



Flying Mexico Made Easy

Tips from the Pros

For corporate (Pt 91 and Pt 135/121) aircraft flying into Mexico for the first time (or returning after a difficult previous trip), touchdown at the destination airport doesn't necessarily mean the flight is back on solid ground. Missing or incorrectly filed documents, unanticipated charges and fees, or a misunderstanding of Customs/entry/multiple destination protocol and cabotage can spark or contribute to an interrupted and delayed trip.

And then there is catering. Bad catering can create havoc on the trip and be more damaging to a career than a botched check ride. Assume nothing: a savvy flight attendant might opt to sample the catering (or try it out on the co-pilot) before ordering for the passengers.

Requirements for foreign (US) aircraft operating into and within Mexico are established by the Mexican Government (DGAC) and its US counterpart the FAA, to manage and address legitimate security and safety issues – some generated by transnational and some born of domestic situations. Many of the fees required by Mexico and other countries in the region are what US operators would refer to as user fees- and reasonable, really, in countries with smaller economies with less revenue available for aviation infrastructure. One thing all governments – big and small – have in common: a funny habit of changing (read: raising and creating) fees quietly—sometimes these “pop-up” fees create frustrating trip delays along with unexpected expenses. Staying current on foreign fees can be daunting when done from afar.

Changing and newborn fees often accompany new and modified procedures – especially with international air travel—so it is imperative for US crews that operate within Mexico and Central and South America do so in concert with a qualified partner; a partner well versed in the current and pending protocols of foreign aircraft operation within the region.

Julio Real Ortiz, CEO & General Manager of Real Alfa Flight Aviation Services (RAF), a full service FBO and Ground Handling Agent specializing in Mexico, Central and South America- based at Toluca's Lic. Adolfo Lopez Mateos International Airport (MMTO) warns, “Part 91 crews should ALWAYS carry their Single Landing Authorization, issued to them on the first port of entry. This document should be turned in before departing Mexico.

(Note: Part 135 flights, the equivalent to the PT91 Single Landing Authorization document is on file having been obtained on your behalf by our legal department in Mexico City and is on file in our office at MMTO).

Part 91. Operators should be aware that if they need to swap crews while in Mexico, there is a charge of \$91.00USD per crew member, but this charge can be avoided if the pilot can prove his flight duty working hours are over, or with a letter on company letterhead explaining why the crew swap is required.”

He goes on to say, “When applying for Part 91 Multiple Entry Authorization (valid for one year) we highly recommend including a list of all crew members from your company rated in the aircraft that might cover or relieve crews while the aircraft is in Mexico. This should help avoid extra fees for crew swaps.”

Part 135 operators are able to obtain Single Landing Authorizations' as well and under this permit make multiple

stops within Mexico. However, all planned stops in Mexico must be listed on the application and cannot be changed after the permit is issued so be sure to advise your trip ground handling agent before they submit the application.

The Mexican Government (DGAC) will authorize unscheduled International Air Taxi Operators that transport passengers, the ability to land at more than two Mexican locations without incurring cabotage fees. For such permission, operators should submit their request no less than 72 hours before the flight departure. For last minute or emergency flights, the DGAC will authorize entry into Mexico no later than two hours before flight departure from its origin airport. This is done with the understanding that the operator complies with all DGAC requirements and documents requested shall be carried on board the aircraft (DGAC NOTAM-008SC3-2002).

For short notice trips that occur on weekends or (Mexican) holidays, the airport authority can authorize these requests; with the condition that the operator or legal representative shall submit the formal request on the next working day to obtain the necessary permits.

Operators should always carry current insurance policies that specifically authorize coverage operating in Mexico, airworthiness certificate corresponding to the aircraft, along with licenses and current medical certificates for the crew.

FAR Part 91 operators are prohibited from operating as Commercial Flights (i.e. FAR Part 135).

In addition to field agents/partners at key airports throughout Mexico, Central and South America, RAF maintains a full time staff in Mexico City in offices adjacent to the DGAC for immediate obtaining of solutions of any administrative or operational issues. These are the signature capabilities of a well-developed experienced and connected regional Ground Handler.

Obtaining and carrying necessary permits, documents, tax stamps – with pre-trip arrangements undertaken and managed by a professional ground handling agent – an agency living in the local culture, with well-established airport operations and regulatory contacts, is the best insurance against embarrassing and often expensive glitches.

Trip glitches come in two basic flavors – “real” glitches due to paperwork anomalies (not enough copies, misspelled names, typos, unclear insurance coverage language), mechanical/ weather related interruptions, dropped or missing hotel reservations, etc. And “unreal” glitches—those born of faulty expectations and/ or inexperience with local protocol on the part of passengers and crew. A good Ground Handler can help you define a passenger briefing to set reasonable passenger expectations and keep the trip moving in “familiar” territory.

Every day hundreds and monthly perhaps thousands, of non-scheduled carrier and private US aircraft (Pt. 91/135 and 121)

routinely fly between US and Mexico. “It’s like ringing a bell, said one Pt 91 corporate jet pilot, “if you know what to expect, do your homework and have a savvy Ground Handler.”

