

# 'Going foreign' made easy

Everything you need to know about venturing 'sur le Continong' explained by **James Chan and Tony Purton**

Great Britain is a relatively small island! That's what you soon discover as a pilot, especially if you live in the south. And when you realise this you want to break out across the water. From the south coast you can be in France in 10 minutes. The Channel Islands are 50-70nm south west of the Isle of Wight. 50nm off the west coast lie Ireland and the Isle of Man.

Flying your aircraft abroad is no problem. The aircraft doesn't care (or know) where it is, over water or in a foreign country. Most of the obstacles are purely administrative, and once you've cracked the paperwork there's nothing more to it!

This article covers general operational procedures for flight to and from civilian (ie. non-military) aerodromes abroad. It also assumes you fly a UK C-of-A aircraft.

**1. Basic facts** See table 1 below You can fly to/from any aerodrome in the UK to/from an EU country. Typically that country will also have its own customs and immigration procedures so you would land/depart from airports that have a customs and immigration presence. For example if you are planning on flying to a private strip in northern France, flying to Deauville, Le-Touquet or Calais are popular first landing points before continuing to your destination. Similarly if you are planning on flying from this private airstrip in France back to the UK, you must stop at such airports.

If you wish to fly to/from a non-EU country, you must use a UK designated aerodrome that has a customs and immigration presence, or a UK aerodrome that has a Certificate of Agreement where your destination/origin aerodrome is in the list of aerodromes permitted - simply phone the aerodrome operator to obtain that list.

## 2. Charts and Airspace

You'll need an up to date air chart to cover your route.

VFR Charts

The UK CAA/NATS Southern Chart covers the French coast from Calais to Cherbourg but if you go any further you will need to

buy the appropriate chart/s. Study the foreign charts carefully because their markings could be very different from the CAA/NATS charts you are used to. There may also be differences in the maximum altitude of airspace that they cover. We suggest looking at the following publishers:

**France** - 1:500,000 published by IGN, or 1:1,000,000 published by SIA as part of their 'Documents VFR' booklet

**Germany, Belgium, Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Denmark** - 1:500,000 published by DFS

**Finland, Norway, Sweden, Ireland** - 1:500,000 charts published by their national CAAs

**Switzerland** - 1:500,000 published by the Federal Office of Topography

**Other countries in Europe** - Jeppesen IFR Charts

Jeppesen and Aerad publish IFR charts across Europe. Jeppesen also publishes low-level routes on separate charts.

**Airspace**  
Most countries in Europe use the semicircular rule for cruising for both VFR and IFR flights. Be aware of minimum heights above congested areas and VMC minima requirements which may be slightly different than the UK. More details can be found in the AIP or on your chart. Besides the area around Paris, Schiphol, and Madrid, most lower airspace is not Class A. It is therefore possible to obtain VFR clearance to enter controlled airspace subject to traffic.

## ATC and Use of English

British pilots are lucky that while airborne they will not have to speak any of the languages of the countries they visit, unless they are visiting a smaller/private aerodrome where all calls are made in the national language. This will normally be marked on the chart or in the AIP.

ATSOCAS (Basic, Traffic, Deconfliction, Procedural) is specific to the UK and does not exist abroad. Instead, Flight Information Service can provide traffic and deconfliction advice on an as-far-as-practicable basis. FIS may also be provided by Approach Control units enabling you to transit certain pieces

of airspace more easily. Just check your chart for the FIS frequency for the area.

## 3. Aerodromes

You'll need a plate of your destination aerodrome and alternates. You can download the ones you want from the AIP of the country concerned.

You should also contact the aerodrome to confirm opening hours, parking and fuel availability. If your first stop is at a customs/immigration aerodrome, your alternates should be the same, taking note of any PPR requirements here as well. At larger aerodromes with passenger carrying traffic, you may also need to make arrangements with a suitable FBO (such as a based flying club) and obtain confirmation by email or in writing to avoid excessive handling charges from an executive-jet or airline handling agency. Details should be found in the AIP.

