

# AOPA

## Returning to the U.S.

Eventually, it will be time to start home. You should have no trouble making landfall heading west from the Bahamas. Remember...you still have to be mindful of ADIZ penetration and giving advance notice to Customs of your arrival. Please, pay careful attention to these requirements.

The U.S. government is serious about catching drug smugglers and Customs agents consider general aviation aircraft one of the highest risk vehicles for narcotics smuggling, especially those arriving from the south. Violating Customs rules means possible aircraft impoundment and fines starting at \$5,000.



Paying close attention to the few straightforward requirements for returning to the United States will pay off in a smooth, hassle-free flight home.

### Departure from the Bahamas

Basically, there are five items to cover on your preparation for departure from the Bahamas for the United States:

- Do your paperwork;
- File a flight plan;
- Make advance Customs notification;
- Land at an Airport of Entry; and
- Clear Customs.

### Departure Airports

Your jumping off point for return to the United States must be from an [airport of entry/exit](#).

### Bahamas Paperwork/Departure Fees

For Bahamian paperwork requirements, you must fill out two Aircraft General Declaration (Outward-Inward) forms, and all persons in your party must return their tourist cards (Immigration Disembarkation/ Embarkation card). You must also return your cruising permit or transire. All persons must pay a \$15.00 departure tax.

### Flight Plan

A DVFR or an IFR flight plan must be filed prior to your departure from the Bahamas en route to the United States. Call FSS Nassau at 242/377-7178, FSS Freeport at 242/352-2205 or FSS Miami at 305/233-2600 to file all flight plans. If the flight plan is filed for leaving from Freeport or Nassau, then in addition to filing with MIA, you must either file with FSS at Nassau or Freeport, or you have the option of faxing a copy of the actual flight plan to the ATC tower at the appropriate airport. See the local FBO for the tower fax number.

### Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ)

Since you will be crossing an ADIZ again, the same rules for 12-inch aircraft N numbers and ferry tank paperwork apply.

Your flight plan should include the estimated time of ADIZ penetration. This information must be received at time of flight planning, but no later than 15 minutes before crossing the ADIZ while in-flight.. The ADCUS message that U.S. Customs Service requires notice to be received at least one hour prior to border crossing.

### ADCUS

Use of ADCUS rarely works, even though it is an approved means of Customs notification. Call the Customs Airport of Entry as required by the Customs Regulations

### **Airports of Entry/Overflight Exemptions**

Your landing must be at the designated airport nearest to the point of first border crossing, unless an overflight exemption has been granted to land at a Customs-served airport farther inland. Due to the increasingly tight requirements for overflight exemptions, AOPA recommends the returning tourist not consider this procedure or to get details from the AOPA Aviation Services or from U.S. Customs before departure from the United States.

There are three kinds of designated airports through which you can clear customs in the United States. One is the Airport of Entry (AOE), a Landing Rights Airport (LRA) or a User Fee (UF). You must provide the minimum of 1 hour advance notice of arrival and obtain prior permission from Customs to land. Be sure to record the badge number of the Customs official who gave the permission. If Customs inspection cannot be provided for any reason, you will have to select another entry airport

Designated U. S. Airports of Entry are listed [online](#)

### **U.S. Customs Notification**

You should have the following information available for Customs notification:

- Aircraft registration number;
- Name of aircraft commander;
- Number of U.S. Citizen passengers;
- Number of Alien passengers;
- Passport No. and other requested information
- Place of last departure;
- Estimated time and location of crossing the U.S. coastline;
- Name of the U.S. airport of first landing; and
- Your ETA.

### **U.S. Customs Decal**

U.S. Customs requires a \$27.50 annual user fee decal for re-entry into the United States. It must be purchased before leaving the U.S. and displayed on the outside of the aircraft near the door to show that your fee has been paid. This decal allows the aircraft to clear U.S. Customs for the remainder of the calendar year without additional user fees. You will need to [register and apply for the decal online \(CBP Form 339A\)](#).

