

OK, you've read all those articles in the magazines that talk about flying to France, but it still looks like far too much hassle:

- Flight Plans – what're they all about?
- There are loads of documents to take, aren't there?
- Loads of notice required to Customs and Immigration.
- And what about Special Branch?
- And Customs in France?
- The planning seems too much, and then there's the thought of all that water...

Well, what if I told you that with only a small amount of preparation over and above normal flight planning, you could depart only ONE HOUR after making the decision to go and the only thing extra you need to do before you leave is to fill out three simple forms on the Web. In fact, it's even better than that, since modern flight planning software such as SkyDemon will complete most of the forms automatically.

Those Three Web Submissions

They are:

- Outbound Leg Flight Plan Form
- Inbound Leg Flight Plan Form
- Inbound General Aviation Report to Customs & Immigration

Documents

Well, you're going abroad, so you'll need passports for all. You may also need to prove your credentials so take PPL, radio licence and medical. Other required documents relate to the aircraft (CofA, Registration, Radio Licence, Insurance Certificate...) and it is useful to keep them all together in a folder in the aircraft – leave photocopies elsewhere for safety, I suggest. The final document you need is a copy of the Interception Signals in case (let's hope not) you ever see a Rafale fighter on your wingtip. These can be found within CAA Safety Sense Leaflet No.11 – see later.

From August 2016 these documents are required to be carried in the aircraft anyway.

Outbound Trip

It's a little known fact that one can fly to an EU Country such as France from the UK without telling anyone at all (except Air Traffic) – even from the humblest farm strip. You need to fly to a foreign airfield with a Customs and Immigration presence, it is true – but there are lots of those within easy striking distance of the Channel Coast. Check if they require a notice period, though; some of the popular ones do, but only a small number of hours, usually. (This information can be found on the airfield plate from the French AIS, freely available online at http://www.sia.aviation-civile.gouv.fr/html/frameset_VFR_fr.htm). There are also many other French airfields who have Customs and Immigration on request, so if you find that the destination that you have set your heart on doesn't have Customs at hand, do not despair – they may only require a slightly longer notice period. If they don't, well - simply clear Customs elsewhere and then continue your journey – it needn't even cost you much, as many French airfields don't bother with landing fees.

Remember I said you need to tell Air Traffic? Well, apart from the radio work in the air, this is the FIRST of the three web submissions – the Outbound Flight Plan. There is a legal requirement to file one of these when crossing an International frontier, and whilst at first sight they may appear to make limited sense and be a little daunting, do not despair – they aren't that bad. In fact, there is a CAA Safety Sense Leaflet (SSL No.20) that demystifies it completely, and I've included an example version of a completed (paper) form at the end of

this article. Nowadays you would create an account with AFPEX (<https://ts2.flightplanningonline.co.uk/>) and use that, or (even easier) seamlessly via a VFR planning programme such as SkyDemon.

Return Trip

For this leg of the journey, you will need to file a Flight Plan as you are crossing an international boundary again. This is your SECOND web submission, and you can file it from the UK before you depart. Most of the contents of this will be the same as the outbound Flight Plan except for obvious things such as times, destination and departure airfields, alternates etc.

You will also need to inform UK Customs and Immigration at least 4 hours before your return. You do this using the General Aviation Report (GAR) Form, which is very straightforward and simply asks for names, addresses, DOB and Passport Numbers for each occupant as well as times and airfields for outbound and return. (There is actually no specific requirement or legal need to inform them of your outbound timings, but there it is on the form).

Once again, for a day trip it makes sense to do send this before you depart – and whilst the same form needs to go separately to Customs and Immigration, it is done to one destination for both so this is your THIRD web submission. There are a number of web addresses for this, and more are coming on line as I write. The original was hosted by AOPA (<http://www.aopa.co.uk/Gar6/>). Again you can also do this using flight planning apps/programs such as SkyDemon.

There is no requirement to inform Special Branch for trips to the Continent.

So why wait an hour?

The reason you cannot leave immediately after sending your three submissions is because your outbound Flight Plan needs time to be entered into the system, and an hour is advised to ensure this – although in practice I've found that less time may in practice be needed now that it is all electronic. You must activate the flight plan in the air by radio (e.g. with London Information) or just before departure by phone.

And that's all there is to it. Easy!

But I Don't Want to Go to France – I Want To Go To Alderney

Sheesh – there's always one, isn't there?