If you need fuel, always refuel immediately after landing to avoid delays to your departure. If staying for a known period, try to also pay all fees after landing for the same reason. Credit cards are becoming more widely accepted at most manned aerodromes. Although if you have enough cash with you for a refuel, this could save you a very long walk to a cashpoint in the event the card facility goes down.

Check what is needed to get back airspace. Usually your passport *and* either your pilot's licence or AOPA aircrew card will be sufficient. Sometimes a receipt for your landing fee payment is needed. Larger aerodromes in countries such as Spain will additionally require a paper copy of your Flight Plan which has been stamped/approved by the Tower.

Note that just like the UK, some countries will not publish smaller public-use aerodromes in their AIP. These aerodromes will normally not have customs/immigration facilities. Contact the aerodrome operator/owner or ATC and ask them to email you the plates.

## 4. Flight Plan

Next you will need to file a flight plan to cross any FIR boundary with a foreign country because it gives you 'permission' to enter that country's airspace. It is also advisable to file a flight plan for any flight over water. You will need to file another flight plan for your return to the UK.

The filing of a flight plan is primarily for any interested ATC facility, search and rescue, and national security purposes. It does not constitute formal notification or request to land at any aerodrome or use of its services (e.g. customs, immigration, fuel).

Flight plans will be automatically activated when departing an aerodrome with ATC if they are aware that you on a flight where flight plan filing is mandatory. Similarly when you land at an aerodrome with ATC it will be automatically closed.

If the origination or destination aerodrome does not have ATC, you must activate (after takeoff) or close your flight plan (before landing) in the air using the appropriate FIS

**Table 1. Basic Facts**

	Part of the UK	Part of the EU	Part of the Common Travel Area	Part of the Schengen Area
Great Britain	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Northern Ireland	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Republic of Ireland	No	Yes	Yes	No
Isle of Man	No	No	Yes	No
Channel Islands	No	No	Yes	No



frequency or nearest ATC unit to prevent national security and/or search and rescue operations being initiated. FIS will often not be contactable over radio while your aircraft is on the ground - follow up via telephone if you were unable to reach an appropriate unit in the air.

### 5. Aircraft/Personal Paperwork

In many European countries, the following aircraft documents need to be carried on the flight:

- Airworthiness Certificate
- Airworthiness Review Certificate
- Certificate of Registration
- Aircraft Radio Licence
- Certificate of Release to Service
- Aircraft POH/FM or copy
- Weight and Balance schedule
- Noise certificate
- Aircraft Insurance certificate

As well as the following personal documents:

- Crew licences
- Passports for everyone travelling
- Copy of the procedures and signals for airborne interception (a useful reference is Safety Sense leaflet 11 or UK AIP ENR 1.12)

Note: An NPPL used in France must be supported by an ICAO Class 2 medical certificate. A UK 'Self Certification' medical certificate signed by your GP is not valid outside the UK.

The UK IMC rating is not valid outside the UK. You will need an Instrument Rating to conduct flight under IFR.

### 6. Aircraft Equipment

By law you must consider the survival equipment appropriate to the flight. For flight over cold UK waters this will involve

carrying lifejackets at a minimum, ideally with a liferaft. More information is available from Safety Sense Leaflet 21.

In many European countries, your aircraft must be equipped with an installed Emergency Locator Beacon (ELT), OR you MUST carry a Personal Locator Beacon (PLB) with you.

Also, Mode C transponders are required in many European countries, supplemented by Mode S for operating in and around some busier terminal areas.

The requirements for any particular country can usually be found in Section GEN 1.5 of their AIP. Most UK C-of-A aircraft will have met most, if not all, of such requirements.

### 7. UK/CTA Customs/Immigration Procedures

You may be legally required to complete a GAR form and send it off to the UK NCU (for Customs and Immigration), police or both. The GAR form is downloadable from the UKBA website. Submission instructions are also downloadable, which contain a list of aerodromes that are:

1. Designated for Customs and Immigration
2. Designated TACT-2000 for Police
3. Have a Certificate of Agreement

The notification requirements for the GAR form are shown in table 2, below.

