



Major Differences Between Canadian and U.S. Flight Procedures

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By COPA

1. **VFR "over the top"** flight is permitted under the OTT (Over The Top) visual flight rules, which also requires a separate rating on Canadian pilot certificates if they are not already IFR rated (or have been in the past). U.S. pilots who do not have an instrument rating should not expect to be able to use this. Under VFR-OTT the departure airport must be VFR and the destination airport must be forecast to be good VFR at ETA. VFR-OTT is allowed during daylight only, and during the cruise portion of the flight only. The aircraft must be operated a vertical distance of 1,000 feet from clouds and when between layers, the layers must be separated by 5,000 feet. The flight visibility must be 5 miles at the cruising altitude. The weather at the destination airport needs to be scattered or clear sky conditions and ground visibility of 5 miles or more with no precipitation, fog, thunderstorms, or blowing snow. These conditions need to exist from one hour before ETA to two hours after if using a TAF; and from one hour before ETA to three hours after if using an area forecast (FA). VFR flight in Canada requires continuous visual reference to the ground or water. Flight through clouds to reach VFR is not permitted under VFR-OTT.

2. Only IFR and "controlled VFR" flights are permitted in **Canadian Class B airspace**, similar to U.S. Class B procedures. "Controlled VFR" can be defined as the equivalent to flying VFR under mandatory radar service. Flying controlled VFR will allow you access to more airspace; however, VFR weather conditions must be present.

3. **Cruising altitudes and flight levels** in Canada are identical to those outlined in the Hemispherical Rule in the U.S., except in the Northern Domestic Airspace (see [chart](#)). Magnetic tracks are used in the Southern Domestic Airspace, but true tracks are used in the Northern Domestic Airspace because of erratic compass indications in these areas.

4. **Control Zones (CZ)** have been designated around certain airports to keep IFR aircraft within controlled airspace during approaches and to facilitate the control of VFR and IFR traffic. These Control Zones are either Class C or D airspace. Control zones within which radar control services are provided normally have a 7-mile radius. Others have a 5-mile radius, with the exception of a few which have a 3-mile radius. Control zones are capped at 3,000 feet AGL unless otherwise specified. Military control zones usually have a 10-mile radius and are capped at 6,000 feet AGL. All control zones are depicted on the VFR aeronautical charts and the Enroute Low Altitude Navigation charts. In all Class C control zones and Class D control zones with an operating control tower, an aircraft must be equipped with a working two-way radio and must obtain a clearance from ATC before entering that CZ. The pilot must maintain a listening watch and comply with ATC instructions. If the aircraft is not radio-equipped, the pilot must have prior authorization from the controlling ATC authority. In Class D control zones, with a nonoperating control tower, no prior

For More Details ...



This article was published to accompany Russ Niles' article, "[Northern Hospitality](#)."

More Information

The following information may be useful to pilots traveling in Canada:

1. VFR and IFR flights landing at or taking off from Toronto Lester B. Pearson International Airport require a slot reservation. Details are listed in the Canada Flight Supplement.

2. The VHF emergency frequency is 121.5 MHz.

3. Canadian FSS flight planning, NOTAM, and weather services are similar to those of the U.S. FSS system. When in range, Canadian FSS can be reached VHF on 126.7 MHz. Canadian FSS is available by telephone at 800/INFO-FSS. Availability of privately funded DUATS computers is also referenced in the Canada Flight Supplement. Nav Canada provides weather services [online](#). Click on "Flight Planning." A pilot license is not required to use this service.

4. Telecommunication and

clearance is required, but position reports must be made on the mandatory frequency (MF). Special VFR is permitted in control zones.

5. Procedures for setting the altimeter depend on the region within Canada (see [chart](#)). The Altimeter Setting Region is an airspace of defined dimensions below 18,000 feet ASL (above sea level). The Standard Pressure Region includes all airspace over Canada at or above 18,000 feet ASL and all low-level airspace that is outside the lateral limit of the altimeter setting region. Procedures for each region are as follows:

Altimeter Setting Region

Departure: Altimeter is set to current altimeter setting at the airport or, if not available, to the airport elevation.

