

OSHKOSH OUR MAJOR ACTIVITIES

The Flying Circus “Old Fashioned Barnstorming” Airshow

www.flyingcircusairshow.com

This is a day of aviation experience and camaraderie that you will forever remember - with a great yearning to return. This we promise.

In fact, it may well rate as your finest aviation experience - ever.

Operated by a group of current and retired United Airlines Captains, the Flying Circus takes place every Sunday from May to October. The location is a grass strip on a farm near to Bealeton, located in agricultural Virginia, about 50 miles south of Washington – an hour by coach. The South Africans in our group enjoy a favoured status at the Flying Circus. Open their web-page, then follow the links to “photos”, then “good friends and good times” and you’ll see photographs of previous Designer Tours Oshkosh groups at the Flying Circus.

The show is described as “An Old Fashioned Barnstorming” Airshow, and this is an apt description. Not one of the participating aircraft is younger than 1946. We spend a full day here:- each member of the group is treated to a 20 minute Stearman flight, and should you desire an Aerobatic flight, you will be accommodated at a very reasonable additional cost. At 1400h we are guests at the pilots’ briefing, and the Barnstorming Airshow kicks off at 1430h. After the show we enjoy an evening of beer and pizza under the shady trees, in company with the performing pilots and the ground staff – sunset is at 2030h here!

Hardened SA men have been known to have tears in their eyes when it is time to depart the Flying Circus. This is no exaggeration. Now, some may think that beer has something to do with this - but after you’ve experienced the day, you decide - whilst you hide your eyes in your cap!

Oshkosh – *the airshow!*

Oshkosh is truly the enthusiast’s airshow.

It is, undoubtedly, the hadj of aviation.

Every pilot must attend, at least once in a lifetime. At least.

At Oshkosh, you are in the company of only like-minded enthusiasts.

Almost all here have something to do with aviation.

Only Oshkosh!

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There is nothing – absolutely nothing – to distract you from your devotion to flying. No scenic attractions, no Mickeys, no Goofies, no anything! Well, maybe a beer or two at the day's end. And there is no talk of rugby, or cricket, or THAT either! Only concerning what was seen today, and what will be seen tomorrow.

Click here for up-to-date information about 2016:

<http://www.airventure.org/attractions/airshows.html>

Click here for a pre-view:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hmOPgYEBwEw>

These are the official statistics for the 2016 show:

- **Attendance:** over 563,000
- **Total show planes:** 2,855 (1124 homebuilt aircraft, 1032 vintage airplanes, 371 warbirds, 135 Ultralights, 101 seaplanes, 41 aerobatic aircraft, 51 other).
- **Commercial exhibitors:** 891 (a new record).
- **International visitors registered:** 2,369 visitors from 80 nations - topping the list were Canada (578), Australia (340), Argentina (167) Argentina took over South Africa's "3rd most" slot, which in 2015 was 187.

NOTE: As this total includes only non-U.S. visitors who register at the International Visitors' Tent, the actual international contingent is undoubtedly larger.

The most attended day of the show is the sixth day, Saturday. On this day the Warbirds take to the sky en masse. The drone of literally hundreds of piston engines is positively orgasmic. The sight of Mustangs, Spitfires, Harvards (some in SAAF colours), Gullwings, Bearcats (all the Cats for that matter) and many others, taking to the air, three abreast every fifteen seconds, cannot be imagined. And the subsequent formation fly past will leave you convinced that, somehow, you've arrived in airman's heaven.

When so many attend on one day, how do they cope? More to the point, how will you cope? After all, we South Africans can claim maybe 50,000 at Loftus as our experience of a crowd. Maximum. Well, rest easy. They have it taped. You won't even notice that there are 200,000 plus at the show on the Saturday!

Roads are set up as "one-ways" – mornings "inwards", afternoons "outwards". At the gates, you will stand in a quick moving line on the first day only. Now you are a member of the EAA, you have a week's pass to the show in the form of a wristband. Better get used to showering with it, if you remove it, you will have to cheat to get in!

There are so many toilets that, if you have to wait, it will be for a minute or two at the worst. Clean and tidy. They even smell clean. In fact, "clean and tidy" is the general impression you have about Oshkosh and Wisconsin. With all of the disposable food wrapping and drink containers

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about, you would, being South African, expect to see litter. But there is no litter, no waste paper, no rubbish. Makes a change!

