

Med, Dead and Red seas in one day

Charles Strasser flies his Seneca II to Israel to stand in three seas between dawn and dusk

I thrive on challenges, so when I learned that the 2010 World Assembly of the International Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association was to be held in Tel Aviv I perceived an opportunity for a trip of a lifetime. The decision was made and planning started. Maps came out to choose a routing with about four hours flying a day, which is also the fuel endurance of my aircraft allowing plenty of reserve in case of strong headwinds or diversions. Friends with local experience advised me to avoid Cyprus for expense and bureaucracy reasons, so I chose the Greek island of Rhodes as the last airport before entering Israeli airspace. The two alternative routes from Jersey are south to the Mediterranean and then east, or east first to Prague then south to Croatia and then east. I love my country of origin, so the Prague alternative won. The route was decided to be Jersey (EGJJ) Siegerland (EDGS) for lunch and fuel, Prague Vodochody (LKVO) night stop, Dubrovnik (LLDU) night stop, Corfu Kerkira (LGKR) for lunch and fuel, Rhodes (LGRP) night stop, then 422 miles over the sea to our destination Tel Aviv (LLSD) and the same in reverse for the return flights.

Obviously whilst in Israel the opportunity to do an inland flight from the Med to the Red Sea in the south was too tempting to miss and needed further investigation. Having chosen the airports and night stops it was now necessary to find out if prior permission for landing was required, what the cost of landing and fuel was, whether handling was compulsory and if so the name of the handling company. I designed a form for this in such a way that it could be used also for their answer, and faxed it to all the airports. Contrary to expectations and the experiences of others, I received a fax reply from all airports. A table of this information forms part of this article. Similarly I designed a form to fax direct to hotels asking for their best B&B "aircrew" prices for the relevant dates, having first Googled comparative hotel websites to choose those fitting our price and location criteria. In this way all the hotels were pre-booked but not prepaid.

I do all my flying on an instrument flight

plan (IFR) basis even in VMC. This is so much simpler when flying and also gives the additional protection of flying in controlled airspace. However it does require pre-planned routings in airways. These must be in a form acceptable to the Eurocontrol ATC computer in Brussels where they are first validated and then filed up to four days before the flight.

The whole of the 5,040 nautical mile journey was planned using a relatively new but very powerful programme www.eurofpl.eu, which for each leg suggests a route, validates it and then stores it until time to file it. Besides that it prints out a plog which shows all the waypoints, headings, fuel requirements etc and also a brief showing weather and Notams,

Top left: Charles with feet in the Mediterranean on the seafront in Tel Aviv

Top centre: Charles and Ian in the Dead Sea – jagged rock salt made keeping one's shoes on a good idea

Top right: mission accomplished – Charles in the Red Sea at Eilat before the day was out

Right: Ian, Charles and Seneca II in Jersey at the start of their flight to Israel

and will shortly also show the charts for airports of departure/arrival and up to two alternates. It can also be used for VFR flight plans. All the filed plans were acknowledged and automatically available at each of the airports on the way. Only one, which was accepted on filing, had to be changed and that was the leg from Eilat to Rhodes, which takes you through Egyptian airspace. Israel ATC insisted on changing it to going north inland to Tel Aviv before turning left to Rhodes.

My trusty Navbox Proplan programme was used to find phone and fax numbers for the airports and produce en-route RNAV, frequency and airport reports.

As you would expect, a special security clearance to enter Israeli airspace had to be applied for. This is done through ASOC, their aviation security operation centre and is explained on their website. Some forms had to be sent with a copy of the aircraft's registration certificate. This was the only thing queried by

them, by phone, as the name of the owner on it was not me. After I explained that an American registered aircraft had to be owned by a US citizen or company or Trust and that I was the beneficial owner, they issued the entry procedures and codes. These had to be transmitted to "Tel Aviv Identity" at least 180 miles before entering their airspace, but more of that later.

I heard from an Italian AOPA group that they were told that to fly through Cyprus airspace a special permission was required for non-EU registered aircraft and that they had difficulty getting this. I faxed a request for my Seneca N37US giving all details to the Cyprus Director of Civil Aviation and got my fax back within 24

Pictures by Ian Rosewood



hours stamped "approved". Thus all permissions had been obtained and hotels booked, and the journey could commence.