### **U.S. Customs Hours**

Free Customs service is generally provided during the normal business hours of 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Saturday, including holidays. However, the duty hours of inspectors are based on demand for service and may be altered at some airports to accommodate schedule changes and peak work loads. Pilots should check hours of operation before departure. Refer to U.S. Customs Guide For Private Flyers.

U.S. Customs in Miami, Florida, has issued a new telephone number—786/265-5540—to be used by pilots who have problems or difficulties contacting the Florida airport of entry during normal business hours, or if they need assistance with after-hour arrivals at these airports: Miami (MIA), Opa Locka (OPF), Kendall-Tamiami Executive (TMB), Key West International (EYW), Fort Lauderdale Executive (FXE), Fort Lauderdale/Hollywood International (FLL), Palm Beach International (PBI), and St. Lucie County International (FPR).

### **Overtime Charges**

Before January 1, 1995, private aircraft and vessels arriving outside normal duty hours were assessed an additional \$25.00 overtime charge for each arrival. This fee is no longer collected by U.S. Customs.

However, if an officer from an inspection agency other than Customs is providing the service, you may pay overtime charges after regular working hours during weekdays. These agencies are listed in the U.S. Customs guide for Private Flyers.

### **User-Fee Airport**

Congress created the User-fee Airport Program as a part of the Tariff and Trade Act of 1984. Certain airports that do not meet the normal criteria for establishment of a port of entry can petition to become a designated user-fee airport. Private aircraft operators using these designated user-fee airports are frequently required to pay the airport operator costs associated with their processing. These

costs may well run from \$100 to \$300 per arrival.

### U.S. Customs Do's and Don'ts

- **Do** know Customs rules.
- **Do** notify Customs in advance by telephone.
- **Do** get Customs information from Customs officials.
- **Do** be on time.
- **Do** request the Customs officer's badge number.
- **Do** declare every article acquired abroad and accompanying you, including gifts.
- **Do** keep a record of all acquired items; save sales invoices.
- **Do** pack your purchases and gifts in one piece of luggage or a box.
- **Do** have all your baggage ready for inspection.
- **Do** know your state and federal liquor restrictions.
- **Do** understand that every country insists upon a Customs examination for returning residents.
- **Do** be patient.
  
- **Don't** exceed your Customs exemption without expecting to pay duty.
- **Don't** forget that your purchases sent home are subject to duty.
- **Don't** be surprised if Customs opens your baggage.
- **Don't** forget that all accompanying foreign purchases must be declared, even those you wore or used.
- **Don't** accept the offer of a "false" sales invoice. This could result in seizure or penalties.
- **Don't** rely on the "experienced" traveler or foreign seller for Customs information.
- **Don't** bring back fruits, plants, vegetables, or meat without permits from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.
- **Don't** exit your aircraft until you are authorized by Customs.
- **Don't** be late.

### U.S. Paperwork

For U.S. paperwork requirements, the pilot will have to submit [Form CF178](#), Private Aircraft Enforcement System Arrival Report. This form may be filled out upon arrival or may be prepared in advance to save time.

The pilot should also be prepared to produce a valid Airman's certificate, medical certificate, aircraft registration certificate, certificate of airworthiness, and proof of citizenship for each occupant and other aircraft documentation as requested.

### Expensive Items/Large Amounts of Cash/Other Declarations

Of course you declared all valuables before leaving the U.S., so you should have no problems with them on your return. However, you are required by Customs to declare any items purchased while on your trip.

### Occupant Obligations

Documentation used by you and your passengers to enter the Bahamas will serve the same purpose for the return to the United States.

In addition, all occupants must make a general declaration of goods purchased in the Bahamas. A written declaration using Form CF-6059-B must be presented when duty is to be collected or whenever the inspecting officer requires it. A word of caution: Customs officers are strict about declared value of goods, and penalties can be severe for undervaluing through false statements or artificially lowered prices on receipts.

If there is any non commercial cargo or unaccompanied baggage on board, the pilot should prepare a written declaration. Customs will provide the necessary forms.

To expedite your clearance at the Customs Service office it would be helpful if a list of items for inspection could be prepared in advance and those items separated for general inspection.

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