Because the Channel Islands are not in the European Union, the rules above don't apply. However, most of what is required is the same – it's mainly that the notification times are longer, and there are additional notification requirements.

Essentially, the Customs & Immigration General Aviation Report now must be submitted for the outbound leg, and a minimum 12 hours in advance. You also need to inform Special Branch (Why? Don't ask me!), which uses exactly the same GAR form sent to yet another user - again, 12 hours' notice is required. (Nowadays, the online GAR submission (including from commercial apps/programs) will send the form to all three Agencies together).

One wrinkle here is that, strictly, you should depart and arrive from/to a "Designated" or a "Certificate of Agreement" airfield – these are listed on the GAR guidance document. You shouldn't be departing to/from that farmer's field that was OK for trips to the continent.

The notification and GAR requirements above also apply to the IoM, and also to Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland (Eire), even though the latter are both in the EU.

Here is a link to the GAR Instructions, otherwise search for "General Aviation Report":
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/412944/GAR_Instructions_March_2015.pdf

But Can't You Make It Even Easier?

Oh, alright then. At the end of this article are copies of sample General Aviation Report and Flight Plan Forms, as well as a single page Aide Memoire I put together that distils all of the above information. Feel free to copy and distribute.

But What About All That Water?

Well, there is that. However, the engine doesn't know it's over water, and even on the long crossing from Isle of Wight to Cherbourg you will only be over water for about 35-40 minutes in a typical tourer. Lifejackets aren't that expensive, or they can be hired for a small fee from many airfields, along with liferafts. Safety Sense Leaflet 21 on Ditching is an essential read. If you wish, training courses in swimming pools are available to let you experience use of the lifejacket and dinghy, and whilst not essential is very worthwhile. It's fun, too – which is more than the real thing would be!

"CAA Safety Sense Leaflets" works as a search term – they seem to move regularly around the CAA website.

Still not convinced yet? Well, what if I told you HMRC will subsidise your trip?

Difficult to believe, I know, but - it's true! If you export Hydrocarbon fuel from the UK, you are entitled to claim back the duty paid, up to the amount in your tanks when you depart – ***even if you don't burn it all during your return journey***. This is because it is the act of exporting the fuel that triggers the right to claim; re-importing is irrelevant. So, let's say you have a full 100 litre fuel tank – HMRC will pay you over £35, which is certainly enough for a very decent meal at your destination.

Claiming is relatively straightforward, and to start with you should familiarise yourself with the online claim form and guidance material.

https://public-online.hmrc.gov.uk/lc/content/xfafoms/profiles/forms.html?contentRoot=repository:///Applications/Customs_A/1.0/HO60&template=HO60.xdp

If the above link is broken (the site gets rearranged every now and again), just search the HMRC website for "Form HO60" (That's Hotel Oscar Six Zero), and the accompanying guidance material ("Excise Duty Drawback").

- At the time of writing (Jul 2016), the Excise Duty rates (that is, the amount you can claim back) are:
 - £0.3770 per litre for AVGAS
 - £0.5795 per litre for MOGAS
- You can only claim for the amount actually in your tanks – you'll sometimes hear the misconception that you can claim up to maximum tank capacity.
- You'll probably need to provide proof of UK uplift (i.e. Duty paid) for the amount in your tanks, so keep those receipts!
- You will need to state on the form the date that the aircraft last returned from overseas – the intention is presumably to ensure that you do not export the same fuel more than once!
- Some airfields (e.g. Lydd) make this even easier. If you uplift fuel there prior to your next destination being outside the UK, they will sell it to you with Excise Duty already

removed – you will be asked to sign a simple declaration to confirm your intention to depart overseas, and that if you do not you will be liable for the Duty saved.