En route: Altimeter set to the current altimeter setting of the station nearest along the route of flight or, if stations are separated by more than 150 nm, to the station nearest to the route of flight.

Arrival: When approaching the destination airport, altimeter is set to that airport's current setting, if available.

Standard Pressure Region

General: Procedures are the same as above, except that upon reaching altitude (referred to as flight level in this region) altimeter is set to standard pressure (29.92" Hg or 1013.2 mb). Altimeters should be set to the current setting for the airport of destination before descent to that airport is initiated. When transitioning between regions, altimeter settings are done while in the Standard Pressure Region.

6. **Radio communications** in Canada are similar to those in the U.S. Transport Canada has designated Mandatory Frequencies (MF), Aerodrome Traffic Frequencies (ATF), and Unicom frequencies at most uncontrolled airports throughout Canada. These frequencies are used to broadcast position reports and the pilot's intentions both when on the ground and in the air.

The MF and ATF are comparable to the U.S. Common Traffic Advisory Frequency and Multicom frequencies. MF and ATF have established zones that are usually a 5- to 10-nm radius capped at 3,000 feet above airport elevation. At uncontrolled aerodromes for which a MF or ATF has been designated, certain reports shall be made by all radio-equipped aircraft.

MFs are assigned to airports with an FSS, RCO, or local government equivalent to an FSS, called Community Aerodrome Stations (CARS), on the field. For airports with part-time towers, the assigned MF or ATF is used when the tower is not in operation. The ATF will normally be the frequency of the Unicom where one exists or 123.2 MHz where a Unicom does not exist.

If the aircraft you are flying is not equipped with a radio or the radio is inoperable, you must obtain permission from the controlling facility before conducting operations at that airport or within its airspace. MF and ATF procedures apply equally to IFR and VFR flights. However, IFR flights have additional reporting points during the approach procedures.

Unicom frequencies in Canada are operated by privately owned facilities and function identically to our Unicom services.

While en route in uncontrolled airspace or VFR on an airway pilots should continuously monitor 126.7 MHz. This frequency is used for listening watch and to broadcast position reports, altitude changes, significant weather, NOTAMs, and other intentions. Virtually all FSSs monitor 126.7 in Canada, so it's a good frequency to listen to for weather updates and so as to have someone to call in the event of an aircraft emergency.

Enroute Facilities Service fees are levied for aircraft using certain navigational aids and services while flying over the polar North Atlantic routes. (Reference Canada AIP, FAL 3.0)

5. Significant data not shown on the visual charts may be found in "Chart Updating" in the Canada Flight Supplement.

6. Niagara Falls, Ontario, has special procedures for overflight. Refer to the Canada Flight Supplement and U.S. Northeast Airport/Facility Directory special notices for detailed information.

7. An **emergency locator transmitter (ELT)** is required to be carried in most general aviation aircraft. The same exemptions for carrying an ELT in the U.S. exist in Canada except that training aircraft are limited to a 25-nm radius. ELTs are a very good thing to have on board. Without one your chances of being found in the event of a crash, even in Southern Canada, are greatly reduced. Without an ELT and a flight plan, your chances of being found are almost nil.
8. To permit identification and control of aircraft in the interest of national security, Canada has established **Air Defense Identification Zones (ADIZ)** -- see [chart](#).
9. Pilots are required to file a **VFR flight plan** or flight itinerary for every cross-country flight when more than 25 nm from the departure airport or when operating between Canada and a foreign country.
10. At certain land and water airports, **special requirements and/or procedures** are in effect with which all operators must comply. These requirements/procedures are listed in the Canada Flight Supplement and the Water Aerodrome Supplement. The Toronto Terminal Area is an example of this. In order to operate in this area on an IFR flight plan, the aircraft must be equipped with a 720-channel transceiver.
11. Pilots and passengers flying in unpressurized aircraft between 10,000 and 13,000 feet MSL for more than 30 minutes have **oxygen equipment and usage requirements** (refer to Canadian A.I.P. ANO series II, #9). Pressurized aircraft oxygen requirements are also covered under this order.

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