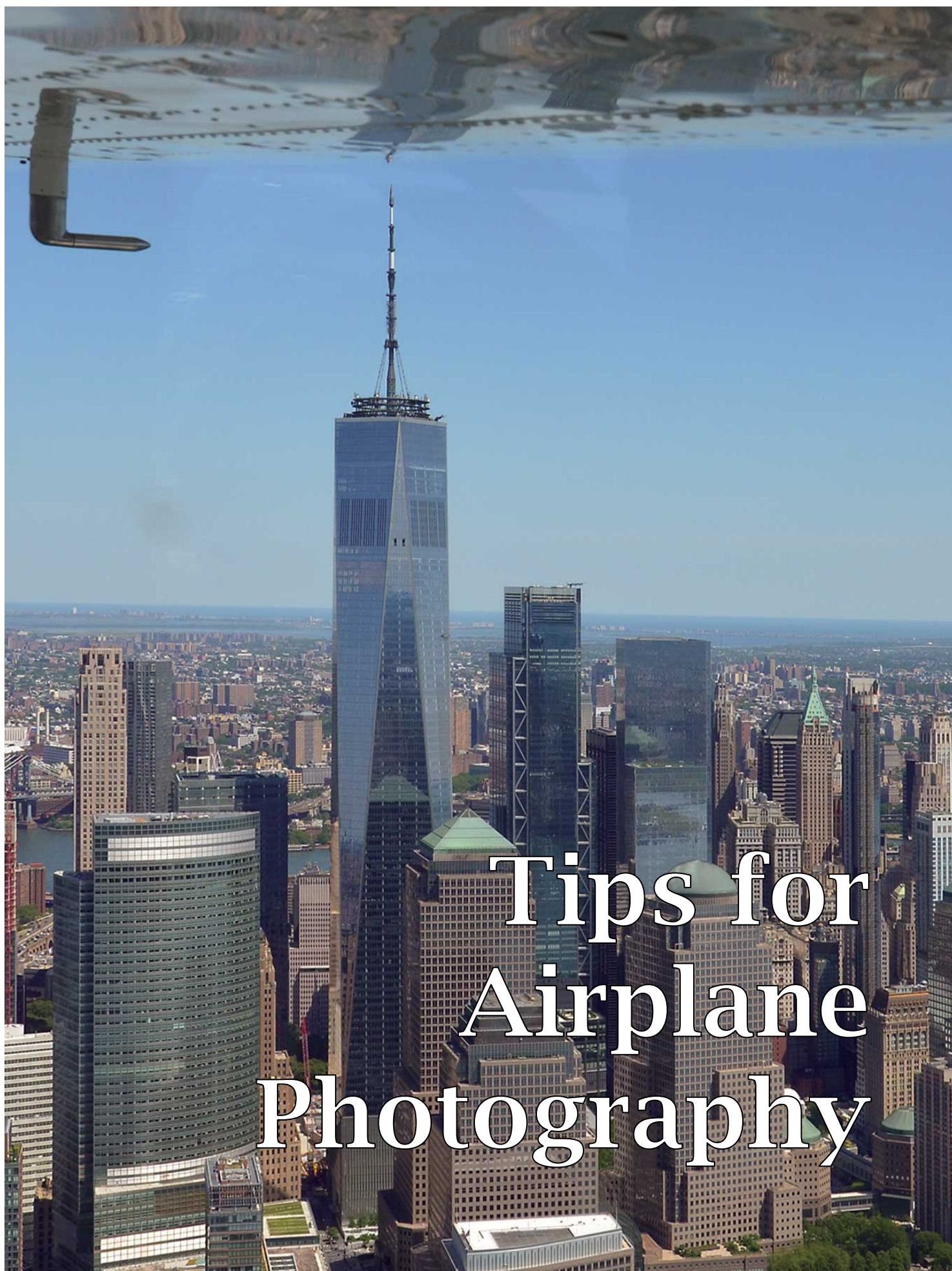




Tips for Airplane Photography

Tips for Better Airplane Photography

By Mike Jones

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One of the great joys of flying is showing people on the ground the places we have been. With modern cell phones, mirrorless-single lens reflex camera, and GoPro action cameras, getting great photos and videos has never been more fun. That said, shooting photos through Plexiglas windows isn't easy because Plexiglas isn't camera-lens quality. Here's a few tips to make your snaps snappier:

- Slow the plane to a crawl. I used a notch of flaps, gear down, and low power settings to maximize the stability of the plane. You're sight-seeing, not racing.



- Shoot with the sun at your back; schedule your flight to get the best light.
- Avoid days with turbulent air.
- Before you depart, clean the windows! While you're in flight, get the lens as close to the window as you can but don't rest it against the window; the vibration will blur your photos. On some airplanes, you can even open the window and get crisper shots.
- Try to get part of your airplane in the photo, such as a wing tip or a pitot tube. It provides perspective and a sense of "being there", and helps differentiate your photos from static drone and helicopter imagery.
- Avoid glare from the windows. Wear dark-colored shirts. Even better: pull a blanket over the photographer and the camera, to minimize glare. Even better yet: Todd Vorenkamp, a 30-year professional photographer, recommends a large rubber lens hood as a useful accessory. Since it is not rigid, you can press it against the window to minimize reflections and it won't transmit the vibrations to the camera.
- Use a medium length telephoto lens. Wide-angle lenses won't capture any detail while a long telephoto will be blurred. I like 85-150mm lenses in the plane.
- If you're photographing a propeller airplane or a helicopter in flight, use the highest shutter speed you can but nothing over 1/250th of a second. Use the "shutter-priority" setting if available. The objective is to capture a silver "prop disk" as opposed to freezing the prop as a motionless hunk of aluminum glued to the front of the plane (see photos, below).
- If you're photographing a jet, use any shutter speed you like — there is no "prop disk" to capture.
- If you're photographing scenery, like mountains, cities, or clouds, use the highest shutter-speed your camera can produce for crisp, sharp images.



In the image on the left, the prop is frozen by the fast shutter speed and creates an unnatural look. The Cessna 180 shows an almost-perfect prop disk captured using a slow shutter speed.

- Set “autofocus” to infinite (anything over 500 feet is infinite). If the camera is a simple one with minimal manual controls, set it to “landscape” settings (usually the “mountain” symbol on the control knob).
- Do not use the flash; it will bounce back off the Plexiglas windows.
- Remove the polarizing filter (if you have one) to avoid rainbows from the Plexiglas.
- Slip the plane to get better views of scenes below the plane.
- Use the time-lapse feature on your cell phone to create a great video of your flight-adventure.

About the Author

Dr. Mike Jones is an entrepreneur who uses his business expertise to help G.A. airports across the country improve their governance and operations,. He also helps protect them from avaricious developers and reverse the damage caused by ineffectual politicians. He's been writing for this magazine for nearly a decade, flown 800 Young Eagle missions, and put 4,000 hours in his logbook. He's always accessible at PilotMike2012@gmail.com.