FLIGHT PLAN			
Priority << ≡ →		Addressee(s) 	
Filing time 		Originator << ≡	
Specific identification of addressee(s) and/or originator 			
3. Message type << ≡ (FPL 7. Aircraft identification - GROBN 8. Flight rules - V Type of flight G << ≡ 9. Number - Type of Aircraft R100 Wake turbulence cat. / L 10. Equipment - S/A << ≡ 13. Departure Aerodrome - EGDM Time 0630 << ≡ 15. Cruising speed - N0120 Level VFR Route DCT SAM DCT Garmi DCT			
16. Destination Aerodrome - LFRC		Total EET hrs/min 00 50	
		Alternate → EGHN	
		2 nd alternate → LFRK << ≡	
18. Other information - DOF/24 JUNE EET/LFRR0035 RMK/ MOBILE PHONE +44 7725 123456			
Supplementary information (Not to be transmitted in FPL messages)			
19. Endurance -E/ 04 00 P.O.B →P/ 002 Survival Eq. → S Polar X Desert X Maritime M Jungle X Jackets → J Light / L Dinghies → D / 01 Capacity 006 Cover C Colour YELLOW << ≡ Emergency Radio → R/ X VHF V ELBA E Floures F UHF U VHF V Aircraft colour and markings A/ BLUE/WHITE Remarks → N / << ≡ Pilot-in-command C/ WHITE			
Filed by 		Space reserved for additional requirements 	

NOTES ON FLIGHT PLAN FORM

I suggest that you read the CAA Safety Sense Leaflet No. 20 (available on the Internet) in order to fully understand how to complete one of these. 10 minutes with that and you will wonder what all the fuss was about. However, a few points worth making now are as follows:

CLOSING FLIGHT PLAN ON ARRIVAL IN FRANCE

You must remember to do this, otherwise French SAR may be called out and you may well be billed – which is unlikely to be cheap. Your destination airfield can be requested to do this for you, or for peace of mind you can do it yourself on 0810 437 837 (“0810 IFR VFR”).

Field 9: Number This field is used if you are travelling as a group of aircraft, otherwise leave blank. You would provide the registrations and types of the other aircraft in the formation in field 18 “Other Information”.

Field 9: Type of Aircraft “R100” is the appropriate code for a Robin Aiglon. A Cessna 172 would be “C172” – no surprise there. Other Owners can look on the ICAO website for a fairly comprehensive ICAO list, or use “ZZZZ” and put “TYPE: BOSCOMBE WHIZZBAT” (or whatever) in Field 18.

Field 13: Time Don’t forget – time in this field is in UTC (GMT)

Field 15: Route “DCT” means “Direct”, so this example is Boscombe Down (EGDM) DIRECT to SAM VOR (Southampton) DIRECT ‘GARMI’ DIRECT to Cherbourg (LFRC).

‘GARMI’ is a reporting point at the FIR boundary on the VFR route south of the Isle of Wight, and it and similar reporting points are marked on the UK 1:500,000 charts. The French require an indication of the point of entry into their airspace, for which these points are convenient. Alternatively you can use Lat/Long in the format “50N00123W”, or bearing and distance from a route reporting point or navigation aid: “SAM18057”.

Field 18: Other Information If we are planning an early morning start then we can send in the Flight Plan the evening before – it’s only a *minimum* of an hour pre-takeoff, remember. In such a case, we would use “DOF/24 JUNE” in order to be explicit about the Date Of Flight.

You should also provide Estimated Elapsed Time (EET) to the International (FIR) Boundary crossing point identified in the Route at Item 15 (see comment above). In this case, the FIR Boundary is LFRR (i.e. Brest FIR), and you think it will take you 35 minutes to get there.

Also, it is good practice for the operators to have a mobile phone number for you, so include as a Remark (RMK). If you *did* forget to close your Flight Plan, the French Authorities might just call this number first before triggering SAR Action... It is by no means obligatory, though.

Field 19: Emergency Radio, Survival Equipment & Dinghies The comprehensive equipment available through most clubs will allow you to avoid crossing out many of these items.

GENERAL AVIATION REPORT

UK COUNTY -

AIRCRAFT DETAILS (BLOCK CAPITALS PLEASE) *Data Protection Act 1984 - Information supplied on this form may be held on computer*

Registration:	Type:	Based at:	Crew phone contact in UK:
Owner/Operator (Not Pilot):			

FLIGHT DETAILS

Departure			Arrival		Reason for visit to EU (including UK):- * Delete as necessary (see notes overleaf)	
From:	Via:	To:	From:	To:	Has UK VAT been paid on the aircraft?	Yes / No
Date:	Time:		Date:	Time:	Is the aircraft in free circulation in the EU?	Yes / No

CREW DETAILS

Full Name	Date of Birth	Place	Nationality	Passport Number	Home Address	In	Out

PASSENGER DETAILS

Full Name	Date of Birth	Place	Nationality	Passport Number	Home Address/Address visiting in UK	In	Out

