

# Can I open the aircraft door on arrival in the US?

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An OPSGROUP member operator recently reported getting into trouble after opening the aircraft door when they saw CBP officers approaching.

**This may sound like a familiar story!** Crew land, open the door, CBP aren't happy. They're told they've opened the door without permission, and things get fairly heated. No fine was issued, but obviously the crew wanted to know: is this actually a rule?

We checked with CBP, and the answer is pretty clear: **yes, you can open the door on arrival.**

Here it is on the CBP FAQ site:

## **As the pilot in command of a General Aviation aircraft arriving in the United States, may I open my aircraft door upon arrival?**

Yes, there is no regulatory basis requiring pilots and travelers to remain onboard an arriving aircraft awaiting formal or direct permission to deplane. Such practices can be detrimental to personal, aircraft, and aviation safety – especially in cases of inclement weather and extreme temperatures. Any traveler movement outside the immediate aircraft area or interactions with other individuals, though, is **not** permitted without specific and direct CBP authorization. In all cases, especially where health and safety concerns present or exist, please exercise reasonable and responsible judgement.

The nuance is that thing about **not being allowed to leave the plane.** So yes you can open the doors, but no you can't just wander off after you do.

We're pretty sure that second part comes from this rule in 19 CFR 122.36:

## § 122.36 Responsibility of aircraft commander.

If an [aircraft](#) lands in the U.S. and Customs officers have not arrived, the [aircraft commander](#) shall hold the aircraft, and any merchandise or baggage on the aircraft for inspection.

[Passengers](#) and crewmembers shall be kept in a separate place until Customs officers authorize their [departure](#).

### So why are some airports telling crews otherwise?

Good question. Since we shared the incident above, we received a medium-to-large flurry of emails from members being told to **keep the door closed at several different airports**. So it's definitely not a one-off.

One was even told the reason was that CBP needed to carry out some sort of radiation scan outside first, before opening up the aircraft. We can't verify that one!

And yet at **some airports the procedure seems to be almost the opposite** – we had a few reports saying that in some places local CBP gets annoyed if the crew *doesn't* get out and go into the CBP office.

So the procedure does seem to change a bit depending on where you land.

### Check the local CBP factsheet

CBP publishes General Aviation Airport Fact Sheets for a lot of airports around the US.

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[Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport \(KDFW\) Fact Sheet Details](#)

[View Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport Fact Sheet \(PDF\)](#)

This airport fact sheet for Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport (KDFW) located in Dallas, Texas provides information regarding CBP procedures for general aviation aircraft operators arriving and/or departing from Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport.

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[Tulsa International Airport \(KTUL\) Fact Sheet Details](#)

[View Tulsa International Airport Fact Sheet \(PDF\)](#)

This airport fact sheet for Tulsa International Airport (KTUL) located in Tulsa, Oklahoma provides information regarding CBP procedures for general aviation aircraft operators arriving and/or departing from Tulsa International Airport.

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[Boca Raton Airport \(KBCT\) Fact Sheet Details](#)

[View Boca Raton Airport Fact Sheet \(PDF\)](#)

So many facts...

**Worth checking before you go!** These docs contain local arrival procedures, operating hours, contact details and other stuff.

We looked at a few of these (especially the airports where we had reports of crews being told they weren't allowed to open the door until CBP arrived!) and **we couldn't find anything about doors.**

### **What to do?**

Check the local CBP factsheet and follow whatever specific procedure it says.

But if there's no door-related rule written down anywhere, and you're told "you can't open the door until CBP gives you permission", it seems reasonable to ask where that requirement comes from!

**CBP HQ guidance is clear:** there is no general requirement to keep the door closed. Just remember that opening the door doesn't mean you're cleared to leave the aircraft area - wait for CBP to complete the arrival process.