

HOW TO BECOME AN AIRLINE PILOT

Asian-Pacific Region Version



Congratulations! You have decided to pursue a challenging and rewarding career field. As with any worthwhile goal, the road to becoming an airline pilot may have its ups, its downs, and a few detours.

Along the way, there is help, guidance, and encouragement. ISA+21 would like to be there with you each step of the way as you achieve milestones and eventually reach your goal of getting that airline job.

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ISA+21 Recommendations

Whatever route you choose, realize there are many other highly qualified pilots who also want that airline job. You are attempting to get into a highly competitive field, so you need to make yourself as desirable a candidate as possible.



Get your college degree: It may look better if it is in an aviation-related field. However, many pilots get hired with other degrees. Having any four-year college degree puts you ahead of other candidates without one.



Build good flight hours: Get as much experience as possible in more than single engine aircraft. Work on multiengine, cross-country, instrument, and night flying. Build up time in high performance aircraft, such as turbo props and jets. Build your Pilot-in-Command time, especially in larger and more complex aircraft. Get a type rating in a complex aircraft or jet. These will all go a long way in making you stand out from the other candidates.



Be a good citizen: Volunteer your time to worthy organizations or non-aviation related organizations



Become and stay informed: Join organizations that can help you stay informed of the aviation community. There is no charge for **ISA+21's ASPIRING MEMBERSHIP**. Read aviation magazines, blogs, forums, and follow aviation groups on social media. There is a wealth of information on aviation at your fingertips.



Continue your education: Attend seminars on aviation related topics or take courses to enhance your aviation knowledge. Talk to others in aviation, especially those who have the job which you aspire.



Keep an accurate, neat logbook: Your logbook is your record of all your flying experience. It will be reviewed before all checkrides and prospective employers. You will make a better impression if it is organized.

Military

- Joining the Air Force is one of the few paths to become a pilot for those in Asia Pacific region. The spots are limited and the competition is fierce. For those who are interested in the military route, the first step is to look for information on the recruitment event – usually once a year in a designate location within a given region in the case of China. Normally only male applicants are accepted. However, there are exceptions. A handful of female pilots are reported to be flying in the militaries of Singapore, Japan, and Taiwan. In China, 12 classes of female cadets were recruited and successfully trained to fly various military crafts since the fifties. It is expected that the Chinese military will continue to recruit female pilot cadets, likely every three to five years.
- Dates and locations of recruitment event as well as procedures to apply can be found online in most countries' Military of National Defense's website. For China, the site is www.mod.gov.cn.
- Before applying, one should learn what the basic requirements are from the official website. Most military has specific restrictions on age, height, body weight, eyesight, educational level, etc.
- In mainland China, the military normally selects cadets from high school seniors in a dozen major cities. The initial stage usually requires a comprehensive physical exam, a face to face screening with the recruiters, and a thorough background check. Those who make it through the first stage must also score well at the Annual National College Entrance Exam in order to be selected. The successful candidates will be sent to one of the military colleges or a national university affiliated with the Air Force where the cadets will take general college courses with a major in Aviation during junior years and start flight training in senior years.
- All expenses for college and flight training are funded by the military. During active duty, pilots enjoy better compensation than those in other branches and greater benefits for their families.
- There is usually a minimum service commitment to the military which can range from 15 to 30 years.
- Veterans from the Chinese military usually receive warm welcomes by major airlines within the country.

Civilian

→ Intro to Flying

- Locate a flight school nearby you to take an introductory flight with an instructor in a small plane – there are a dozen of flight schools operating throughout China, which can be found through a quick online search.
- Depends on what country or region you are at, sometimes it may be easier to find a flight school during trips to overseas destinations such as North America or Australia where flight schools are abundant.
- If you enjoy the initial flying experience and want to know how to continue flight training to become an airline pilot, then inquire through the flight school, read up online, or contact one of us at ISA+21. Following are some highlights to guide you through the process and lead you toward your dreams of flying.

Compare your options: Airline Cadet vs Self-Financed Flight Training

→ Become an Airline Cadet:

- Most airlines in Asia Pacific region such as Cathay Pacific Airlines, Singapore Airlines, Japan Airlines as well as major airlines in China have pilot cadet programs to recruit and train pilots from zero flight time up.
- With all flight training cost funded by the airlines and a guaranteed flying job after graduating from the flight training program, becoming an airline cadet is a great way for many otherwise lack means or opportunity to become an airline pilots.
- Hiring information can be found via online forums or social media chats, however, the most reliable source is the airlines website.
- The available spots for cadets vary year to year among the airlines. The window of application can be narrow at times, so visiting the airlines hiring site frequently is strongly recommended. The selection process is very competitive. It

usually requires an aptitude test, psychological evaluation, physical screening, background check, and face to face interviews.