Besides reviewing the official requirements of the National Business Aircraft Association (www.nbaa.org) and the Aircrafts Owners and Pilots Association (www.aopa.org) or with your Ground Handling Agent for flight operations in and out of Mexico (keeping in mind that, generally, the longer the duration of permits, the longer the administrative lead time required to obtain the permit), there are some other good sources for “getting street smart” and gaining pre-trip experience. Talking to crews with recent experience is a great source of real world information that you won’t find in the regulations.

We spoke to a crew and their dispatcher regarding a recent trip into Mexico. This crew is part of a major US Corporate flight operation with a fleet ranging from a BBJ to several Gulfstream/ EMB category aircraft and Ground Handling contract with a universally recognized Ground Handler serving global flight operations. Flight plan, fuel arrangements, entry documents, and customs clearance arrangements (CIQ), hotel reservations, etc., were flawlessly in place. But some local (regional) protocols were never briefed by the Ground Handling Company resulting in a ramp side glitch and 90 minute delay.

The Captain reported, “We taxied to the ramp, were marshalled to a parking spot. Customs was waiting and things looked good for a smooth hassle-free arrival – then the unexpected occurred. First, Customs/Immigration off loaded all the baggage, collected passports, loaded everything into a van and drove off. No one from the crew could accompany them and we had no idea how long the baggage would be gone. The language barrier contributed to the confusion on our part.

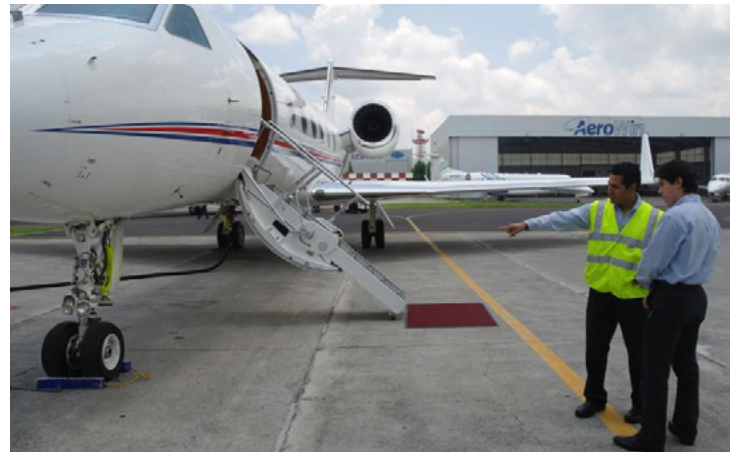
“Next, the customs folks began quarantining the aircraft, taping shut and tamper-proofing the Galley doors and cabinets, including the garbage/trash and perishable food storage compartments. A negotiation ensued to allow us to empty the trash and clean out perishable food. Meanwhile, our passengers headed for the lounge to await the return of their baggage and travel documents. In the end it all worked out BUT it was an unexpected and un-briefed 90 minute arrival delay that felt open-ended and out of control. Next time we will be able to tell the passengers what to expect from Customs, the stores will be ready for quarantine, and the trash tagged and bagged for disposal.”

Departure for that trip held another surprise—the catering was cold and “terrible”-prepared way too far in advance. The flight attendant reported that even the co-pilot, known for an unusually high tolerance for “exotic and well-aged catering” would not eat it.

What can be done to mitigate some of these surprises? The answer is plenty.

For starters, the NBAA National and the AOPA websites (referenced above) have excellent international trip information resources to help crews understand official requirements, obtain forms, and better plan for and arrange flights into Mexico. "PIREPS" from crews with recent experience flying into Mexico are available. These reports are a gold mine of information to help you set reasonable expectations and manage your passengers' expectations. Below are two sample reports, redacted for privacy, that illustrate the type of crew-to-crew feedback available as a member on the NBAA website:

Put some thought into selecting a Ground Handling agency with a business model and reach appropriate to your trip profiles.



Crew-to-crew feedback available as a member on the NBAA website (sample reports)

Date: 02/2015

Region: NAM(I) **Country:** Mexico **City:** Toluca

ICAO: MMT0 **Airport Name:** Lic Adolfo Lopez Mateo Int'l **Aircraft:** DA 900

Feedback: All handling was arranged directly through XXXXXXXX< FBO chain in Mexico. Email worked well for all corresponding including sending all documents. They (FBO) asked for all billing info to pay up front which was new. We were able to negotiate paying after landing, but the manager later told us this would be the new norm when not using XXXX to plan the trip. Used UVAir card for fuel and VISA for the rest. The Mexican Annual landing permit required a new letter, different than those of last year. It wasn't a problem, though. Arrival was the MEX4C with vectors to the ILS DME15 in VMC conditions. Called FBO in the air to have them meet us at customs. Taxi to Customs as usual and they met us with the bags at the FBO afterwards. Our biggest headache was the transport arranged through FBO was late twice picking us up from our hotel, the Westin Santa Fe which was very nice. Departure was smooth with the same taxi to customs as usual. APN3C was the departure.

