

International Flight Quick Briefing

Bahamas

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.

You have selected the [Bahamas](#) and the following topics will be discussed: proof of citizenship, aircraft documentation and equipment, pilot credentials, pre-clearance items, entry into and flight operations within the Bahamas, returning to the U.S., and charts.

Additional information is available on the AOPA web site at www.aopa.org.

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 or birth certificates. The birth certificate must be the original or a certified copy. Certified copies have a raised or embossed seal on them. Birth certificates require accompanying photo identification.

Additionally required, tourist visas may be obtained at the first [airport of entry in the Bahamas](#) or in advance through a travel agent.

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 Aviation Services (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.

An approved floatation device for each occupant of the aircraft is required for flights in the Bahamas. 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.

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 \$25.00 annual user fee decal [[apply online](#) | [mail-in form](#) (requires [Adobe Reader](#))] 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.

Pilot Credentials

You will need your Pilot Certificate, Medical Certificate, and [Radiotelephone Operators permit](#). 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 US Customs before you leave. U.S. Customs is serious about declaring items purchased aboard and by declaring expensive items before you leave the US 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-US citizens may have pre-clearance requirements and the pilot should confirm those prior to departing the U.S. with the appropriate customs office.

Entry into the Bahamas

You are required to provide at least (1) hour advance notice to Bahamian customs. This can be done by noting advise customs or ADCUS in the remarks block of your [flight plan](#). You must be on an activated IFR or Defense VFR flight plan for the border crossing. You must make your first landing in the Bahamas at an airport of entry.

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, we recommend obtaining a cruising permit at your airport of entry. VFR at night is prohibited in the Bahamas except within the airport traffic areas of Freeport and Nassau.

Loran coverage areas from Florida down to the southeast coast of Cuba are usually received down to the Turks and Caicos. Fuel should be paid in cash using U.S. dollars, Pounds, or Traveler's Checks. Credit cards and gas cards are sometimes accepted at Freeport and Nassau 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 tourist card and cruising permit when you clear out of Bahamas. In addition, there is a \$15 (fifteen-dollar) per passenger departure tax that may be charged.

Returning to the United States

U.S. Customs requires advanced notice of arrival. These 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](#). The phone numbers for U.S. Customs offices are listed in the front pages of AOPA's [airport directory](#) and in the *AOPA's Customs Guide*.

Most airports of entry will require no less than one hour but no more than 23 hours advance 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 the telephone and not rely on the ADCUS message in [your flight plan](#). AOPA recommends a phone call to Customs due to the violations reported to us by pilots when Customs has not received the ADCUS message in a timely fashion. Typically, customs violations will start at \$5,000.00 for the first offense. When calling customs, we suggest that you get a badge number of the customs official that 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.

Keep in mind that it is important to be on time. It's always better to be a little late than too early. Pilots should update their estimated time of arrival 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 U.S. Unless you have obtained an overflight permit in advance, your first point of landing must be at a [designated airport of entry](#) within the Miami Customs District.

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 U.S. must have their registration cards with them in order to re-enter the U.S. The pilot must report the nationality of any passengers on board to customs and immigrations. Pilot and passengers must remain inside the aircraft until the Customs officer motions you to come out.

Charts

AOPA members may also purchase our International Operations Portfolio for the Bahamas that provides comprehensive information for a printing fee of \$8.00.

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

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