

A day in the life of a commercial airline pilot

Introduction

Every pilot receives his schedule once a month, listing flight- or instructor's duties. Every flight number signifies one-leg, out- or in-bound route.

For instance: Zurich – Paris: LX 635
Paris – Zurich: LX 635
Zurich – Hong Kong – Manila: LX 136
Manila - Hong Kong – Zurich: LX 137

On the basis of a Crew Time Table the pilot prepares himself approximately one day ahead of departure accordingly.

- Flight number, departure and arrival, also change of time-zone
- Route information, air traffic control areas, general climate and weather, high terrains, intermediate aerodromes
- Destination information (arrival charts & procedures, flight information & procedures)
- Emergency equipment procedures & check lists to be studied
- Hotel information: local facilities (fitness, restaurants etc.)
Crew-call and pick-up time, tipping instructions, etc.

Sample flight duty schedule

01Nov	D 0632 9853	Flightduty
02	0316 0317	Flightduty
03		off
04	STBY05	Standby
05	0780 0781 2810 0358	Flightduty
06	0365 0370 0357	Flightduty
07	2811 1732 1733	Flightduty
08	1734 SPLIT	Flightduty
09	DO 1735 "off after 1000"	Flightduty
10		off
11		off
12		off
13		off
14	0632 0633 0780	Flightduty
15	0771 1884 1885	Flightduty
16	1726 1727 0638	Flightduty
17	0647 2020 2021	Flightduty
18		off
19		off
20		off
21	VTZR	
22	1734 SPLIT	Flightduty
23	DO 1735	Flightduty
24	2084 2085 0340	Flightduty
25	0355 2819	Flightduty
26	2808 0356 0371 GDH BSL -ZDH	Flightduty
27	D 7413 2032 2033	Flightduty
28		off
29		off
30		off

Prior to departure / day of duty

On the day of departure check-in time is 1 to 1½ hours before takeoff at the latest in the OPS Center. Cockpit-crew meets there alone followed by a joint preflight briefing with the cabin crew. Beforehand the captain and copilot will get the crew list so that they know who is part of the crew. At the ELS, Meteo and dispatch the cockpit crew receives relevant flight information, in order to complete the flight planning. During briefing the cockpit crew informs the cabin-crew about the route, weather conditions, duration of flight and possible specialties about the respective aircraft. The cabin-crew discusses passenger numbers, meals, flight procedure and organization of services. Special care duties, such as unaccompanied children or medical cases are being assigned. Emergency procedures with spot-checks are made, local destination procedures, hotel information and mentionable items regarding the destination are being discussed.

Approximately 40 – 60 minutes before departure following joint preparation, the crew will be picked up by the crew-bus and brought to the aircraft.

On the plane

The co-pilot starts with the preflight checklist, to examine if everything is in order and the captain does the PFC (Preflightcheck). He makes a walk around using a checklist. This means he is checking tires, hydraulic leaks, engines and whether there are any irregularities.

In the meantime the co-pilot inserts all data requested (take-off cross weight, routing, load information etc.) and programs the flight management system FMS and sets the communication frequencies.

The passenger boarding begins. The Maître de Cabine, and if time permits, the captain or first officer are welcoming the passengers

After completed boarding the Red Cap informs the captain about aircraft loading completed and the load-sheet is being delivered. The load sheet lists passenger data, cargo, baggage mail, and center of gravity calculations. Once verification of the load-sheet, which also includes the correct head-count of passengers, the last door will be locked and the aircraft is ready for start-up.

For example:

- Co-pilot asks ground control for engine start and taxi permission.
- Captain taxis to the departure runway.

Prior to take off the Maître de Cabine reports to the cockpit “cabin secured”.

Take-off / Flight

After receiving permission by ATC Controller the take-off roll begins. The work sharing is such that one pilot is responsible for the flying operation and the other takes care of radio communication and acts as assistant. The responsibility of the flight naturally lies with the captain during the entire rotation. Both pilots are totally concentrated with the take-off phase. The flying pilot keeps the aircraft rolling on the runway centerline and the non-flying pilot monitors the instruments and calls out V1 (take-off decision speed) followed by Vrotate (aircraft rotation speed).

