



IMPORTANT INFORMATION

The risks associated with flying in a Spitfire aircraft

INTRODUCTION

The following information is essential reading if you are considering flying as a passenger in a Spitfire aircraft. The risks encountered are considerably greater than those associated with flying in an airliner and may result in death or serious injury. The UK Civil Aviation Authority (**CAA**) regulates these flights under a system known as Safety Standards Acknowledgement and Consent (**SSAC**).

This document seeks to inform you of the reduced safety standards when participating in this activity. Once you have read this document and seen the associated video (viewed immediately prior to flight), you should have sufficient information to make an informed decision as to whether the risks are acceptable to you. Prior to flight, you will be required to acknowledge you have been provided with this information and consent to the increased level of risk.

If at any time up until engine start, you decide the level of risk is unacceptable to you, a full 'no-quibble' refund will be made.

BACKGROUND

Certain activities such as flying as a passenger with an airline have a legitimate expectation of a very high level of safety. In contrast, some adventurous activities, such as bungee jumping, parachuting or motor sport present a higher level of personal risk which participants readily consent to as part of the recreational value of taking part. Flying as a passenger in a Spitfire or other ex-military aircraft is an adventurous activity and comes with an increased level of risk.

WHAT ARE THESE RISKS?

The risk can be described as the likelihood of a hazard occurring and the severity of the outcome should it occur. The potential hazards are wide-ranging and can be broadly divided into two categories. Firstly, those generally encountered when flying in any small aircraft with a single pilot and secondly those specific to flying in the Spitfire aircraft.

NON AIRCRAFT-SPECIFIC RISKS

If you choose to fly with us you will encounter the following hazards. The list is not exhaustive but identifies some of the more significant items, with details as to how we attempt to mitigate these risks. Please note that all these 'non aircraft-specific risks' are similar to those encountered if you were to charter a small commercial helicopter or single engine aircraft.

Pilot Incapacitation: All our pilots have regular CAA medicals which may include ECGs and other tests to ensure they are in good health and, unlike passengers in most other single pilot aircraft, you will be wearing a parachute, so in the highly unlikely event of the pilot becoming incapacitated you always have the option of leaving the aircraft.

Personal Health: Before flying, you will be required to sign a medical declaration regarding your fitness to fly. If you are fit enough to drive a car, you do not suffer from any serious medical condition, and you have not got a cold or sinus infection, then your health should be adequate to fly. Please read the form carefully before signing as it identifies several medical conditions where medical advice will be required before you can fly.

Apart from your physical health, you should also have the mental capacity to remember some straightforward emergency procedures, and a degree of physical strength to execute them. If you are in any doubt, please obtain further medical advice.

Mid-Air Collision: We operate in what is termed 'uncontrolled airspace'. Simply put, if you are flying in a large passenger aircraft, air traffic control will ensure your separation from other aircraft, so the chance of a mid-air collision is extremely remote. In contrast, we operate the Spitfire in 'uncontrolled airspace', which means that we are responsible for ensuring our own separation from other aircraft on what is called a 'see and avoid' principle.

All our pilots keep a good look out and we encourage you to help us manage this risk by pointing out any other proximate aircraft that you might see. Whilst the chance of being involved in a mid-air collision is low, you, unlike the passengers in most other light aircraft, will be wearing a parachute, so this provides a further level of safety.

Regulatory Oversight: Prior to issuing us with an approval to carry passengers in Spitfire aircraft, the CAA conducted an inspection of our operation to ensure compliance with the applicable SSAC regulation and this approval is renewed on an annual basis.

It is important to understand that the governing legislation is considerably lighter than that associated with commercial air transport (flight with airlines) and whilst the CAA does provide some oversight of our operation, it is significantly less than that provided for operators such as British Airways or EasyJet.

Aircraft Maintenance: Our aircraft are maintained by our own CAA approved maintenance organisation, which is one of the largest and most experienced facilities for Spitfire aircraft in the world.

The servicing is conducted in accordance with a schedule agreed with the CAA, and involves regular inspections throughout the flying season. These range from the daily check, through 25, 50 & 100 hour inspections to the in-depth 'Annual Check'.

AIRCRAFT SPECIFIC RISKS

The following risks are those specifically associated with flying in a Spitfire aircraft:

Design Standard: The Spitfire was designed in the 1930s as a wartime fighting machine with an expectation of a limited operational life. Whilst we know that the basic design is very sound and can comfortably withstand the stresses of air-to-air combat, the aircraft was never designed for the carriage of fare-paying passengers. Eighty years on, the commercial aircraft of today are designed to significantly higher standards and benefit from the latest technology and materials. Inevitably, whilst a well proven design, flight in an historic aircraft exposes you to a much greater risk than flying in a modern Boeing or Airbus.

Engine or Component Failure: Engine failure is always a possibility. The Rolls Royce Merlin is a complex engine designed in the mid-1930s. Ours are regularly serviced and completely overhauled approximately every 500 flying hours. Like all fixed wing aircraft, the Spitfire is capable of gliding in the event of an engine failure and only requires a small field to land. Indeed, numerous wartime aircraft safely performed forced landings during WW2.

Whilst our pilots are very experienced, an engine failure at a critical time could result in a significant accident and always carries the risk of death or serious injury.

There are a number of other non-normal situations that could occur as the result of component or other failure, but you can be assured that all our pilots are highly experienced and train on a regular basis to manage such events.

HOW DANGEROUS IS IT?

Unfortunately, there is insufficient data to quantify the risk accurately, but we believe it is likely to be slightly higher than that related to other recreational aviation activities. In January 2011, the CAA provided data for a 10 year period which indicated a fatality risk of around one death per 100,000 hours. The chances of injury will be higher.

WHAT IF SOMETHING DID GO WRONG?:

The aircraft is fully insured for third party and passenger liability with a combined single limit of at least £15.0M. If you hold personal life assurance or similar policies, you should make your own enquiries as to the extent of cover whilst participating in adventurous activities such as this.

SUMMARY

We have covered above some of the major hazards associated with undertaking a passenger flight in a Spitfire. Whilst we try and mitigate these risks to a level as low as reasonably practicable, the residual risk is still significantly greater than that associated with flying as a passenger on a commercial airliner. There is always the possibility of death or serious injury as a result of participating in this adventurous activity.

We believe you should now have sufficient information in order to make an informed decision as to whether you wish to consent to these risks and to fly with us. However, If you do require any further information before making a decision, please contact us on 01959 576767 and we will be pleased to answer any further questions you may have.

Prior to flying with us, you will be shown a video covering the above information again, as part of the briefing process.

Finally, please remember that:

If at any time up until engine start, you decide the level of risk is unacceptable to you, a full 'no-quibble' refund will be made.
