

Fun Statistics About U.S. Airports



All Dressed Up and No Place to Go: Fun Statistics About U.S. Airports

By Mike Jones

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I've owned my Cessna T210 for over twenty years, putting close to 2,000 hours on my baby. I've replaced all the avionics and added more digital capabilities than Cessna ever conceived in 1979. She's got a new engine, a new turbocharger, new leather seats, and a snappy red-and-white new paint job. I've flown 700 Young Eagle flights and more AngelFlight journeys than I can recall. There is nothing I enjoy more than slipping into that comfy left seat and blasting full-throttle to a new destination.

Ah, there's the problem. Since the arrival of COVID, the reasons for flying have dissipated as quickly as light fog on a breezy morning. Most weekends I sit at my hangar and try to think of a plausible excuse to turn \$200 of avgas into something useful. My mostly-sainted wife looks askance at those fuel bills and asks, What was the point? It turns out, short of flopping into Oshkosh or Sun-n-Fun and the like, I don't have many places to go right now.

But there are more places to go than ever. According to the FAA, there are 20,002 airports in the United States equipped with 23,852 runways of different types. Texas has the most airports with 2,080 while sunny Florida comes in second with 910 destinations. Rhode Island has the fewest with just 22 aerodromes; not bad for the smallest state. Interestingly, cramped Washington

DC has sixteen airports of one sort or another — where do they put them all? To my eyes, it was somewhat alarming to discover in an official FAA database that 146 airfields are located in “Blank” which is either the newest state in our sturdy republic or someplace in the middle of Area 51. Try finding it on Foreflight.

But that 20,002 figure is somewhat misleading, and Table 1 shows why. It includes military airports where you and I are usually not very welcome as well as island airports none of us will ever visit (unless you’re a “rounder” Guam and Midway are pretty far off our normal routes). It includes fire-fighting facilities, hospital landing pads, balloonports and other niche facilities — special for sure and charming in their own way, but not really the stuff Cessna drivers can call home. When you cut through the fluff, in the U.S. there are 13,028 airports more or less suitable for our Cessna babies.

Table 1: Aeronautical Facilities in the US

Type of Aeronautical Facility	Quantity
AIRPORT	13,247
BALLOONPORT	13
GLIDERPORT	36
HELIPORT	6,059
SEAPLANE BASE	534
ULTRALIGHT	113
Grand Total	20,002

Table 2 takes a closer look at those airports. As we all remember, many airports are charted as “PVT.” Private airports may be available to the general public — the 7,000 foot grass runway at SC00 in South Carolina

is privately-owned but visited by hundreds of planes during the famous Triple Tree Fly-In — but most are not. Some of those airports are owned by celebrities who value their privacy. Some are resort airports and restricted to their deep-pocketed customers, some owners simply don’t want the liability of nosy visitors. Here’s an odd reversal: some publicly-owned airports are not available to the public. This includes most military airports and the enormous Space Shuttle Landing Facility at the Kennedy Space Center, for all the obvious reasons.

Table 2: Airports and Their Availability to the Flying Public

Types of Airports	# of Each	%
Privately-Owned	8,847	68%
Private, No Public Access	8,022	62%
Public Use Permitted	825	6%
Public-Owned	4,181	32%
Private, No Public Access	108	1%
Public Use Permitted	4,073	31%
Total, All Airports	13,028	

(Note: There are an additional 21 military airports open to the public.)

Pop quiz: how many types of runways are there?

While the digital elves at the FAA also record the surfaces of the runways, as shown in Table 3. The FAA claims 151 different types of runway materials, including brick, wood and caliche, whatever that is. I happily note the most

Table 3: Runway Materials of Construction

Runway Surface	# of Runways
Asphalt	7,141
Brick	3
Concrete	4,819
Coral or Caliche	3
Deck	16
Dirt, Sand, Gravel, or Oil & Chip	1,432
Grass or Turf	9,218
Matting	188
Metal	16
Other	62
Rooftop	131
Water	769
Wood	54
Total, All Runways	23,852

common surface is grass or turf which makes me happy; my Centurion is absolutely her most happy when she is low-and-slow with long strands of

prairie grass tickling the Michelins. I wonder what the difference is between grass and turf? Only an FAA minion knows for sure.

About the Author

Mike Jones is a 4,000 hour commercial-rated pilot who has more than 50 aircraft types in his logbook. His pride and joy is a Cessna T210, which has carried him to every corner of the U.S. and Canada for more than twenty years. He's always accessible at PilotMike2012@gmail.com.