Food and drink vendors abound. Wisconsin, as a result of its largely German descended population, is the sausage (Bratwursts – called “Brats”) capital of the USA. Sausage and beer! But, no beer or any alcoholic drink available, or even permitted on the grounds. The nearest bar is some 150 metres outside of the main gate.

Between the locals, taking their once a year chance to earn some extra bread, and the EAA taking their share of the profits, prices at the show tend to be high. The wise and experienced amongst you will have fruit, fruit juices, and sandwiches in your backpacks.

The same wise and experienced will have their collapsible chairs and will have set them up on the flight line on arrival each morning. They will not grow legs and disappear. Yes, believe it. They will be there when you return to watch the afternoons flying from your chosen prime position.

Crowded it is, to be sure. 200,000 crowded on the Saturday. You are aware that there are many people around. But your space is, somehow, never invaded. You do not have that Loftus on a test afternoon feeling. At the exhibits, at the museum, at the flymarket, on the flightline, all is flowing; no crowd jams.

Friday is foreign visitors’ day. We all meet at the foreign visitors’ marquee.

A great venue – shade, tables and chairs, a place to meet, a place to rest – your headquarters for the week. We all march behind our national flags to the president’s tower. A short speech from the EAA Chairman, and it is back to the business of Oshkosh.

Same evening is the foreign visitors’ party. Beer at last! And, FREE at that! From 1700h to 2100h. The EAA thank us for attending the show, and then we are at the free beer, wine and food. “Brats”, of course!

Remarkably, despite the frantic attempts made by the Australians and South Africans, the box-car trailer - yes, that’s right, the box-car trailer - of beer on tap, runs out at exactly 2100h. Closing time! Some South Africans (no names provided), have developed a system: join one of the four tap lines, fill your mug, go to the back of the line. By the time you get to the front, you can fill up again. Who needs food?

Oshkosh as a town is probably no larger than Paarl. It has only about 1000 hotel rooms, and those are taken in perpetuity by the EAA themselves, and allocated to the performing pilots and other senior show staff. Accommodation-wise, therefore, you have three options.

(a) Camp out on the premises (so to speak). Contact Neil Bowden.

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Neil has operated the camping tours annually since 1998, and they are good value for those who appreciate camping, and of course, for the not inconsiderable convenience of being on the spot. Neil1@telkomsa.net Ph 084-674-5674 or <http://www.airadventure.co.za/>

(b) Hotel accommodation. Attendees accommodate in towns up to 80 miles away and commute daily. First prize is where we are based, Appleton, 18 miles – twenty minutes – away, with some 3000 rooms. Being so close, competition amongst the FAA, NASA, tour operators and other exhibitors for these rooms is fierce, and allocations are contracted for years ahead.

Hotels tend to the usual American chain standards – clean, large rooms, all equipped with two double beds, air conditioned, bathrooms en suite, cable television, and free local calls (who would you call anyway?). Room rates for this week are very high.

(c) Bunk down in one of the university residences. These are ad hoc tours, operating one year, and not the next. They are organised by individuals not wanting to join either of the tour operator organised groups described above. The drawbacks are communal bathrooms, no air conditioning, and some 50 miles each way daily in vehicles shared by six, and parked up to two km from the gates. By definition, travelling to and from the show is at fixed times.

Foodwise, dinner can be cheap at fast food outlets. It does not mean hamburgers every night. Some, such as Ponderosa, offer buffet meals featuring soups, salads, vegetables, roasts, stews, and sweets to follow - \$15 all you can eat. Others, such as Denny's, offer plated and balanced meals, from \$13 to \$15. However, note that hotels do not mind you bringing your own food or drink onto the premises, and consuming same in your room. This is a much less costly option.

Most hotels do not have restaurants, but do offer a quaintly named “American Continental” breakfast. Coffee? Yes, well it is hot and black and smells somewhat like coffee. Awful. Americans drink coffee non-stop all day. As a consequence, their coffee tends to be weak and watery and alien to our palates.

Be assured that, unless this is your third visit, you will not have had enough time to see the entire Oshkosh Airshow. Even if you have devoted every hour of all of your five days.