When I started spreading the word about my trip, my friend, ex-employee and now successful business owner and pilot Ian Rosewell asked if he could join me. He is also the owner of a Seneca, which I had sourced for him in Florida, so he became the First Officer and in true airline fashion, I decided that we would each fly alternate sectors. The trip started from Jersey on June 3rd and I flew the first leg of three hours at FL090 to Siegerland in Germany, situated between Cologne and Frankfurt, so that I could show Ian the procedures for my Seneca. Siegerland

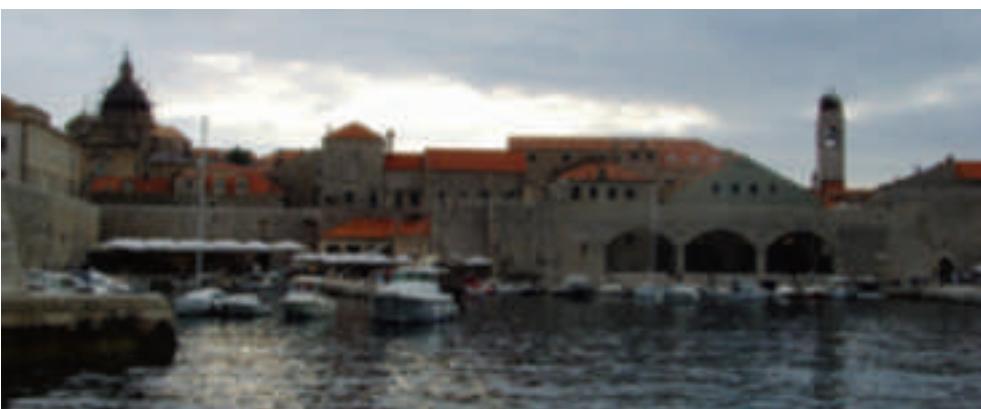


Top: en-route IFR charts purchased from Jeppesen. Note the unique AOPA cap with built-in sunglasses and LED lights.

Left: rainy Dubrovnik – we always refuelled on arrival to avoid delays next day

Below left: awaiting the arrival of the ferry

Below: awaiting dinner at The Nautica with eager anticipation and enjoying the majestic view of Dubrovnik from its outside balcony



(EDGS) is a very GA friendly airport with an ILS and tower but strangely only an information service, so the landing and take-off clearances are given as "at your discretion". As a matter of policy I always refuel on arrival, so we taxied up to the static pumps. They have a unique service. You leave the aircraft and walk to the excellent restaurant serving meals all day and when they've re-fuelled you they tow the aircraft to the parking ramp. After the meal you go to their office and pay the landing fee and fuel charges. Next two-hour sector, again at FL090, to Prague Vodochody. This is an aircraft factory airfield with full radar and ILS facility. They have built two GA buildings, have a parking apron and fuel available and are anxious to build up their GA user base. On both occasions we got lifts to the Hotel Duo. This is a good value for money hotel right by a Metro station from where it is less than 15 minutes to the centre of Prague, in my opinion, the most beautiful city in Europe.

Day 2 was a 501 NM flight to Dubrovnik on the Adriatic coast of Croatia. We had planned for FL100 but asked for FL120 to stay above the clouds.

This was the only landing on the trip, with what we later saw was a temporary condition, necessitating an ILS instrument approach almost to limits. All refuelling on the trip was paid for with a Mastercard credit card except for Israel where cash was required. We stayed at the small friendly Hotel Castelletto in Cavtat, not too far from the airport, and Dean the manager provided a free shuttle service from and to the airport. We spent the afternoon and evening in Dubrovnik where we went by a 20-minute boat ferry from Cavtat. A one-hour guided walking tour of the ancient town prepared us for dinner. This was at the Nautica, a recommended restaurant I had read about in Michael Winner's column in the Sunday Times. Whilst hugely overpriced, the food was excellent and it was worth it for the majestic view from its outside balcony where, without booking, we had the best table for two.

