

AOPA

Quick Flight Briefing for traveling the Bahamas

ABOUT EAPIS

eAPIS is Customs and Border Protection's (CBP's) Electronic Advance Passenger Information System. Beginning May 18, 2009 pilots who fly internationally will be required to provide passenger manifests to CBP when departing from and arriving back in the U.S. using this electronic reporting system. Until May 18, pilots may voluntarily [use the eAPIS system](#) in lieu of completing [CBP Form 178](#).

Note: All pilots should be aware of certain Customs and security staff actions at some island airports of entry. Pilots and passengers may be informed of a prohibition on taking photos inside airport perimeters or that cell phones are prohibited. While this is incorrect, visitors to the Bahamas must comply with local authority directives to avoid problems.

Please note that this briefing is designed to be advisory in nature for a private pilot conducting a recreation flight and is not intended to be a substitute for thorough and adequate preparation.

This sparkling chain of islands stretches 750 miles in an arc beginning only 50 miles off the East Coast of Florida on down to the Caribbean. Some 700 islands and 2,000 cays ("keys") cover 100,000 square miles of ocean and offer airstrips on 21 of the 29 inhabited islands. The most familiar of the islands are New Providence Island, on which is located the Bahamian capital of Nassau, and Grand Bahama Island, with Freeport International and West End airports. All the rest are variously called the "Family Island," the "Family Out Islands," or simply the "Out Islands."

Here is a brief set of operating tips to help you get started.

Proof of Citizenship

Each person on board must have current passports. Birth certificates are no longer acceptable after January 23, 2007, under the new Department of Homeland Security and Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative. Refer to the [AOPA Passport section](#) for more details on this.

U.S. citizens visiting the Bahamas are not required to have a visa and are permitted to stay as long as they like without having to obtain a travel or tourist visa.

Any minor children on the flight accompanied by only one parent must have a notarized letter from the absent parent authorizing the trip. Specific dates, places, and names should be included. For single parent households, contact AOPA's Pilot Information Center (800/872-2672) for further information.

Aircraft Documentation/Equipment

Standard Airworthiness Certificate, a permanent Registration Certificate, (no temporaries or pink slips), [Radio Station License](#) (even though no longer required for domestic operations, it is still needed for international operations), Operating Limitations, and Weight and Balance are required. If the aircraft is



registered in another person's or corporation's name, we recommend that you have a notarized letter authorizing use of the aircraft for flights in the Bahamas.



ICAO requires an approved life vest floatation device for each occupant of the aircraft for flights in the Bahamas and other Caribbean islands. It is also recommended that a life raft suitable for the number of aircraft passengers be carried onboard. All U.S. registered aircraft must have an identification data plate on the exterior surface. For penetrating the Air Defense Identification Zone, twelve (12) inch high registration marks (temporary or permanent) are required per [FAR 45.11](#). Bring an original, completed Form 337 if fuel tanks have been installed in the baggage or passenger compartment. A transponder with Mode C is also required. You must comply with FAR Parts 91.700 series and Part 99.

There are no special insurance requirements for the Bahamas, however we recommend that you check with your insurance company to verify your coverage.

U.S. Customs has a \$27.50 annual user fee decal [mail-in form](#) that will be required. We recommend that you obtain it in advance of your departure or contact the airport of entry you will be using for your return to see if they have a supply of decals on hand. An [online application](#) for the decal is also available.

Pilot Credentials

You will need your pilot certificate (effective March 5, 2009, ICAO requires that your certificate have an [English proficient endorsement](#)), medical certificate, and restricted [radiotelephone operators permit](#) (not required for U.S. domestic VHF radio operations but is required whenever crossing the U.S. borders or when using an HF radio). Each foreign country regulation also requires the permit within its airspace. All certificates must be original and current.

Pre-Clearance Items



Normally, private flights do not pre-clear with U.S. Customs; however, if the pilot and/or passengers are taking expensive items abroad, it is a good idea to declare those items with U.S. Customs before you leave. U.S. Customs is serious about declaring items purchased aboard and by declaring expensive items before you leave the U.S. it is less likely that you would face a duty or a tax issue on your own belongings when you return. Monetary amounts over \$10,000.00 must be declared with customs before you leave the country and when you return. Non-U.S. citizens may have pre-clearance requirements and the pilot should confirm those prior to departing the U.S. with the appropriate customs office.

Cabotage

Private pilots and commercial operators should understand "cabotage," formally defined as "air transport of passengers and goods within the same national territory." The definition adopted by ICAO at the Chicago Convention is, "Each state shall have the right to refuse permission to the aircraft of other contracting states to take on its territory passengers, mail, and cargo destined for another point within its territory." Although cabotage rules are different in various countries and usually incorporate the term "for hire," some countries do not allow even nonrevenue passengers to be carried by a foreign aircraft within their boundaries. The restrictions range from no restrictions as in Italy, to not allowed, as in Pakistan. The fines for cabotage can be extremely high; therefore, pilots and flight departments should be absolutely sure of a country's cabotage rules before carrying passengers. The cabotage requirements and restrictions of individual countries are listed in the corporate aircraft restraints section for each country in the IFIM. Refer to Chapter II, Article 7 of the Chicago Convention.

Entry into the Bahamas

You are not required to provide advance notice to Bahamian Customs. You must be on an activated IFR or Defense VFR flight plan for the ADIZ crossing in international airspace. You must make your first landing in the Bahamas at a Customs airport of entry. It is recommended you at least call the FBO or Customs to announce your tentative arrival time.

