

Crossing the Channel.

Interesting Background information.

The majority of countries in the European Union have signed up to the Shengen agreement which allows free movement of people between their member states (i.e. you can pass from France to Belgium to Germany etc with no requirement to show your passport). For countries not "in Shengen" (i.e. UK, Switzerland, Sweden, non Europe) their people will still have to follow the normal immigration requirements that have historically been in place.

In the 1990's the UK relaxed its border control requirements and allowed pilots to leave and re-enter the UK through any airfield or private airstrip, but you still needed to file a flight plan and complete a GAR form (General Aviation Report) for the immigration service for the return flight.

The French have retained the need to use a Customs airfield when entering the Shengen area from the UK. Many of these airfields require notice of your arrival.

Outbound from UK.

You can depart from any airport, airfield or farm strip. There is no need to inform UK immigration of your departure.

You MUST file a flight plan for your outbound journey. This flight plan can be done directly through the AFPEX flight planning system (if you have registered with NATS and have an AFPEX account) or using one of the flight planning systems like Skydemon. (Note. If you use skydemon you will need the "subscription version", will need to have pre-enter all aircraft / pilot / passenger details prior to filing the flight plan and will need to have flight plan credits on your account, 50p per flight plan).

Once airborne you will need to activate your flight plan. The air traffic controller at the departure airport should do this for you. If you have departed from a farm strip this can be done on the radio using London Information on 124.6 instead.

Time.

All cross boundary and flight times are referenced to UTC (Universal Time Coordinated) and are called called ZULU time (same as British winter time). In the summer the UK and European clocks move forwards one hour for "daylight saving" and the continentals are already one hour ahead. So in summer the UK is one hour ahead of ZULU and France is two hours ahead of ZULU. Example 1 :- UK departure on 2nd Feb at 07:00, you would put a flight plan departure time of 07:00 (ZULU). Example 2 :- UK departure on 1st June at 10:00 local time (British summer time), you put a flight plan departure time of 09:00 (ZULU). Example 3:- If you wish to depart a French airfield on 1st June at 3pm (15:00) French time you will need to subtract two hours to get back to ZULU, so would put 13:00 (ZULU) on you flight plan.

Arriving in Foreign Country.

When planning your foreign trip your first landing into the Shengen area will need to be through an immigration port of entry. Le Touquet has on site immigration so by giving the airfield 4 hours notice you can simply arrive and use their service. You can not land directly into a farm strip in France if you have not first landed at an immigration airfield.

When planning your trip you need to check their AIP to see if they have daily customs or if it needs to be reserved. Some immigration airfields require 4 hours notice in which case e-mail your immigration details (aircraftreg, type, names of all people, dates of birth, place of birth, passport numbers) and your estimated arrival time.

If you arrive at a large airfield the Air traffic controller will automatically close your flight plan, you may have to show your passport as you pass through their customs area but then you will be free to leave the terminal and go to town.

Returning to United Kingdom.

You HAVE to file a flight plan for your return to UK. If you are on a day trip most people file both outbound and return flight plans whilst at home in the morning. This saves having to navigate the facilities whilst in France. (Abbeville and Le Touquet require you to complete an A4 paper form which they fax, but they also have internet facilities which is not difficult to use if nobody is about.)

British immigration require four hours notice of your return to the UK. For a day trip, most people send an e-mail GAR form to UK immigration in the morning stating both their outbound and return times, this complies with the 4 hours notice requirement. Immigration may or may not visit you airport / airstrip depending upon their resource on the day. The normal practice is to provide the best estimated time of your return and hang around the airfield for an hour after your arrival just incase they show (by the time you have unloaded and pack away that's your hour gone so no big deal).

Immigration info required :- Aircraft reg, aircraft type, Pilot and Passengers name, DofB, place of Birth.

Documents that should be carried in the aircraft

- Copy of Certificate of ownership
- Copy of Permit to fly – certificate of validity
- Copy of Permit to fly – conditions of permit
- Copy of Permit to fly – operating limitations
- Copy of flight release certificate
- Copy of aircraft insurance (valid for country of destination).
- Weight and Balance schedule for aircraft.

Aeroplane:-	You are within your weight and balance constraints at all times. Have sufficient fuel for your journey and for diversions.
Pilots documents :-	Pilots licence (valid for country of destination). Valid Medical certificate (suitable for licence held) Passport Copy of Radio licence
Pilot :-	You are in currency.
Other Equipment :-	Emergency locator Beacon required for over water crossing. Life jackets, to be worn during flight. Suitable clothing (multiple layers in case of ditching). Transponder C or S will be most useful but not essential. Money (Euros), flying is not free in France despite the rumours.

Detailed break down of the day :-

Friday afternoon - Kent Strut will Email Abbeville a request for immigration giving details (Aircraft reg, aircraft type, arrival time, pilot and passenger names, DofB, town of birth)

Saturday morning :- - Kent Strut will fax or e-mail your completed GAR form to ncu@hmrc.gsi.gov.uk

- Kent Strut will file your flight plan for outbound
- Kent Strut will file your flight plan for return journey.
- Obtain weather for departure/destination/channel/alternates.
- Collect equipment, goto airfield, load up, depart at time stated on Flight plan.