In climb established and autopilot engaged, communication contact, continuous monitoring and adjusting of relevant parameters for the flight operations have to be performed. Follow-up on automatics and systems must be checked during the entire flight.

Once reaching cruising altitude, sufficient flying time and workload permitting, pilots can expect a planned crew meal. Since Sept. 11. 2001, cockpit visits by passengers are, for security reasons, no longer permitted. The only visitors allowed during a flight are cabin-crew-members.

Landing / stop over

Depending on the length of the flight approx. 30 minutes before arrival, preparations for landing are taken. Crew awareness for eventual alternate airport re-planning are part of this procedure. This concerns latest weather conditions at destination. Fuel reserves and possible passenger handling have to be re-checked.

Following landing and after goodbye to passengers the aircraft will be prepared for either the return flight (European routes) or secured for a night stop, or in case of long-distance routes, for handing-over the aircraft to a new crew. Crewmembers then will proceed through custom clearance and fetch their luggage. A hotel shuttle-bus usually waits in front of the airport and then will bring the crew to the designated hotel where reservations have been made. It depends on how the schedule is set the crew is off for either a few hours or lay-over-time (night/day). On those days time is at their disposal, such as excursions, visiting friends, whatever the crewmembers desire.

For the return flight from abroad (home-bound) the crew meets at the stipulated time in the hotel lobby for homebound departure to the airport. Proceedings are pretty much according to the out-bound flight.

After a rotation / pairing all crewmembers are free for a specific number of days before the next assigned duty.

Miscellaneous

Now and then every pilot has 'on-call duty'. This means that he has to be ready for flight duty within 1 to 2 hours, be it, because someone became ill, had an accident or because of some changes in the flight operations. After some years of experience pilots may possibly have a chance to become an instructor, an additional challenge to a pilot's career. Every pilot is assigned to one type of aircraft only, except when aircrafts are of very similar flying characteristics such as Airbus A 320 and A 330. Someone flying a MD11 cannot fly another type of aircraft at the same time. After several years the copilot may be called to take a promotional training to captaincy. Every six months pilots have to perform a mandatory proficiency check. In this simulator-check he has to prove his standard of performance, whereby his flying skills are to be checked, such as handling emergencies and dealing with various technical mal-functions and problems. In addition, every pilot has to undergo a medical check once or twice a year in order to examine their state of health.

Glossary

1) Destination	The place to which an aircraft travels
2) Schedule	A plan of procedure, usually written, for a proposed objective, esp. with reference to the sequence of and time allotted
3) Emergency Proce.	Procedures at a distress on an urgency condition
4) Outbound	Flight from Zurich (from home base)
5) Inbound	Flight to Zurich (back to home base)
6) Crew call	Wake-up call in Hotel before departure
7) Pick up	Pick-up from before departure
8) ELS	Operation Control Center
9) Meteo	Weather Information
10) Dispo	Disposition (daily planning)
11) Pairing/Rotation	Days of duty between 1 – 12 days
12) CTT	Crew Time Table
13) OPS Center	Operations Center at the airport
14) Crew Member	Group of persons having duties concerned either with the flying of the aircraft or with passengers or cargo when in flight
15) Briefing	The act of giving in advance specific instructions or information
16) PFC	Pre-flight Check, an inspection of an aircraft performed by the pilot before the aircraft is approved for flight
17) FMS	Flight Management System (Flightdata-Computer)
18) M/C	Maître de Cabine
19) Red Cap	Loadmaster/Groundhandlingmaster
20) Loadsheets	A document specifying in detail the payload expressed in terms of passengers and/or freight carried in one aircraft for a specific destination
21) ATC	Air Traffic Controller
22) V1	Take-off decision speed (critical engine failure speed)
23) V-rotate	(Rotating speed) that portion of take off in which the airplane has gained enough speed for the nose wheel to be lifted to increase the angle of attack and thus the lift.