

Mexico Permit Chaos: New Rules Explained

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Key Points

- **From 1 Jan 2024, Single Entry Permits and Multiple Entry Permits for private flights have been replaced by the Single Entry Authorization (AIU).**
- **This AIU is valid for 180 days. With it, you can fly to Mexico as much as you like during this timeframe, and can do as many internal domestic flights as you want.**
- **You should apply for the AIU at least 2 days prior to the flight.**
- **Before the AIU can be issued, the Mexican airport you're flying to must obtain the authorization number from AFAC Headquarters in Mexico City. Timeframe for this is varying between 5 minutes to 2 days.**
- **These changes only impact private flights. Rules for charter flights work the same as before (i.e. you get a blanket charter permit).**

All these recent changes to permit procedures have been causing **stress and delays for ops to Mexico**. Before we get stuck into all the painful details, let's begin with a story...

A Cautionary Tale

*I just completed my first trip to **MMSL/Cabo San Lucas** since the new procedures came into effect, and thus needed the new permit. I use the local FBO for all of my permit applications, etc. **All paperwork was submitted and accepted days in advance.** This FBO is unquestionably one of the best that I ever use.*

*When I landed, they said **"we now wait for Mexico City to issue your Special Use Permit which they will only do after landing"**. I suggested that my passengers (family and friends) go on to the hotel in case it took a little while. Good decision.*

While sitting in the FBO waiting, I started to chat with other waiting crews. **One crew had been waiting for 3 hours already**, another crew was down for 2 hours.

The FBO manager indicated that **the new Mexican permit process has been total chaos** since it went into effect with huge delays. In the end, I waited 3 hours, and then was told to come back the next day.

As I left, one crew was still waiting. They had done a part 135 drop-off and had planned to head back to the US. They had been **delayed so long that customs at their US destination airport was closed**, and they couldn't reliably file a return eAPIS into the US because they didn't know their departure time (and you have to give the US at least one hours notification).

Hopefully, the new permit process settles down in the weeks ahead, but in the meantime, crews should be ready for a **many-hour or overnight delay**. Another pilot who flies regularly into Mexico told me that his delay (at a different airport) was less than 30 minutes. So, your mileage may vary, but in the meantime we all have to anticipate some delays.

The Full Story

Thanks to Rick Gardner of CST Flight Services for the report that follows. CST Flight Services provides a wide range of international trip support services in Mexico, Central and South America, The Bahamas and the Caribbean. You can contact them for more info at: customersvc@cstflightservices.com

Ancient History

To understand the impact that the recent change to Mexico's entry procedures has had on private aircraft arrivals, one has to understand the history of how foreign private aircraft have been allowed to enter Mexico in the past.

For well over 20 years, Article 29 of Mexico's Civil Aviation law decreed that foreign (non-Mexican) aircraft could enter Mexico by landing at an official international Airport Of Entry (AOE) in Mexico and obtaining a **Single Entry Authorization** (subsequently called the single entry permit) or a **Multiple Entry Authorization** (subsequently called the multiple entry permit).

In 2014, a Mandatory Circular (CO SA 02/14 R1) was generated that updated the procedures and documents required for authorizing the issuance of a single, or multiple, Entry Authorization. This circular was a heavy-handed intent to address **illegal charters and illegal cabotage in Mexico** which caused great confusion because it inserted confusing procedures for recording, and updating, the list of passengers authorized to fly on board a private aircraft and it eliminated an essential federal document that was relied upon by not only Mexican Civil Aviation officials but also by Mexican Immigration and by Mexican Customs.

The fallout of this new procedure resulted in **several Mexican AOE's being unable to receive international flights for many months** while the issues were resolved but eventually work-arounds were found and things settled down despite the confusing procedure.

Although tweaked periodically, Article 29 of Mexico's Civil Aviation Law remained unchanged until May 05, 2023 when the entire Civil Aviation Law received a major update in many areas. Amongst the many changes made in the new version of the Law, **the concept of "single entry" and "multiple entry" authorizations were eliminated** and the ambiguous phrase "corresponding authorization" was inserted.