Schedule 7 Terrorism Act 2000. Owners/agents of aircraft employed to carry passengers for reward on a journey between Great Britain & Northern Ireland and/or Eire, Isle of Man or Channel Isles (Common Travel Area) shall not arrange for it to call at a port in Great Britain or Northern Ireland to disembark or embark passengers unless the port is a designated port or the examining Police Officer approves the arrangement. The captain of an aircraft employed on a journey within the Common Travel Area carrying passengers other than for reward shall not permit it to call at or leave a port in Great Britain or Northern Ireland unless it is a designated port or he gives at least 12 hours notice in writing to a constable for the Police area in which the port is situated, (or where the port is in Northern Ireland, to the Police force of Northern Ireland.) GAR-11MAR1004

Crossing the Channel / Irish Sea – Aide Memoire

V4.4 © D J M White, July 2015

The following assumes that aircraft is on a C of A (i.e. **NOT** an LAA Permit) and that all occupants hold EU passports.

Permits: France, Germany, Eire as for CofA aircraft. Else check the LAA website for Leaflet TL 2.08

Personal Documentation:	√	Aircraft Documentation:	√
• Pilot's Licence		• Certificate of Registration	
• Pilot's Medical Certificate		• Certificate of Airworthiness	
• Pilot's Radio Licence		• Aircraft Radio Licence	
• Passport(s)		• Insurance Certificate	
• Health Form E111(s) (Not compulsory)		• Interception Signals List (e.g. CAA Safety Sense Leaflet 11)	

NOTE: Documents should be the originals, but obviously sensible to leave photocopies at home!

Aircraft & Survival Equipment:	√
• Maps & Flight Guides	
• Lifejackets	
• Tie Downs	
• Immersion Suit (Consider)	
• Liferaft (Consider)	
• Aircraft Cover (Consider)	
• Sun Shade (Consider)	

NOTE: A Mode A transponder, or better, is required if flying to/from the Channel Islands

OUTBOUND FROM UK		√
Flight Plan	Min. 1 hour before departure Activate with FIS (London Info) when airborne¹	
Foreign Customs Notification	Submitted – Check Notice Period (Not required for CI / NI / IoM / Eire)	
UK Customs & Immigration Declaration (GAR Form)	Not specifically required if outbound to EU. Min. 24h if non-EU; 12h if Channel Islands	
Special Branch Permission ² (GAR Form)	Min. 12 hours if outbound CI/IoM/NI/ Eire Emergency Helpline: 0845 723 1110	
ON ARRIVAL, CLOSE FLIGHTPLAN	FRANCE: 0810 437 837 ("0810 IFR VFR") UK: 0208 745 3111 / 0208 745 3163	

¹ Or activate by departure airfield / "Responsible Person" Tel. [0208 745 3111](tel:02087453111) / [0208 745 3163](tel:02087453163)

² If required, e.g. If destination is Channel Islands, Isle of Man, Northern Ireland, Eire.

INBOUND TO UK		√
Flight Plan	Min. 1 hour before departure Activate with FIS when airborne³	
Foreign Customs	Cleared (Not required if outbound from CI/NI/IOM/Eire)	
UK Customs & Immigration Notification (GAR Form)	Notify min. 4 hrs prior to arrival from EU ⁴ Min. 24h if non-EU; 12h if Channel Islands Emergency Helpline: +44 845 723 1110	
Special Branch Permission, <i>if reqd.</i> ⁵ (GAR Form)	Min. 12 hours prior to arrival Emergency Helpline: +44 845 723 1110	
ON ARRIVAL, CLOSE FLIGHTPLAN (See NOTE below)	FRANCE: 0810 437 837 ("0810 IFR VFR") UK: 0208 745 3111 / 0208 745 3163	

³ Unless activated by departure airfield or "Responsible Person".

⁴ Unless arriving at "Designated" Customs airfield, when prior notification NOT required. 4 hours also required if returning to Private airfield **from EU. Specific permission needed if non-EU to private airfield.**

⁵ i.e. if departure from Channel Islands, IoM, Eire, Northern Ireland. (Fulfil Immigration Reqmt.)

NOTE: Flight plan closure **on returning to UK** is NOT compulsory. Search & Rescue will only be called out if "responsible person" alerts emergency services when aircraft is overdue. **THIS IS NOT THE CASE ELSEWHERE**, when failing to close can be **EXPENSIVE!**