### 8. Foreign Customs/Immigration Procedures

The aerodrome abroad may have advance notification requirements for foreign customs and immigration. At the time of writing popular first destinations such as Le-Touquet and Calais in France require 2-hour advance notification. Check the AIP for a telephone

number or email. Not paying attention to these procedures may put you and your passengers at risk of being detained until someone is available to process your passports.

The good news is that if both departure and destination aerodromes are within the Schengen Area, there would be no more customs & immigration formalities to follow until you leave the Schengen Area again: for instance to return to the UK. Nonetheless, it is advisable to carry your passport and pilot licence with you at all times. Do remember to file a flight plan if you are going to cross an international FIR boundary.

### 9. Weather and Daylight Hours

Weather abroad can be retrieved from the Met Offices provided by each individual country as well as the US NOAA and Jeppesen. Note that the UK, Channel Islands and IoM, Ireland and Portugal are on the same time zone (GMT or BST). Most EU countries are on Central European Time which is always 1 hour ahead of UK time. Eastern European Time (including Finland) is 2 hours ahead of UK time.

### Other Useful Information

#### Fuel Duty Drawback

When you get back, you can apply to HM Revenue & Customs on Form HO60 to recover the UK excise duty on all the fuel in your tanks when you left your last UK departure point.

The completed and signed form together with the necessary fuel receipts should be sent by post to:

HMRC, Mineral Oils Relief Centre, Dobson House, Regent Centre, Newcastle NE3 3PF

*\*The full version of this article appears on the AOPA website [www.aopa.co.uk](http://www.aopa.co.uk), and includes direct links to some of the sources and documents mentioned here. ■*

Origin	England, Scotland,	Northern Ireland	Republic of Ireland	Isle of Man	Channel Islands	Other EU Country	Other Non-EU Country
<b>Destination</b>							
<b>Great Britain</b>	None	Police	NCU + Police	NCU + Police	NCU + Police	NCU	NCU
<b>Northern Ireland</b>	Police	None	NCU + Police	NCU + Police	NCU + Police	NCU	NCU
<b>Republic of Ireland</b>	Police	Police	None	Police	Police		
<b>Isle of Man</b>	NCU + Police	NCU + Police	Police	None	Police		
<b>Channel Islands</b>	NCU + Police	NCU + Police	Police	Police	None		
<b>Other EU Country</b>	No	No				None	
<b>Other Non-EU Country</b>	NCU	NCU					None

**NCU** = Notification required to National Co-ordination Unit (If UK aerodrome is not listed as Designated for Customs and Immigration then the following advance notification periods apply:  
 Inbound from EU countries (including Republic of Ireland) – 4 hours prior to arrival  
 To/From Channel Islands and Isle of Man – 12 hours  
 To/From other non-EU countries – 24 hours  
 To submit the GAR form to the NCU, you may use email: [ncu@hmrc.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:ncu@hmrc.gsi.gov.uk) (put 'GAR', registration and airfield in the subject of the email) or fax: 01708 862521. If the UK aerodrome is listed as Designated you will be able to complete and submit the GAR form at the UKBA/HMRC control point at the aerodrome.

**Police** = Notification is required to the police for both departure and arrival aerodromes. If either aerodrome is not listed as TACT-2000 then 12 hours advance notice is required. You can type in the postcode of the aerodrome and the appropriate police force will be shown on the results page. To submit the GAR form to the Police, you may use fax or email (telephone or visit their website to find their email address for their Special Branch division). If the UK aerodrome is listed as TACT-2000 you will be able to complete and submit the GAR form at the police control point at the aerodrome.

**Note 1:** If anyone onboard the aircraft has a non-EU passport, you will need to consider their visa requirements as well.

**Note 2:** The pilot will receive no acknowledgement of the GAR submission and hence no approval of his stated intentions. If he hears nothing to the contrary he simply continues with his intention knowing that he may be checked either before departure from or on arrival into the UK.