Activate flight plan - Rochester or with London Information.
Coast out at Folkstone
Report mid channel
Call Lille approach.
Turn at BNE beacon
Call Abbeville on French Unicom frequency of 123.5 expect to hear traffic at other airfields
Join overhead, check wind sock to deduce wind direction and therefore landing direction. All circuits are to the west.
Land on hard surface 02/20 or grass 02/20, exit to west and taxi to hangers.
Ensure you book in with Airport manager and ensure he has closed your flight plan. If the airfield manager has gone to lunch you MUST telephone Bordeaux to close your flight plan on 0033 5 57 92 60 84 or the national number 0033 (0)810 837 437.

Returning to the UK.

Start making preparations before your declared return flight plan time back to the UK (you can be up to 1 hour late on a VFR flight plan without causing a problem). Make blind calls when you taxi out at Abbeville, don't expect any replies but you MUST keep a good lookout for other airfield users i.e. gliders etc.

Depart the airfield, note your departure time in zulu (i.e. subtract 2 hours from French time).

When at height make a call to Lille and ask them to activate your flight plan (as Abbeville will not automatically do this).

Fly to BNE VOR then mid channel. Lille may pass you to London info as soon as you coast out from France.

Stay with London info right across Kent and change to Rochester when appropriate.

Land at Rochester, have a cup of tea while waiting for immigration, if nobody arrives within 30 to 60 minutes then sign out with the tower and continue on your way. We hope it all went well and you enjoyed your first channel crossing.

Scenarios that people have experienced during channel crossings and associated advice.

Flight Plans.

Your local airfield should activate your flight plan (by telephoning the London Centre) upon your departure. If you fly from a farm strip, climb to a suitable altitude for best radio reception and make your request with London Information on 124.6MHz. (Don't forget to log your departure time (in ZULU – subtract an hour in British summer) as they WILL ask for it.

It is usual practice to activate your flight plan soon after take off but you may choose to get to the coast and verify the weather is suitable before activating. Don't forget to give London Information the time you left your departure aerodrome (in ZULU) not the time you arrived at the coast.

Height of crossing. If the weather is good - more height gives more gliding and thinking distance. Good height (5000ft) will often provide a good visual horizon and make following your track easier.

Hazy days can make water crossings more difficult. Having no reference to land, the blue of the sea and sky merge, so keeping the wings level is more difficult and subsequently maintaining track is more difficult too. The haze layer is often worst at around 2000ft. Solution one is to climb above the haze, which often ends abruptly, and the defined top of the haze provide a horizontal reference. Second solution is to descend to 500 to 1000ft where the waves and boats become more defined and

provide a lower horizontal reference instead (but don't forget you lose gliding distance with this solution.)

Foggy days in the Channel. In the spring and autumn there is often fog in the channel early in the day. During these times do not be tempted to catch an early start for your Le Touquet day trip as there may not have been enough time (in the weak sunshine) for the fog to burn off. Usually by midday it has warmed up sufficiently for the fog to either disappear or form into an acceptable cloud layer.

Fog. Occasionally the channel is blanketed by very low level fog but can be clear at both sides. Some people will climb to 5000ft over Dover and "coast out" above the layer (still within sight of land). After 15 minutes they will be mid channel and if they can see land on the other side will happily to continue. If they cant see land on the other side they will return to their UK departure airfield.

Getting caught in bad weather in the channel. If visibility gets really poor do not continue, turn back in good time. On the French side there are no tall obstacles (except wind turbines) around Cap Griz Nez and it would be possible to either a) turn north east and follow the coast to find Calais (not easy to find as 5nm in land) or b) turn south and follow the coast down to Le Touquet (but being a certified aerodrome they may declare IMC conditions and only accept IFR arrivals).

If you are returning to England in bad weather at low level (<500ft) then much caution is required as there are lots of cliffs and aereals to avoid. Often the weather is poor at Dover due to the high cliffs but it may be totally flyable inland. A suggestion is to sight land (in the Folkstone / Dover area), remain over the sea and follow the coast northwards towards Margate. When you reach Deal (extreme east Kent coast) ground elevation reduces to less than 100ft, there are no cliffs or tall aereals and it may be possible to head inland towards Canterbury and improving weather. Alternatively continue flying over the sea with the coast in sight on your left side, pass around Margate (Manston is now closed), follow the North Kent Coast and your bolt hole is Southend Airport (which has customs).

Possible Radio calls and problems.

London information – activate your flight plan – will need your time of departure in ZULU. May ask for an estimated time to the UK coast and a location to coast out. May ask for an estimate to reach mid channel. You will be asked to squawk mode C or S.

Lille Approach. You will need to call Lille approach when mid channel and entering French airspace. Many pilots have difficulty raising Lille on the radio so it may be necessary to reduce the squelch on your radio to get a sufficient reception. If you can not raise Lille then contact Le Touquet and ask to stay with them for the duration of the sea crossing. If you get passed back to Lille and cant get any communications then just carry on anyway.