Date: 02/2015

Region: NAM(I) **Country:** Mexico **City:** Pittsburgh

ICAO: MMTP **Airport Name:** Tapachula, Mexico **Aircraft:** Falcon 900EX

Feedback: Arrived via VOR DME2 to 23; cleared by tower controller. Joined DME ARC from the south; tower requested updates on location and altitude as we descended/ approached. Customs stop from Brazil. Met by armed guards and uniformed officers. We had to remove all luggage from baggage compartment (sniffed on ramp with dogs); bags then transported to terminal for scanning. Dogs then boarded the aircraft and sniffed all areas including baggage compartment. Immigration required forms filled out by all aboard (we were not aware in advance; it would expedite if you can get those in advance). They also required original C of A, registration, Mexican Insurance certificate and pilot's license and medicals. (If you show up with copies of those docs in advance, it will go quicker.) They also asked for 3 copies of GEN DEC form. All passengers and one pilot were required to go in the terminal where all passports and gen dec were reconciled against Mexican E-APIS. There was some initial confusion, we were lucky to have Spanish speaking passengers on board to facilitate. Captain had to verify and sign original ICAO flight plan form with route, altitude and equipment codes. (I had original from Jeppesen to refer to.) Total ground time was 1+10. Clearance and departure SID went quick once the flight plan was approved locally, etc.

For example, if you are operating international flights that span multiple diverse regions of western/eastern Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, you might consider different ground handling companies than if you are traveling into and through Mexico, Central and South America.

While the large Ground Handling Institutions will certainly get the job done, going narrow with a regional Ground Handler can mean going deeper with support personalized to the regional culture – with a home-grown support network tuned to local issues-better able to finesse reasonable solutions to unforeseen glitches in a timely manner.

Below is a general “Checklist” of issues for consideration. This is just a general guide to illustrate the scope of considerations.

Dispatch

- Select and contact Ground Handler
- Discuss requirements and order appropriate permits
- Gather passenger and crew immigration data
- Confirm passports
- Confirm SENEAM bill for prior flights in Mexican air space is paid and up-to-date
- Work with Ground Handler to schedule trip
- Check Special requirements with Ground Handler

Crew

- Passport
- Pilot certificate with an English proficient endorsement
- Medical certificate
- Restricted radiotelephone operators' permit

Passengers

- Each passenger must have a current passport
- Tourist visas are required and may be obtained at the first airport of entry
- Children traveling with only one parent must have a notarized statement of approval from the absent parent stating the dates of the trip

Aircraft

- A standard airworthiness certificate
- A permanent registration certificate (no temporary certificates/pink slips)
- A radio station license
- Operating limitations information
- Weight and balance information
- Transponder with Mode C
- Two-way radio equipment
- If the aircraft is registered in another person's or corporation's name, a notarized letter authorizing use of the aircraft for flights in Mexico



- An ID data plate
- 12-inch registration marks are required for crossing the ADIZ into Mexico
- Aircraft with fuel tanks installed in the baggage or passenger compartments must have Form 337 on board
- Copies of aircraft insurance policy in the aircraft, specifically indicating Mexico coverage
- Present your insurance policy for validation upon arrival in Mexico
- Suggested- US and Mexican Declaration forms

US Customs and Border Protection

- An annual user fee decal (\$27.50) – allow a few weeks for delivery. You can buy decals online. For decal questions, call (317)-298-1245 or send an email to decals@dhs.gov. You can download a paper application from their website
- eAPIS CBP's Electronic Advance Passenger Information System. For your return trip back to the US, plan to land at the first airport of entry after crossing the US border to clear customs

Flight Plan

Use of an ICAO flight plan is currently required if the flight will enter international airspace. While an ICAO flight plan and an FAA flight plan are similar in many ways, there are some important differences. Some items are the same on both forms: aircraft ID or tail number, aircraft type, fuel endurance, and number of people on board. New items on the ICAO flight plan include a Wake Turbulence category, and Type of Flight. The biggest change,

though, is found in the equipment suffixes box, box 10. The ICAO codes used to denote the type of equipment on board the aircraft are different than the codes used by the FAA.

Permits & Authorizations

- FAR Part 91
Landing Authorizations per aircraft for Private Flights
- FAR Part 135
IBP for aircraft or fleet, smaller than 3.5 tons of payload or less than 14 seats
- FAR Part 121/125
IBP for aircraft or fleet, larger than 3.5 tons of payload or more than 14 seats
- Overflight
Authorization per aircraft to fly over Mexican air space
- One-Time Permits
Landing Permits issued per aircraft, for FAR Part 135, 121 and 125, on special circumstances

A good discussion with your Ground Handler will no doubt add new and timely issues and recent or local requirements too new to appear on various trip planning websites.

There is no substitute for reliable “boots on the ground” to keep your next trip to Mexico on solid ground with smooth customs and immigration clearance, good planning and catering, and hassle-free on-time departures.