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General aviation in Israel

Yaron Efrat, chairman, AOPA-Israel



Yaron Efrat, AOPA-Israel chairman

Today there are more than 6,000 licensed pilots in Israel with about 1,500 of them holding a private pilot license. Out of 700 registered civilian aircraft some 600 belong to general aviation or the light sport category. AOPA-Israel has 600 members and about 300 more in the Light Sport Aircraft Association.

AOPA-Israel is a nonprofit organization founded in 1977. Its official name is the "Israeli Association of General Aviation" (IAGA). Today it is the largest public aviation organization in Israel. The association is an active member of IAOPA (International Council of Aircraft Owner and Pilot Associations) and FAI (Fédération Aéronautique Internationale). All officers and committee members of AOPA-Israel act on a purely voluntary basis. The association maintains an office at the Hertzelia airport (LLHZ).

The association is active in promoting general aviation in Israel. One of the organization's key objectives is the effort to maintain GA pilots' rights to fly freely. In addition, the association is active in a number of issues:

- Safety. Organizing safety seminars, flight safety during air sport competition events, circulating safety newsletters, and other safety oriented activities
- Social flying events. Organizing social events and managing family fly-ins, professional

lectures, member benefits, and more.

- Aviation sports. Promoting aero sports activities, manage and organize rally navigation competitions, spot landing competitions, participation in the international air rally, training, and more.
- Community activity. The association contributes to the community by helping the police air patrol, environment air watch, handicap and disabled children flights, and teaching aviation-related subjects to unprivileged children are among a few of the activities the association sponsors.

Major issues

In 2009 the AOPA-Israel agenda included the following issue: Reducing the cost of flying in order to promote general aviation—it must be accessible and affordable. We would like as many people flying as many hours possible. Our philosophy is simple: the more a pilot flies the safer he becomes. In order to encourage private pilots to fly more, flying costs must be reduced.

The International Council of Aircraft Owner and Pilot Associations represents the interests of more than 470,000 pilots and aircraft owners in 68 countries. Formed in 1962, IAOPA is dedicated to promoting the peaceful uses of general aviation and aerial work worldwide.

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During 2009 we have focused on lowering fuel prices and landing and parking fees. We argued that reducing those costs will directly increase flying safety. Our campaign with the Israeli civil aviation authorities (ICAA) resulted in: approved use of mogas in some aircraft; the ICAA became active in the attempt to reduce the price of 100LL fuel versus what the government energy agency wanted; ICAA has looked favorably at our claim to reduce the government's general aviation fees.

Freedom to fly in Israel airspace is fully controlled—no VFR flights allowed, so in Israel we fly controlled VFR (CVFR). A flight plan must be filed for each flight no matter how short. The Air Force fully controls all air traffic over the country except IFR routes into and out of Ben-Gurion International Airport (LLBG) and Eilat International (LLET). Flying from one airport to another is allowed only along prescribed 2-km-wide air routes; any flight outside those air routes is considered a special flight and requires a special clearance 48 hours in advance.

We were struggling to have a bit more freedom during the weekends and holidays. Our goal is to be able to fly freely on the weekends and holidays, without any restrictions. We started negotiations with our authorities. Initial discussions with the ICAA resulted in eliminating the 48-hour advanced clearance requirement for cross-country flights outside the prescribed air routes during weekends and holidays. Today, only 30-minute advanced notice via flight plan is required for special cross-country flights during weekends and holidays.

A further freedom to fly example: the Air Force Chief Rabbi summarily declared that there should be no more civilian flights during Shabbat and Jewish holidays. This decree would have severely restricted Israeli general aviation so we were forced to petition our Supreme Court to cancel this directive. As a result the authorities withdrew the directive but the case will be fully adjudicated this year.

- New air law. The ICAA has been drafting a new air law for some years—its provisions would prove crippling for general aviation. We have submitted dozens of comments regarding the proposed laws, with little effect. However, we still hope to amend some of these proposals before they are approved by the Israeli parliament, the Knesset.
- Promoting women pilots. The government has instituted a special budget to promote women's activities, some of it is proposed for sport. As IAGA is also considered an aviation sport association, we were successful in receiving a nice share of the promotion budget. We used this to create a project to qualify women pilots as an aviation sport pilots.
- International cooperation. Aviation is all about connecting people. We love to fly out to other countries, meet other aviation people, and talk to pilots engaged in general aviation. One of our key goals is to host fly-ins and to become a general aviation destination for pilots from around the world. We strive to become an integral part of the world aviation community. We have participated in several previous IAOPA world assemblies, and we wanted to organize and host one.

We are fortunate that Tel Aviv is a wonderfully exciting city and June is just about the best time to visit it. Therefore, the next 25th IAOPA World Assembly will be held at the Sheraton Tel Aviv, on the magnificent Tel Aviv beachfront, between 6 and 11 June, 2010. You are all cordially invited.

Joining us at the assembly will also enable you to explore Israel, the Holy Land, the birthplace of the three great monotheistic religions, and a blend of ancient history and the heart of a young entrepreneurial society. Tel Aviv is only a one-hour drive from Jerusalem and not more than a three-hour drive to the lowest place on earth—the Dead Sea. This, the Sea of Galilee, and numerous interesting historical and religious sites are all relatively close at hand. We look forward to a great assembly and to welcoming you and your colleagues to Tel Aviv.

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