

Pre-Flight Preparation

Whether you're an experienced flyer or this is your first time in a small aircraft, please read through these tips to prepare you to get the most out of a flight with a SouthWings Volunteer Pilot.

Safety First

1. **Meet the pilot** at the airport's small aircraft terminal AKA the **'Fixed Base Operator' (FBO)**. FBOs often offer a lobby, WiFi, restrooms, snacks and conference space. Please arrive early enough to use the restroom and ask the pilot any questions before the flight. Security and safety regulations govern who may access the aircraft movement area (the ramp). The ramp may be busy with private, propeller-driven and light jet aircraft traffic. Your pilot must escort you to his/her aircraft and back into the FBO post flight. **Do not walk onto the ramp without your pilot.**
2. **Listen to the pilot.** Many small aircraft have intercom systems. The pilot and passengers wear headsets to facilitate inflight communication and protect hearing. Your pilot will instruct you in the use of the headset.
3. **Avoid talking to your pilot during certain phases of the flight.** Your pilot will be focused on safety for the entirety of the flight, however takeoffs and landings are especially critical so please don't ask the pilot questions at these times.
4. **Be aware that your pilot may need to communicate with Air Traffic Control (ATC).** At times the pilot may need to divide his/her attention between the conversation occurring inside the aircraft while simultaneously receiving and acknowledging ATC instructions. This is a common occurrence. Pilots manage these competing communications differently. Expect your pilot to explain their own way of handling ATC chatter. Ask before the flight if you're unsure.
5. **The pilot is the ultimate authority.** The pilot monitors weather and other safety considerations to decide if a flight can be safely conducted.
6. **Talk to the pilot.** Tell the pilot immediately if anything about the flight is making you uncomfortable. It happens and pilots know how to take care of uneasy passengers.
7. **Keep lines of communication open about health concerns and regulations.** Talk to the pilot beforehand about masks, exposure to illness, any potential medical issues you may face, etc. The time to make sure that you can respect each other's boundaries is during the flight planning process.

Technical and Photography Tips

8. **If you are the planner for this flight, know your waypoints and landmarks.** For flight planners: be sure to discuss the flight route with your pilot and give them coordinates and a general description for the areas you would like to fly over. Your pilot may not be familiar with the area and will be focused on flying and safety.
9. **Plan out your photography needs.** Aerial photography can be very different than on the ground. Only a few of our volunteer pilots' planes have camera windows. Be aware that there could be scratches, fog, or reflections when taking photos through a window. A polarizing filter may help with

atmospheric haze. Wearing dark colors may help minimize window reflection issues. If you're new to aerial photography, check out our [aerial photography tutorial](#).

10. **Geotagging images can be a useful tool to remember where you shot your photos.** Methods for tagging locations to your photos vary across devices, so test your system in advance and be sure that batteries are charged. Keep in mind that cell signals at altitude are often weak, so GPS features on mobile devices may be unreliable. If you're new to geotagging, check out our [geotagging tutorial](#).
11. **Don't scratch the windows!** Most photographers know that the best way to avoid glare when shooting through glass is to bring your lens as close to the glass as possible. However, aircraft vibrate while in the air, and the hard plastic of your lens vibrating on the glass will scratch the volunteer pilot's windows causing hundreds of dollars' worth of damage. Please avoid bumping or resting your lens against the aircraft window at all times. Bring a soft or rubberized bumper if needed. Bring the proper filters to avoid glare, and plan to stabilize the camera using your body, not the window.
12. **Please be sure to credit SouthWings in any photos that are published.**

For Your Comfort

13. **Dress appropriately for the season.** Temperatures drop as the aircraft gains altitude. You may want a light sweater on all but the hottest summer days. Dress in layers during cold weather. Most small airplanes have a heater like a car. Please avoid bulky coats, scarves, loose fabrics, or anything else that could get in the way of the pilot or other passengers in windy (Yes, windy! The window may be briefly opened for photography even in winter!), cramped spaces. Sunglasses are recommended as well.
14. **Use the restroom before each flight.** There are no restrooms in our volunteer pilots' aircraft.
15. **Avoid consuming a large meal prior to flight.** People may be more prone to air sickness if they have eaten a heavy meal.
16. **If you are prone to motion sickness... small aircraft travel may not be your cup of tea.** Let your pilot know before the flight. And, if you feel ill during the flight, be sure to let your pilot know as they can often make adjustments to help you feel better.
17. **If you become airsick... TELL THE PILOT AS SOON AS YOU BEGIN TO FEEL ILL.**
 - Have the airplane vents turned towards you for better air circulation.
 - Look at the horizon, not at points nearby or directly below.
 - If you are taking photos or shooting video, take breaks from looking through the viewfinder.
18. **Be prepared to feel an occasional bump.** Air is fluid like water. Just as a boat ride feels slightly bumpy passing through small, choppy waves, so does an aircraft ride moving through slightly choppy air. This is completely normal.
19. **Enjoy the experience!** We hope that you have an enjoyable flight with one of our experienced, dedicated volunteer pilots. We hope to inspire each passenger to further raise awareness about protecting our vital ecosystems and to enjoy one of the many great ways aviation can benefit our communities.

Post-Flight

20. **Thank your pilot!** All of our pilots are volunteers who donate their time, resources and expertise for these flights, so please thank them every chance you get.
21. **Let us know how your experience was.** Look out for a follow up phone call, email or post-flight evaluation form from your Program Manager. Your feedback is extremely important to a small organization like ours!

22. **Please be sure to credit SouthWings in any photos that are published.** IF YOU ARE POSTING PHOTOS OF THE AIRPLANE, PLEASE ENSURE THAT THE TAIL NUMBER IS NOT VISIBLE.
23. **Send us links to any photos, articles, films, social media, etc.** that result from your flight experience. We look forward to hearing how your flight benefited your cause or campaign and we will be glad to share it among our network as well!

SouthWings arranges charitable conservation flights conducted by volunteer pilots operating under Federal Regulations Part 91 which apply to private, general aviation activities. Charitable conservation flights are not conducted under the same standard as commercial flights operating under Federal Regulations Part 121 or Part 135.