Day 3 night stop was Rhodes, one of the



Above left: Dubrovnik's beautiful harbour

Left: on finals for Kerkira, Corfu

Above: some anvil heads en route to Rhodes



Greek Islands, but because of the distance we made a fuel and lunch stop in Corfu (Kerkira), after a short one and a half hour flight at FL110. It is worth mentioning here that AOPA Greece has done a great job in persuading the Greek government, in order to attract more general aviation tourism, to abolish landing and parking fees for GA aircraft under 3 tonnes at all Greek airports. They also made an agreement with Olympic Airways Handling for AOPA members from any country to be



charged only €15, which includes all services with a dedicated agent. However, beware – only 11 airfields of the many in Greece have 100LL avgas available, making careful route planning advisable.

A three-hour flight took us to Rhodes. This was the only leg of our trip where we encountered bad weather, including isolated CBs. We had planned FL100 but this would have meant being in icing cloud all the time, so we progressively climbed to FL140 and then had to weave around CBs. Many airlines on this frequency also asked ATC to turn left or right "to avoid build-ups", with permission readily given. By the time I descended and approached Rhodes the weather had improved to CAVOK. On Rhodes we stayed at a relatively new but exceptionally well-endowed "K boutique" hotel in Ixea.

Day 4 was the final one to Tel Aviv with a 422 nm sea crossing at FL070. AOPA Israel had obtained special permission for us to land at the SDE DOV, a joint military/civil airport in town. This was also the day for the carefully pre-planned security procedures for entry into Israeli airspace. As arranged I called my contact lady at ASOC as we were behind schedule. I phoned from the taxi on the way to the airport. The first thing she asked was "Charles, where are you phoning from?" When I told her, I was told to phone again just before take off from the airport. When I finally did this, she gave me the 'Tel Aviv Identity' frequency and reminded me again to ensure I called at least 180 miles before Tel Aviv. I tried this without success from 220 miles and when even at 185 miles I got no response, I started to get worried and asked Ian to keep a good look out for a F15 fighter intercept. I did then tell Cyprus control of our problem, to be told that our experience was normal, that he would advise Tel Aviv on the landline and to keep trying. Finally at 162 miles we made radio contact and went through the identification procedure to be told to "stand by" and given entry clearance some four minutes later. We were then asked if we wanted to "cancel IFR", which I declined. However they still wanted a call with "coastline in sight" and when we did this they descended us and asked us to fly south, keeping to the west of the coast until we got to 'The Country Club'. Not being conversant with the area, we declined this too, and they told us that they would tell us when to turn base leg for DOV. In fact I had already got the extended centreline of the landing runway on my GPS and could have intercepted this when first approaching the coastline but obviously for noise abatement reasons they wanted as short a final as possible. After landing, the usual refuelling. It was our lucky day as just the week before, to encourage general aviation tourism, the government had decided to halve the cost of 100LL avgas and it now was cheaper even than in Jersey. AOPA



Top left: we were instructed by Sde Dov radar to "follow the coastline"
Above: at Tel Aviv 100LL avgas was cheaper even than in Jersey
Left: the AOPA Israel welcome poster in the small arrivals room

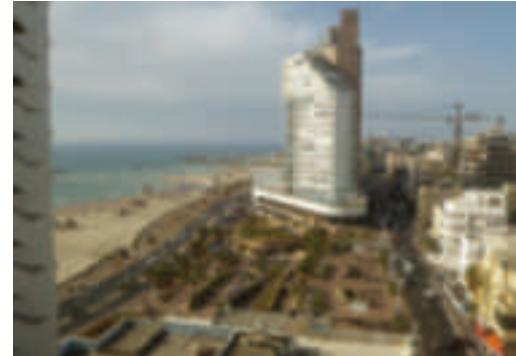


Above: at the IAOPA World Assembly Charles, as always, flying the flag for Jersey CI
Left: Herzliya Airport, Israel's only dedicated GA airport, is under threat from developers

Israel had advised us in advance that they had arranged that payments could be made in Euros, as credit cards were not acceptable. Unfortunately the fuel people had not been informed of this and only after lots of phone calls by the ever present and helpful Moshe Akler of AOPA Israel was the matter resolved.

We were now to stay in Israel for the next five days and were taken to our hotel, The Park Plaza Orchid, on the wonderful Mediterranean beach about 500 metres from the IAOPA World Assembly at the Sheraton Hotel.

