

FLYING IN AND OUT OF GREAT BARRIER



Photo courtesy of B. Shepherd.

Great Barrier is one of the more popular destinations to fly to in the Hauraki Gulf but as a busy commercial aerodrome pilots need to be aware of the island's unique features.

“In the summer we are doing one flight every hour in and out of Auckland Airport to Great Barrier. As well as passengers, we take most of the freight and all the mail,” says Matt Cameron from Barrier Air.

Matt's the company's operations manager and chief pilot and says Great Barrier aerodrome gets extremely busy over summer with a lot of private pilots coming and going, on top of the usual commercial operators.

Matt says being aware of the circuit pattern is essential given the amount of commercial traffic coming in and out.

“Ninety percent of the pilots are pretty good and we don't have too many issues. As long as you've read the AIPNZ Vol 4 plates, you understand the circuit direction and you're making the radio calls on the correct frequency – on 124.4 MHz.”

North Shore Aero Club Chief Flying Instructor Daryl Gillett has been flying in and out of Great Barrier for the last 18 years.

His biggest observation is a lot of pilots don't comply with standard procedures.

“One of the issues that I've seen over the years at Great Barrier and other aerodromes is pilots joining in any circuit direction. I've even seen stand-offs out there where there's an aircraft on final for both Runway 28 and Runway 24. It's a 'who's going to give way to who' situation. If everyone was to use standard procedures and be courteous then it would all work out quite nicely.

“It appears some people have the attitude 'I'll just do it my way' or 'we've always done it that way'.

“Compared with an aerodrome like North Shore, there’s fewer people out there, fewer people watching, so it’s really incumbent on pilots to regulate themselves.”

Weather

Daryl says weather can be an issue at Great Barrier.

“It gets pretty turbulent on the eastern side of the island in westerly conditions. And if you’re using Runway 28 in a westerly, you’re taking off into the terrain and into the downdrafts. It could be necessary to drift right after take-off onto the upwind side of the valley, while climbing, and fly a figure eight pattern back into the downwind position.”

He says it’s similar to operating in any mountainous environment.

“You can get quite a lot of low cloud backed up on the western or eastern side. Often the cloud will sort of sit on the tops of the highest points of the terrain.”

Dan Power is the flight ops manager at Sunair. He’s been to Great Barrier more than 500 times over the past 25 years.

Dan says prevailing winds and turbulence around the airfield are a consideration.

“Great Barrier typically has wind speed of about 10 knots higher than at the west end of the Hauraki Gulf, say around Ardmore. The prevailing wind there is a southwesterly through westerly at the airfields on the east side of the island. So, within the vicinity of the airfield you can frequently get bad turbulence.”

Terrain

Daryl Gillett says there are very few options in the event of an engine failure, “It’s pretty hilly out there. There’s not much open ground – it’s all pretty much bush. The western side of the island is basically all rock.”

Dan Power says multi-engine operators need to consider the risks around using Runway 28 with respect to engine out performance after take-off.

“Because their ability to avoid terrain with one engine is quite compromised by the fact they’re taking off into a valley. And we as a multi-engine operator would prefer to take Runway 10 with a slight tail wind, rather than face the terrain of 28.”

Matt Cameron says the mountainous terrain can contribute to the wind.

“Given it’s an aerodrome right by the beach, on certain windy days you get a lot of wind shear up and down so a little bit of mountain flying technique comes into play.”

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Mixed use

The North Shore Aero Club does quite a few training runs out to Great Barrier, using both IFR and VFR operations.

The IFR approach into Great Barrier includes a cloud break procedure so IFR traffic comes in and out regularly.

CFI Daryl Gillett says VFR pilots just need to be aware of where the instrument approach is coming from.

“It’s basically directly from the east. The missed approach point is 2.7 NM from the aerodrome. So usually aircraft that are training or doing instrument approaches, don’t really conflict with circuit traffic. But be aware of the typical radio calls you might expect if there’s an aeroplane on the instrument approach.”

Dan Power says there’s an increasing amount of IFR traffic going in and out of there from Auckland.

“Therefore it’s important that separation can be maintained, that they comply with VFR Met minima. To have VFR traffic flying close to cloud or in poor visibility is a hazard for inbound IFR traffic.”

Barrier Air flies Caravans to Great Barrier and Matt says they come in and out at a similar speed as the Piper Aztecs flown by Sunair “but they will arrive a bit quicker”.

It’s worth noting that simultaneous operations on the seal and parallel grass are prohibited. So you can’t be backtracking while someone’s landing; you have to be clear of the whole runway.

Pilots need to be familiar with their standardisation of overhead joins and the correct radio calls.

Using the official visual reporting points will also avoid confusion for pilots unfamiliar with the area.

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