



## **VFR Charts for Mexico, a comparative analysis**

**By: Rick Gardner, Caribbean Sky Tours**

One of the most common questions that we receive from pilots wishing to fly to Mexico is; “what VFR charts do I need and where can I get them?” There are a variety of different VFR charts for Mexico that are published by the FAA, DOD and INEGI (Mexico's National Institute of Statistics, Information & Geography). In this article we will investigate some of the advantages and disadvantages of these different charts.

### Available VFR charts

The charts most familiar to U.S. pilots are the VFR Sectional Aeronautical charts (Sectionals) and VFR World Aeronautical Charts (WAC) which show topography, airport information (location, elevation and runway length), nav aids (location, type and frequency), TCA's, restricted/prohibited airspace and airways. The U.S-Mexico border is covered by five sectional charts; Los Angeles, Phoenix, El Paso, San Antonio and Brownsville or by two FAA WAC charts; CH-22 and CH-23 which cover the entire Baja California peninsula. FAA WAC charts cover a little more Mexican territory than sectional charts but they only extend down to 24 degrees north leaving the majority of Mexico uncovered. VFR WAC chart CH-22 is updated every two years and CH-23 is updated every year.

Up until recently, the only VFR charts that covered all of Mexico were Operational Navigation Charts (ONC charts) from the Department of Defense (DOD) which show topography, airports (location and elevation) and restricted/prohibited airspace. These charts are developed by the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency and four ONC charts cover Mexico; H-22, H-23, J-24 and J-25. Physically, the charts are large and can be very awkward to use in the cabin of a light aircraft. There are no fixed update cycles for ONC charts and chart information can be up to 20 years old.

A new set of charts available to the aviation community are the recently released Mexican WAC charts which were developed in a joint effort between the two aviation branches of the Secretary of Communication and Transportation; the DGAC and SENEAM along with INEGI, Mexico's National Institute of Statistics, Information & Geography. Mexican WAC charts show topography, airport information (location, elevation and runway length), nav aids (location, type and frequency) and restricted/prohibited airspace. Twelve chart regions cover the entire country of Mexico and there are two regions per chart yielding a total of six separate charts. These charts were issued in July of 2008 and are scheduled to be updated every four years.

### Comparison of the VFR charts

Information on nav aids and approximately 89 towered and/or international airports in Mexico is kept up to date in Mexico's Aeronautical Information Publication (AIP) and published to registered subscribers like Caribbean Sky Tours and the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency. Information for the remaining 1,400 airports in Mexico is kept by the DGAC and is not distributed on a regular basis. Therefore, users of FAA WAC charts, ONC charts and any other source of airport information should be aware that information for airports, other than major Mexican airports, could be in error. On the other hand, Mexican WAC charts were developed with the latest information for all airports in Mexico.

Territory coverage between the various VFR charts is not the same. Visitors to the Baja California area will benefit from the design of the FAA WAC CH-22 which covers the entire peninsula with one chart but will have to recognize that the topographical and airport information will not be as accurate as the Mexican WAC charts which break the same area down into two separate charts. As airport and topographical information changes over time, the renewal frequency of charts can play an important factor in the accuracy of the information they contain. Since ONC charts for Mexico have not been updated in up to twenty years, ONC charts have very limited airport and topographical information.



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In Mexico, Aerodrome Traffic Zones (ATZ's) exist around towered airports and Terminal Control Areas (TCA's or TMA's in ICAO) exist around larger, busier airports. ATZ's typically have a 10 NM radius around the airport and they, along with TCA's, are class D airspace. FAA WAC charts are the only VFR charts to show TCA's but none of the VFR charts show ATZ's. Therefore, users of Mexican WAC charts and ONC charts would be wise to supplement their charts with IFR low altitude enroute charts which show airways and TCA's and pilots should remember the presence of ATZ's around towered airports.

<u>Item</u>	<u>FAA WAC</u>	<u>ONC</u>	<u>Mexico WAC</u>
Dimension folded W X H	5" X 10 ¼"	14 ½" X 10 ½"	6" X 10 ¼"
Dimension open W X H	55" X 20 ¾"	57 ½" X 42"	36 ¾" X 20 ¾"
Covers all of Mexico	No	Yes (4 charts)	Yes (6 charts)
Topography	Yes	Yes	Yes
Airport location and elev.	Yes	Yes	Yes
Runway length	Yes	No	Yes
Nav aids	Yes	No	Yes
TCA's	Yes	No	No
ATZ's	No	No	No
Airways	Yes	No	No
Scale	1:1,000,000	1:1,000,000	1:1,000,000
Renewal cycle	1 -2 years	10-20 years	4 years
Cost (US\$)	\$ 8.60	\$ 7.99	\$ 12.00

### Airport Information

Obtaining up-to-date information on airports not included in Mexico's AIP is a challenge for the FAA, DOD and pilots alike. Another confusing factor is that PRIVATE airports are not identified on any VFR charts. Airport operating statuses change constantly and out-of-date information can pose significant legal and safety risks. Therefore, pilots should verify information for the airports they plan to use with the Mexican Civil Aviation authorities prior to initiating flight. Caribbean Sky Tours has worked closely with Mexico's DGAC to develop a Pilot's Guide which contains verified procedural and airport information to supplement official information. Since Caribbean Sky Tours is based in Mexico, it is much easier to stay abreast of aeronautical information and keep it up to date. The Caribbean Sky Tours Pilot's Guide is the only guide that is updated every year to keep information current.

### Summary

Overall, the new Mexican WAC charts are the most reliable VFR charts for all of Mexico. They have the most accurate airport and navaid information as well as updated topographical information. However, being new products, they do contain some errors. Caribbean Sky Tours has built 6 separate web pages on its website, one for each of the 6 WAC charts, where observations regarding the PRIVATE status of airports, airport closures and other factors can be documented and shared with the international pilot community. All pilots are encouraged to contact Caribbean Sky Tours with observations to WAC chart information so that it can be added to the appropriate pages. **All of the FAA, ONC and Mexico WAC charts can be purchased at the on-line Pilot Shop of the Caribbean Sky Tours website;** [www.caribbeanskytours.com](http://www.caribbeanskytours.com) or by calling Caribbean Sky Tours at 1-(866) 420-9265.