At this point I should mention that on the leg from Corfu to Rhodes we lost the starboard alternator. On a single engine aircraft this would be of serious concern but we had another alternator on the port engine. Since no replacement was available on Rhodes, we decided to continue with the trip as planned



Above: Tel Aviv beachfront, as seen from the 12th floor of the Park Plaza Orchid
Below: Jerusalem seen from the Mount of Olives





Above: the Dead Sea, shrinking by one metre a year
Left: the altimeter reads minus 1,200 feet after landing at the world's lowest airport, Masada
Lower left: the terminal building at Masada took the form of a Bedouin tent
Bottom: the airfield at Masada, seen from the top of the Rock
Bottom right: back in Jersey, crabbing home in a crosswind gusting 29 knots

and hopefully get a new alternator during our stay in Israel. Again Moshe came to our rescue and found an engineer and a new alternator which was fitted in time for our departure. I did actually take with me a parcel of spares from my engineers in Jersey, which included plugs, a tyre and tube etc. but no alternator.

Tel Aviv is a lively city and despite all the problems facing Israel, life there and everywhere else we visited, carries on as normal, everyone clearly being aware of extra security. The Convention had a programme of many well-known aviation topic speakers and question and answer sessions from the many international delegates present. AOPA USA President Craig Fuller representing 430,000 US GA pilot members also attended the Assembly and indeed he is also IAOPA President.

AOPA Israel had also organised a day trip to Jerusalem. This included the Christian, Arab and Jewish quarters and many of their significant buildings. We had an outstanding guide, Nadav Kersh (tourisraelwithme@gmail.com), whose historical and biblical knowledge helped us also to understand a lot better the current problems. A visit to the AOPA GA airfield in Herzlia showed that GA is encouraged. Israeli pilots can fly VFR or IFR but foreign pilots are only allowed to fly IFR. For VFR flights an Israeli pilot must accompany them.

Another fascinating trip was the huge factories of IAI (Israeli Aircraft Industry) employing some 16,000 people producing high tech products including civilian private jet aircraft for the USA. We were also shown their assembly line for the many models of drone aircraft for surveillance and reconnaissance use. They have models from no bigger than your outstretched arms to a five and a half tonne one and are working now on producing a pilotless helicopter. All these are sold as "systems" with their controlling equipment and consoles on moveable container-like trailers. We were told they were exported to customers in 37 countries.

Our last day in Israel was an IFR plan internal flight. It started with a quick dip in the Mediterranean, a taxi ride to the airport and a 30-minute flight to Masada (LLMZ). This airstrip, with the Dead Sea on one side and the historical site of the King Herod-built mountain fortress of Masada on the other, is the world's lowest airfield at 1,240 feet below sea level. It is quite eerie to see the altimeter turn anti clockwise below zero. We had a dip in the salt-laden Dead Sea and ascended by cable car to the top of Masada. A quick lunch in a Bedouin-style tent restaurant at the airfield, and a receipt of a certificate that we had landed 1,240 below sea level preceded our take-off for Eilat (LLET). Since I had flown the sector to Masada, we arranged for Ian to do a "touch and go" at Masada before setting off for the 45-minute flight to Eilat. In this way we both had a landing at 1,240 feet below sea level in our logbooks.

The airport in Eilat is the most "town central" airport I have ever flown into in my 55 years of flying. We came in from the north having over flown the Negev desert and as it happens took off from the same runway over the sea with a very tight SID (standard instrument departure) to avoid flying over Jordan airspace next door. Eilat is a very popular international holiday resort with many high-rise and high price international hotels lining the coast and many sea and undersea amenities available. We stayed at the Nova hotel near the airport and enjoyed their swimming pool. The evening after our late afternoon landing we spent at a bazaar style market lining the beach of the Red Sea and finished at a seafood restaurant for dinner during which we had a dip in the Red Sea.

Hence the title of this article – in one day of flying we did a dip in the Med, the Dead and the Red Seas – is this a record?

From Eilat we started our trip home to Jersey in reverse of the incoming flights using the same hotels. We ended our 14 sector leg, 5,800 statute mile trip in sunny Jersey with a 29 knot crosswind landing and a welcome home photo shoot of Piper Seneca II N37US and crew. ■

