many countries is normally called an “IFR clearance” here.) Clearances are usually good for 2 hr. after the filed departure time, but you can ask for extensions. You very rarely need approval to start engines. If there are restrictions, you will normally hear about that on ATIS. If there is an operating control tower, you will need clearance to taxi. In most airports, you switch to tower frequency when you are ready, but some airports will have you wait until instructed. You will normally wait to switch from tower to departure control once airborne, unless you were instructed to make the switch on the ground.

“Cleared Direct.” The Good — Every air traffic control sector in the continental U.S. is connected and if traffic permits, you can often be cleared direct hundreds or thousands of miles down the line. In fact, you might try asking for that. “Request direct Columbus, or farther down if you can do that.” If the current sector says they can’t, don’t be discouraged; ask the next center.

The Bad — You may be used to getting assigned a Standard Instrument Departure (SID) or Standard Terminal Arrival Route (STAR) and flying that procedure to its end. In the U.S. you can be taken off the procedure with

expectations to rejoin it at some time. It pays to have the procedure out and to be familiar with the points along the way.

The Ugly — It isn’t uncommon to be cleared to a point that isn’t on your flight plan. It is either a mistake or there might be more routing you need to know about. In either case, just ask.

Arrivals VMC Versus IMC. Most U.S. pilots prefer visual approaches when the weather permits because it gets them to the airport more quickly. Most towers and approach controllers like the visual too, since it allows more aircraft to be sequenced in the same airspace. But the visual imposes on you the requirement to spot conflicting traffic, spot the landing runway, and to plan your lateral and vertical navigation. If you have a preference to fly an instrument approach, request it. (That may delay you a little since ATC will have to enforce stricter spacing rules.)

VFR Traffic. Much of the world flocks to the U.S. for flight training because it is relatively easier (and less expensive) to get a pilot’s license here, there is a lot of airspace open to anyone with an airplane and thousands of public-use airports, and there are a lot of small airplanes. That’s all good, right? Well consider this: Some of those airplanes do not even have a basic radio and quite a few don’t have transponders. There are aircraft flying under visual flight rules up to 18,000 ft.

In addition, many of the airports favored for training have a mix of high-speed jets and low-speed propeller-driven aircraft. So, even if you are flying under an instrument rules flight plan you will need to keep your eyes out of the cockpit when below 18,000 ft., especially in a traffic pattern.

New York City Area Airports. The air traffic near New York City’s John F. Kennedy International Airport (KJFK)



and LaGuardia Airport (KLGA) and nearby Newark Liberty International Airport (KEWR) and Teterboro Airport (KTEB) in New Jersey is packed in very tight and presents challenges even for the most seasoned instrument pilots. U.S. pilots from outside the New York area often choose airports just outside the area, such as Westchester County Airport (KHPN), White Plains, New York. Many pilots give Teterboro a wide berth when the weather is bad

for example, can be given too quickly to really comprehend unless you are a local. If you are at an airport where the taxiway numbers exhaust all 26 available letters (such as Taxiway AA, AB, and so on), be prepared for this. Just tell the controller your English isn't quite as good as his or hers. "Say again slowly, please" should get the message across.

Weather. The weather in the U.S. can be found throughout the world but not in

Temporary Flight Restrictions (TFRs).

Flying in the U.S. is generally easier than in Europe and Asia, but the restrictions can be unpredictable. You should never plan a flight without checking for any Temporary Flight Restrictions (TFRs).

The FAA's definition of a TFR is well written and easy to understand: "Temporary Flight Restrictions [TFRs] define a certain area of airspace where air travel is limited because of a temporary hazardous condition, such as a wildfire or chemical spill; a security-related event, such as the United Nations General Assembly; or other special situations. The text of the actual TFR contains the details about the restriction, including the size, altitude, time period that it is in effect, and what types of operations are restricted and permitted."

Unfortunately, TFRs are usually written poorly, formatted in a way that confuses, and will require several readings to understand. But you will need to check them. In some cases, failure to abide by a TFR can result in an F-16 with air-to-air missiles parked on your wing with another just behind you ready to shoot. So, you need to either read the TFRs or brush up on your air interception procedures. You can find the latest TFRs at: https://www.faa.gov/uas/where_to_fly/airspace_restrictions

Finding Local Knowledge

As any avid golfer will tell you: "Local knowledge trumps all." Find someone who has been to your U.S. destination airports recently and ask for tips, surprises and "gotchas." Even if you don't know anyone with local knowledge, there are other sources available to you at the National Business Aviation Association (NBAA) online at <http://www.nbaa.org>, social media and various pilot user groups.

After you've done your due diligence by reading the U.S. AIP, searching the internet for user groups and talking with local experts, don't be surprised by the surprises. Whenever I fly internationally, I try to remember to keep my situational awareness as high as it can be, to stay flexible, and to never be afraid to say "I'm sorry, I'm not from around here and I don't understand. Please say again, slowly." I think that approach will serve you well here.

The U.S. flying environment is a friendly one. Let me join with my fellow U.S. aviators and say, "Welcome to the United States." **BCA**



A supercell thunderstorm over Chaparral, New Mexico.

NOAA

because of the way air traffic often has to circle during the most challenging conditions. (See "TEB's 'Non-Circling, Circling Approach,'" *BCA*, September 2017).

"Speakin' 'merican." You aren't alone if you find some U.S. English hard to understand. More than a few pilots from the U.S. Midwest have experienced a little confusion when arriving at a Boston or New York area airport where the accents can be thick and the rate of speech rather fast.

If your call sign obviously places you in the "not from around here" category, most controllers will speak more slowly and with less jargon. But sometimes they don't. Very long taxi instructions,

the same combinations. We have towering thunderstorms than can out-climb aircraft and reach into the 50,000-ft. and higher range. We have snow in parts of the Northeast that is more commonly found in mountainous areas. Hail? The size of oranges.

Most U.S. pilots are accustomed to watching the weather for their routes days ahead of time, looking for patterns and options. You can often avoid delays or even cancellations by adjusting departure times a few hours or even a day or two. For parts of the year, the weather can be your biggest challenge. Fortunately, there are a lot of online sources for help. A good place to start: <http://www.aviationweather.gov>