Experimental Airworthiness Certificates are not valid for international flight and require advance permission from the Bahamas, as in most foreign countries.

Flight Operations in the Bahamas

Flight plans are recommended for operations within the Bahamas. Keep in mind you may need to open and close flight plans from

altitude because phones may not be available at remote island locations. For island hopping flexibility, a cruising permit at your airport of entry will be required. VFR at night is prohibited in the Bahamas except within the airport traffic areas of Freeport and Nassau.

Fuel should be paid for in cash using U.S. dollars, Pounds, or Traveler's Checks. Credit cards and gas cards are accepted at Freeport and Nassau and most other airports, although fuel prices will usually be lower for cash sales. When practical, over fly landing strips for inspection and bring along your own tie-down equipment and security devices.

Departing the Bahamas

It is required to return your Immigration tourist card and cruising permit when you clear out of Bahamas. In addition, there is a \$15 (fifteen-dollar) per passenger departure tax that will be charged.

Returning to the United States

U.S. Customs requires advanced notice of arrival. The notification requirements may vary. Be sure to check the requirements for the specific airport used. This information can be found in the [U.S. Customs Guide for Private Flyers](#). Most airports of entry will require no less than one (1) hour but no more than 23 hours advanced notification. You must be on an activated defense VFR or IFR flight plan with "ADCUS" or "Advise Customs" listed in the remarks section. We strongly suggest that you use a telephone and not rely on the ADCUS message in your flight plan. AOPA recommends a phone call to Customs due to violations reported to us by pilots when Customs has not received the ADCUS message in a timely fashion. When calling customs, we suggest that you also get the badge number of the customs official who took your information, and if you have a telephone credit card, use it so that you will have a statement that shows the date and time you made the call. It is the responsibility of the pilot in command to make certain U.S. Customs has been informed of the flight arrival time, as well as any diversions or changes made enroute.

Keep in mind that it is important to be on time. It's always better to be a little late than too early. Customs will allow a 15-minute window for your arrival time. Pilots should update their estimated time of arrival as necessary by contacting U.S. air traffic control or a flight service station and requesting them to advise Customs of the new arrival time in the United States. Unless you have obtained an overflight permit in advance, your first point of landing in the United States must be at the first designated airport of entry after border or coastline crossing point.

Because you are returning through the Air Defense Identification Zone, ensure that you comply with the ADIZ equipment and notification requirements as noted earlier. Your flight plan should include the estimated time of ADIZ penetration. We recommend continuous radio communications with U.S. air traffic control to ensure that your flight plan information is received at least 15 minutes in advance of the ADIZ penetration. Aliens who are permanent residents of the United States must have their registration cards with them in order to reenter the United States. The pilot must report on the [Form CF178](#), Private Aircraft Enforcement System Arrival Report the nationalities of all persons on board to Customs and Immigrations. Pilot and passengers must remain inside the aircraft until the Customs officer motions you to come out.

DUATS Phone Numbers

Within the U.S. only:

CSC 800/345-3828

DTC 800/243-3828

From outside of the U.S. or wherever the toll free number may not work:

CSC 703/818-5619

DTC 856/228-3232

Charts

Bahamian/Caribbean charts (VFR and IFR) and Caribbean World Aeronautical Charts are available from [Sporty's Pilot Shop](#), 800/SPORTYS (776-7897).

[Read the latest international pilot reports](#) from our members traveling south of the border.

Checklist for International Flight Operations for the Bahamas

These are mandatory requirements

Preflight

- [Appropriate charts and flight supplements](#)

Personal Documentation

- Pilot certificate
- Medical certificate
- [U.S. FCC Radio Telephone Operators Permit](#)
- [Notarized letter](#) authorizing children to travel (only if accompanied by one parent)
- Proof of citizenship
 - Passport
 - Resident alien ID card
- Other visa documentation as required www.uscis.gov

Aircraft Documentation

- Airworthiness certificate
- Registration certificate (temporary certificate prohibited)
- Operating limitations (approved aircraft flight manual)
- Weight and balance information
- [U.S. FCC Aircraft Radio Station License](#)
- Special Flight Authorization for operations in the United States
- [FAA Major Repair and Alteration Form 337](#)
- [U.S. Customs Annual User Fee Decal \(Form 339A\)](#)

Departure

Give advance notification to Customs if exporting any cargo or aircraft spare parts:

- **U.S. to Bahamas or Mexico:** Customs is not always marked; make prior arrangements.
- **Bahamas or Mexico to the U.S.:** Must call U.S. Customs a minimum of one hour before arrival.
- [File and activate a VFR or IFR flight plan](#)
- Advise Customs if any change in ETA at AOE via ATC/FSS while in flight, get badge number and name of Customs official who ATC/FSS speaks with. Inform Customs authorities as required at destination airport of entry.

Arrival

- **In United States:**
 - [Make first landing at an airport of entry \(AOE\)](#)
 - Taxi to Customs area on ramp
 - Do not be early and no more than 15 minutes off ETA; wait for Customs official to motion you out of aircraft
- **In Mexico or the Bahamas:**
 - Procedures vary and Customs is not always identified; call the local FBO for specific arrangements.
- **For all:**
 - If inspected, present documentation as required, fill out any [declaration forms](#), and [pay appropriate duties and taxes](#)
 - If VFR, close your flight plan

Aviation technical specialists in AOPA's Pilot Information Center are available to answer your questions during regular business hours from 8:30 a.m. until 6 p.m. Eastern Time Monday through Friday, 800/USA-AOPA (872-2672).

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