- Mainland China carriers tend to recruit cadets from high school seniors, much like the military's practice. Those selected were sent to aviation universities for a 4 year degree with a focus on flying related knowledge courses and the master of English, the common language for aviation. Actual flight training is often done overseas, North America or Australia, in flight schools contracted by the airlines. Other airlines in the region normally select applicants with a college degree.
 - Cadets are sent directly to flight training programs set up by the airlines, usually in a flight training academy overseas.
 - The initial flight training usually runs from six months to 18 months with all expenses covered and a small monthly allowance. At the conclusion of the flight academic training, cadets will earn a commercial pilot's certificate or the equivalent.
 - Depends on the airlines, the newly trained pilots may officially join the company's flight operation as a second officer or cruise pilot before upgrading to first officer position years later, others may be put through a lengthy aircraft specific simulator and flight training before transitioning to revenue operation.
 - Pilots hired through the cadet program are required to fulfill years of service commitment, if not for the entire flying career. Those who desire to leave before the commitment is up will be asked to reimburse the airlines up to the whole training cost.
- Self-financed flight training
- The advantages for choosing this route are many: 1) less time restraint -- one can start flight training as young as 16 (17 or older to obtain a PPL in China) or years after college, 2) set one's own training pace, part time, full time, stop and go. 3) free to work for any airlines after flight training without being locked to an airline for life or the military for years. One major disadvantage of this path is paying for flight training, which can cost over US\$100,000.

- Another challenge is figure out the right flight training path base on one's needs, resources, and career plans.
- The first decision one needs to make is where to go for flight training: in a flight school in one's own home country or abroad.
 - In China as well as most Asia Pacific countries, the cost of flight training can be several times higher than North America and Australia due to airspace restrictions, limited availability of flight schools and tighter governmental regulations, etc. Information on training programs, certification process, and cost structure are often hard to come by and lack transparency.
 - Though training abroad has been a popular choice, it can pose a different set of challenges: securing student visas, months and years away from family, possible language and culture barriers, etc.
- Tips on finding a flight school for those not seeking college degree:
 - If you know any pilot, talk to her/him. Online forums and Social media are another good place to start. Contact the flight schools you are interested in directly.
 - Ask about costs for each course and the cost to get all the way through their program
 - Ask about their training timeline
 - Talk with students at the school about the quality of instruction
 - If going abroad, one of the first questions to ask is if the school is authorized to provide flight training to international students, and if so, will they provide you the required documents to help you secure a student visa. You should also inquire about lodging arrangement during training – some training cost package may include housing and local transportation, some may not.
- Options for those seeking a college degree plus flight training:
 - More colleges are adding flight training department to their curriculum in Asia-Pacific region. Though most of the flight training spots are reserved for cadets under the airlines or military program.

- For most, the only option to combine a college degree with flight training is to go abroad. Australia, Canada, and the United States all have well-known aviation colleges that attract future pilots from around the world.

Certificates Required –

- **Private Pilot Certificate/PPL** Carry passengers but not compensated
 - Must be 17 years old
 - Possess a FAA Third Class Medical if in the U.S. or CAAC Class II Medical in China.
 - Minimum 60 hours of classroom study, if training in China
 - Minimum 40 hours of flight training
 - Successful complete written exam
 - Flight exam in the airplane with a FAA examiner if in the U.S. or a designated agent authorized by the country's Civil Aviation Department if outside of U.S.
- **Commercial Pilot Certificate** Fly for hire
 - Must be 18 years old
 - Possess an FAA Second Class Medical or a CAAC Class I medical if in China
 - Minimum 250 hours
 - Successful complete written exam
 - Flight exam in the airplane with an FAA Examiner or a designated agent authorized by the country's Civil Aviation Department if outside of U.S.
- **Those who wish to covert PPL and CPL obtained overseas to home country licenses are required to:**
 - Take and pass a written exam
 - Several hours of flight training
 - Pass a check ride in an airplane

In the Asia-Pacific region, pilots with a commercial license are eligible to be hired for commercial flying, however, most airlines won't hire low-time flyers as a direct entry pilot except those that come through their in-house cadet program

- **Airline Transport Pilot Certificate (ATP)** Pilot-in-Command duties of airline and other transport operations
 - Must be 23 years old
 - High school graduate or equivalent
 - Possess an FAA First Class Medical
 - Minimum 1500 hours
 - Successful complete written exam
 - Flight exam with an FAA Examiner a designated agent authorized by the country's Civil Aviation Department if outside of U.S.

- **In order to be hired as an airline pilot in the U.S., you must possess an Airline Transport Pilot Certificate. Most regional airlines will hire you without it, and then include it as part of the training. Passing your final checkout in the simulator will often be the exam for the ATP Certificate. Some airlines may require you to have it before being interviewed. Most importantly, U.S. airlines won't hire anyone without work-permit, permanent resident card (Green Card) or U.S. citizenship.**

- **In China, ATP is not required to fly as a first officer for the airlines, but it is needed as a transport category aircraft captain. Most don't get ATP on their own but wait till captain upgrade training.**

Instructor Certificates in U.S.A

- **Certified Flight Instructor (CFI)** to instruct private/commercial students
 - Must hold a Commercial Certificate and Instrument Rating
 - Successful complete two written exams
 - Flight exam in the airplane with an FAA Examiner or a designated agent authorized by the country's Civil Aviation Department if outside of U.S.