December 2023 changes

On December 27, 2023, 4 days before the end of the year, an internal AFAC document (Oficio 4.1.2.4197) was published to all of the Civil Aviation offices at Mexico's AOE's informing them that a **new procedure was being issued for the authorization of private aircraft entering Mexico**. This internal document

specified the following:

- This internal document had a validity of 180 days.
- The changes to how entry authorizations were to be handled would go into effect January 1, 2024.
- It clarified that the reference to a Single Entry Permit and a Multiple Entry Permit were not correct and contrary to law and that the concept of a “Single Entry Authorization” (Autorización de Internación Única - AIU) was being adopted.
- That the AIU would be valid for 180 days from the date of issuance.
- That during the 180 day period, aircraft could freely travel in Mexican territory in a manner similar to the prior Multiple Entry Permit.
- That to issue an AIU the foreign operator needed to present their request for an AIU at least 2 days before their planned arrival in Mexico.
- That the Civil Aviation officials at the AOE could no longer unilaterally process an entry authorization but rather needed to request an AIU authorization number from Civil Aviation headquarters in Mexico City before the AIU could be issued. The request for the AIU number must be sent via email to a central email address and accompanied by:
 - Make of aircraft
 - Model of aircraft
 - Registration (Tail) number
 - Number of crew
 - Number of passengers
 - Name of Civil Aviation Inspector in charge of the AIU request
 - Name of Civil Aviation Comandante (or acting representative) who approved the AIU request
 - The request needed to be emailed to a central email address in Mexico City
- As a measure of added security and due to different legal “issues”, a Layout Of Passenger Accommodations (LOPA) needed to be presented.
- That for additional guidance on how the authorizations should be issued, AFAC officials needed to refer to the confusing 2014 Mandatory Circular (which was created for Entry Permits, which are now prohibited) until a new Circular could be published.

Confused? You are not alone.

January 2024 onwards

Almost immediately, there was an outcry about what was indicated, and not indicated, in the new procedure such as:

- Had the AFAC headquarters in Mexico City calculated how many aircraft arrive in Mexico per day and ensured that they had the email systems and staffing required to receive and process requests and issue the AIU authorization number for all AOE's in Mexico?

- How long would it take to get the authorization number?
- Many aircraft don't have the luxury to provide the 2-day required notification. (This was unofficially quickly watered down to a 2-day recommendation.)
- The Authorization is NOT VALID without the authorization number provided by the central AFAC headquarters.
 - What if an aircraft needed to make a quick turn and depart Mexico before the AIU was issued?
 - What if an aircraft needed to continue on to another airport in Mexico before the AIU was issued?

Almost immediately, we saw a **divergence in how each of these scenarios was being addressed** and how the new procedures were being implemented across the many Mexican AOE's across the country. Amongst the most notable issues we have seen are:

- It has been clarified that aircraft that were already in Mexico under the old Single Entry Permit that was issued in 2023 could remain in Mexico but needed to depart before those permits expired.
- The time to obtain an AIU authorization number was taking from **several minutes to multiple days** with no evident criteria for what made one request take longer than another.
- If the AIU authorization number is not received, some airports were **allowing the aircraft to depart but without a valid AIU**. This means that if they make a subsequent international flight to another Mexican airport, they will be treated as a new arrival and be obligated to **process yet another AIU** and pay the fee again because the AIU they had requested on their previous trip was never received.
- At some airports, flights wanting to fly on to another Mexican airport were approved on a discretionary basis by the local AFAC comandante with the requirement that they return to the original AOE where they entered the country.
- Aircraft that had been issued an AIU and reentered Mexico with **different crew and/or passengers** are being required to process a new AIU.
- Some airports are requiring a **picture of the inside of aircraft, in addition to a LOPA**, in order to approve an AIU. Without it, approvals are delayed.
- Some airports require a **picture of the exterior of the aircraft** in order to approve an AIU.
- Some pilots who had completed the forms to request an AIU left Mexico **believing they had received an AIU** when all they had was the request form (they are all in Spanish).

One always has to look for a bright side to things, and the one bright side of this new procedure is that it resolves an issue that had plagued the old Multiple Entry Permit which expired on December 31, 2023.

Aircraft operators who entered Mexico with a Multiple Entry Permit who had an AOG at the end of December or who wanted to spend New Years in Mexico could face severe fines if they did not remove their aircraft from Mexico before their permit expired. **With the new AIU, you always have a 180 day window for its use with multiple entries during that time.**



What now?

At the present, there is a lot of **confusion, frustration and miscommunication** at all levels within the AFAC as well as at airports and FBO's in Mexico. The implementation of the AIU approval procedures will remain in flux while AFAC headquarters, regional comandantes and airport comandantes address the issues and come up with a better way to handle this.

In the meantime, **expect some turbulence ahead** - have pictures and LOPA's, expect to have to pay multiple times for AIUs if you travel to different airports in Mexico and expect possible delays. **The good news** is that the beaches are still nice, the food is still delicious, the people are still friendly and the beer is still cold.