

Flying in France - What Do I Really Need To Know?

Not a great deal. A summary (compiled by the 'Flyer' magazine email list) would be:

- 1) Ensure that you have an up-to-date list of the danger-areas and the frequencies on which their status can be checked. Whilst most close at weekends, it is not a totally safe assumption to make.
- 2) Fly high, rather than low given a choice. Most VFR traffic seems to hug the 1500-3000 foot mark in France, and there is much less danger of hitting anybody if you make the effort to go that little bit higher.
- 3) Obey semi+500 rule of cruising, and set 1013 above 3000 feet unless flying in the vicinity of tiered controlled airspace such as the Paris TMA.
- 4) Assume that every small field you overfly will have parachuting and gliding activity, This is a pessimistic assumption, but in the absence of a formal ATZ, and with many fields being uncontrolled, it is a reasonable level of caution.
- 5) The major FIS frequencies are useful only for picking up Met and gleaning intelligence about para activity and similar. Don't even bother giving them PACER style calls.
- 6) Local FIS frequencies (Seine Info, Deauville and similar) are much better, and radar equipped. Whilst they will give a squawk, and pass general traffic information, this is a flight following service, rather than any kind of "Radar Information Service". There is no form of RIS or RAS available to VFR flights in France.
- 7) There is no IFR flight in France without an IR (irrespective of met. conditions), but there is Night VFR for the purposes of flying at night without an IR.
- 8) Learn to make circuit calls in French, since many small fields will operate a French-only UNICOM style system. (When not listed, the usual Unicom frequency for small non-towered fields is 123.50)
- 9) Ensure that when using small French strips, you check to determine that they are not of "Restricted Use". Many small fields are not available to non-based aircraft. Bottlang or Delage are reliable sources of this information.
- 10) There have been some very significant changes to French controlled airspace over the last 12 months (This written August '02). Key changes have occurred in the Paris Region, as well as around Lyon. Make sure that your charts are *very* current. "Just recent" might embarrass you.
- 11) Carry all documents with you in the aircraft. It is probable that the aircraft and pilot will undergo an inspection at some point during a tour of any duration. Make sure that stamps are up to date, and insurance certificates and other necessities are all available and up-to-date.
12. Before departing, check:
 - changes in your Jeppesen charts or Bottlang plates on:
<http://www.jeppesen.com/wlcs/index.jsp?section=resources&content=vfr-gps.jsp>
 - French AIPs:
http://www.sia.dgac.fr/asp/frameset_uk.asp?m=1
 - NOTAMs & Weather:

- <http://ippc.nais.lufffartsverket.no/ippc/AisAerodrome1.html>
(Official Norwegian website: includes weather)
- <http://www.phd.nl/aviation/wx/>
(Dutch website; you can even check airfield information)
- French Airfields: <http://www.nav2000.com/pf/>
(Where you can access data, photos, wx, NOTAMs, clubs, etc of most French airfields)

13. Airspace Question & Answer:

Q. What is the status of R airspace? Most of France seems to have it at some level.

A. French 'R's are probably similar to UK Military Danger Areas, with the addition that the French Low Flying system consists of routes also designated 'R' (these are the ones that cover most of the country)

Q. Can one penetrate it and hope, or are there rules to be followed?

A. Don't go in unless cleared by the relevant authority.

Q. Is there a source of activation of these areas on the web? How can you tell if they are permanent, have operation hours or are activated by NOTAM?

A. Buy Beg or Steal a Bottlang. They're all in the front of that, along with hours of activation and frequencies of control agencies. Most of them are only Mon-Fri 0800-1700 but obviously it pays to check. Unfortunately if they're not at <http://www.sia.dgac.fr> then they're not in the web.

In France, you've got :

P : means : "prohibited", or more precisely "don't go!". In France they are absolutely prohibited, no derogation.

D : means dangerous. more exactly : "go under your own responsibility". Often natural hazard, just look out.

R : means réglementé (regulated)... and this is the most complicated one!

Rules are very different from one to another, activation periods too.

You find all informations on the "Complément aux cartes aéronautiques", edited by the French SIA (aeronautical information service), which is sold to French pilots... That's not useful information for you, foreigners!

But if you want to buy this little book (partially translated in English):

Service de l'information aéronautique
8 avenue Roland Garros
BP245
F-33698 Mérignac cedex
France

In fact, some of these areas are activated H24, some SR-SS, some only by night, some have hours, some don't, some are very few activated (or nearly never). Some are really dangerous to cross when activated (low altitude high speed fighter training, firing, combat training, military

parachuting...) and some are less dangerous (protected area for birds or fauna, area around the president's holiday house :-), industries....).

The best is to get this little book, but the easiest is to contact the information frequency and ask for your Romeo area's activity. Sometimes a RAI frequency exists : that's a frequency on which, if you activate an automatic answering machine, it provides you information about the Romeo area's activity.

When activated, some are forbidden to cross for VFR flights, some others require penetrating conditions...

A free and regularly updated source of Special Use Airspace Data (For all of Europe, and beyond) can be found at:

http://164.214.2.62/dafif/dafif_0209_ed6/PLAN/AP2A.PDF

Similarly, frequencies for the controlling authorities can be found at:

http://164.214.2.62/dafif/dafif_0209_ed6/PLAN/ENAME_SUP.PDF