- **Certified Flight Instructor-Instrument (CFII)** to instruct instrument students
 - Must hold a CFI Certificate
 - Successful complete written exam
 - Flight exam in the airplane with an FAA Examiner or a designated agent authorized by the country's Civil Aviation Department if outside of U.S.

- **Multi-Engine Flight Instructor** to instruct students in twin engine airplane
 - Must hold a CFI Certificate
 - Flight exam in the airplane with an FAA Examiner or a designated agent authorized by the country's Civil Aviation Department if outside of U.S.

Instructor Certificates in China:

Those with a CFI from abroad can apply for a CFI in China by taking a written test, several hours of flight training, and a check ride in the airplane from an authorized local flight school.

Those with a commercial pilot license require 40 hours minimum flight training, a written test, and a check ride in the airplane.

→ Build Flight Time:

- It's quite difficult in Asia pacific region to build flight experience as there is very limited general aviation flying. Those who obtain their certificates in Australia or North America may want to consider building flight time and even secure a flying job abroad. Following are a number of possibilities to consider for those in the U.S.
- On Your Own
 - Build hours by owning or renting an airplane and flying it.
 - Split the price of flight time with someone to keep cost down
- Your first flying job!
 - Once you get your Commercial Certificate, you will be allowed to make money to fly!
- Job Progression Options – the path to 1500 hours for an airline job.

Flight Instruction

If you choose to flight instruct, it will be an excellent way to build flight time, but the pay is usually low. You will get a better foundation on knowledge of airplane systems, regulations, weather, aerodynamics, etc. Most instructing will be single engine to primary students until you earn a multi-engine flight instructor certificate

Charter

You may be able to fly for a charter department. A charter department rents aircraft to individuals or companies and supplies the pilots. You can gain valuable experience in in different types of aircraft. Charter departments vary in the types of aircraft they fly, compensation, and working conditions, so do your homework. Ask pilots who work for them currently about being an employee.

Corporate

Several businesses own aircraft to fly their personnel around. They fly anything from small aircraft to large jets. You should research each flight department before choosing this route if your goal is to build your flight time. Some are large with several jets and scheduled flying, but some own only one airplane and may not fly it often.

Other

There are many jobs available to new commercial pilots such as aerial surveying, banner towing, flying parachute jumpers, crop dusting, aircraft delivery and ferrying, air ambulance flying, flight instruction, and more!

→ Is this the lifestyle you want?

- Airline pilots are typically away from home more than other careers
- Depending on what schedule your seniority can hold, and what type of trips the airline you work for offers, you could be away from home for 3 or 4 days, or up to two weeks at a time.
- You may have to work holidays
- Fly various hours day and night and through multiple time zones which may be hard to establish a regular sleep routine
- Airline pilots are usually based (domiciled) in major cities. This is where each trip will start and end. They vary by airline. You may not be able to choose which city initially. If you choose to live where there is no domicile, you will need to commute several times a month, adding to your time away from home. Most airlines offer the flightdeck jumpseat to pilots.
- Finding a balance between being an airline pilot and having a family, may be challenging, but possible.
- Staying healthy (diet, exercise, etc.) while on the road is important considering odd work hours.
- Be able to get an FAA First Class Aviation Medical and maintain it with yearly exams to check your health.

→ How much is this going to cost?

- Expect to pay around \$100,000 for your certificates and ratings
- Additional costs will be incurred to time-build to get your hours. Even more important to get a starter flying job after getting your commercial certificate so that you can have someone pay you to fly instead of the other way around!
- Loans may be available for standard flight training. Student Aid may be offered for training associated with a college education.
- There are many **scholarship** opportunities available for the different phases of training

→ Organizations and Associations

- Aircraft Owners and Pilot's Association – AOPA
www.aopa.org
- Alpha Eta Rho – Coed International Aviation Fraternity
www.alphaetarho.org
- Civil Air Patrol – CAP
www.gocivilairpatrol.com
- Experimental Aircraft Association – EAA
www.eaa.org
- Federal Aviation Administration – FAA
www.faa.gov
- **International Society of Women Airline Pilots – ISA+21**
www.isa21.org
- Ninety-Nines – International Organization of Women Pilots
www.ninety-nines.org
- Ninety-Nines-International Organization of Women Pilots, China Section.
<http://www.99schina.org/index/guoji.html>
- Organization of Black Aerospace Professionals
www.obap.org
- Women in Aviation, International – WAI
www.wai.org

→ Final Thoughts

- There is much work involved in becoming an airline pilot. We cannot give you that magical formula to guarantee you achieve your goals. You have to make your own decisions on where you want to go from here.
- No matter which road you choose, expect to put in years of hard work and dedication to your goal.
- Ask anyone sitting in that seat now if it was worth it and you will most likely get a resounding Yes!

→ More resources available at www.isa21.org