

## FLYING TO OSHKOSH- TIPS FOR FIRST TIMERS

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Encouraged by reasonable aviation fuel prices and the promise of good en-route weather, I flew to Oshkosh, Wisconsin this July for the annual Airventure celebration. This was my second solo trip back and involved “sleeping under the wing” for the duration of the event. As I compiled the list of items that I’d inevitably forgotten and/or brought too much of, the notion of writing up a tips article came to mind. What follows below are simply some suggestions I wanted to share and is not meant to be a complete how-to guide to Oshkosh.

### PREFLIGHT PLANNING-

-As part of the logistical preparation for this trip, consulting with a flight planning software program was a tremendous aid. I used DUATS.com as well as the AOPA flight planner for determining en-route times and weather. Both planners can incorporate forecast winds aloft with your aircraft’s performance data and yield accurate fuel burns and en-route times.

-For fuel stops, 100ll.com provided information on the cheapest fuel along the way. By planning a stop at Sidney, Montana (\$3.89/gal) instead of nearby Glendive (\$5.15/gal), I saved over \$ 50. !

-Bring a United States map. If bad weather changes your planned route, it’s much easier to visualize alternatives by looking at a US map rather than piecing together 2 or 3 sectionals.

-Airventure publishes a NOTAM for the event that has all of the arrival/departure procedures. Google Earth has aerial photo’s that can help make greater sense of the features one experiences from the air. The arrival can be crowded but is orderly.

-Bring a AAA guidebook for Wisconsin. There are many interesting things to do in and around Oshkosh via shuttle or rental car. As fascinating as Airventure is, a change of scenery can be welcome after awhile.

### ARRIVING-

-Having a portable GPS with moving map will make your arrival much easier. The Notam’d procedures are for the period shortly before the actual event through the end of the event. You may wish to arrive even earlier at which time conventional Class D airspace is in effect.

### PRE-CAMPING PLANNING-

-Aside from your essential needs... tent, sleeping bag, etc... it’s important to remember to bring some creature comforts. A cooler stocked with snacks insures that you’re not reliant on the site vendors being open for food, especially if you arrive early. Bring an extra camp chair to accommodate the occasional visitor. A thicker air mattress ensures a good night sleep! That said, many pilots simply took a cab to WalMart or the shuttle to Target and

purchased all of their camping needs off the shelf. At the end of their stay, they donate the items to the local scouts or thrift store.

-The Airventure folks publish a “survivors guide” that reminds one to bring a big hat, sunscreen, sunglasses, raingear, etc. as well as other suggestions. It’s available online at their web site. [http://airventure.org/planning/survival\\_guide.html](http://airventure.org/planning/survival_guide.html)

#### CAMPING OPTIONS-

-Most general aviation aircraft camp at what is referred to as the North 40. It is convenient to hot showers and nearby off-site restaurants and is connected by shuttles to other parts of the site. It is somewhat distant from the actual showplace event so many bring bikes or, if an early arrival, buy a cheap one from the nearby Salvation Army.

-If you have an aircraft manufactured prior to 1968, you may camp in the Vintage area. Not as close to the nearby stores and restaurants but there are some shaded areas for tents. One downside is that they don’t allow bicycles in the vintage area so I had to leave mine outside the fence.

#### EVENT/ AIR SHOW STRATEGIES-

-Many veterans of Airventure point out that it always rains at least a day or two during the event. Choose one of those days or an exceptionally hot day to visit the indoor air-conditioned EAA museum.

-Airventure.org provides a complete listing of lectures, seminars, symposiums, etc in the weeks preceding the show. You can print out a list of selected events that you’ve chosen which you can keep handy while walking the grounds.

-The plane adjacent to mine was a veteran of many Oshkosh camp-outs. The pilot purchased foam swimming pool “noodles” from WalMart and affixed them to the trailing edge of the wings of his Cessna. He pointed out that even though you think you’re familiar with your plane, all it takes is one careless nocturnal collision between your head and ailerons to ruin your trip!

-A visit to the Seaplane base takes one away from the crowded grounds to a serene cove setting filled with float planes. Although essentially just a static display, there are several booths representing related organizations. A free ride on one of two pontoon boats takes you past the assorted moored aircraft.

-Most of Airventure is now covered by Wi-Fi internet coverage, if your computer has those capabilities. There are also several internet cafe’s that will allow you to go on-line to check your email, etc.

-One of the shuttles conveyed people to the nearest supermarket. On site vendors tended to favor deep fried foods and bratwurst/ hot dogs. The grocery store had deli sandwiches,

fruit, and an incredible salad bar. It was not uncommon to see pilots returning to Airventure with several bags of fresh provisions for their planeside meals!

-Bring along small cards that have your contact information. You will have made friends with folks you'd like to have visit you in the future and they'll appreciate the gesture of good will.

#### DEPARTING-

-Of all of the aircraft related operations one must prepare for, departing Oshkosh is the least stressful. Following a weather/ departure briefing, you listen to ATIS and then taxi to the departure end of the active runway. In rapid succession you are cleared for departure and then maneuver your way out of Class D airspace at specific altitudes and headings. It's interesting to note that they are accommodating voluminous incoming traffic simultaneously on other runways.

-So, you've experienced Oshkosh and are now headed home. You've paid for the fuel to get there so why not take your time getting home. There are many resort areas in Wisconsin and Minnesota that are worth stopping at. I was fortunate enough to visit in-laws near Decorah, Iowa that showed me how beautiful the mid-west corn country can be. Two of my fellow EAA'ers, Chapter 102 president David Schmeckle and A& P extraordinaire Bob Colby, left Oshkosh and went off to Colorado and Wyoming respectively before heading back to Montana.

#### CLOSING THOUGHT-

-If I were to distill the Oshkosh experience down to one thing it would be the atmosphere of camaraderie and kinship with fellow aviation enthusiasts. Most people are smiling, happy, and eager to share in this celebration with other like minded people. There's a familiarity with the crowd that makes one feel like a member of a large, really large, family. It felt great!