

ABERDEEN DYCE INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

SPOTTING GUIDE

2010 EDITION

FOREWORD

This guide is for anyone who has an interest in spotting aircraft at Aberdeen Dyce International Airport. With a diverse range of traffic, from small scheduled flights to large chartered flights in the holiday seasons, Aberdeen also holds the title for “the busiest commercial heliport in the world”. I hope you find this guide useful - enjoy! – **D2GIZZO**

HYPERLINKS

There are several hyperlinks within this guide which may lead to content included in this guide or websites on the internet. To use them, simply click once. Depending on the security settings within Adobe Reader, you may be asked to either allow or block this link. You will need to click allow to go to the destination specified by the hyperlink.

GOOGLE PLACEMARKS

This guide includes Google placemarks to show you the facilities and spotting areas described in this guide on the map – either on satellite images or a traditional graphical map. To use these placemarks, you’ll need an up-to-date copy of Google Earth installed on your computer. Google Earth is a free download, and you can get it by clicking [here](#). Above the contents section within this guide you will see a box containing a link to open the Google Earth placemarks. Simply click this link and the placemarks will open within Google Earth ready for use.

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INTRODUCTION

This guide hopes to give you a solid insight into spotting at Aberdeen Airport.

Aberdeen Dyce International Airport, owned by BAA, is now the second-busiest in Scotland, handling over 3 million [3,000,000+] passengers in 2008, or around 9,000 passengers per day. Aberdeen Airport is located not far from Aberdeen City Centre, not to mention local transport links and accommodation, making it a great portal to Aberdeen City and the surrounding areas. A large amount of traffic at the airport is generated by commercial helicopter flights, giving Aberdeen Airport the title of the biggest commercial heliport in the world. The airport also handles a large amount of fixed-wing aircraft, mainly on seasonal charter and scheduled flights. Due to the increasing demand for larger, higher-capacity, aircraft to be able to access Aberdeen, the main runway is due to be extended by 984ft, from 6,001ft, in the coming years as part of BAA's larger master plan for the airport up to 2030.

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The Google Earth placemarks included in this guide show most of the key locations mentioned in this guide; such as the spotting areas or local transport links. To use the Google Earth placemarks, simply [click here](#). If a security warning pops up, just click "allow". This is just so that this file can access and load the placemarks.

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FACILITIES

✈ TERMINALS

There is only **one main terminal** at Aberdeen airport, which handles all scheduled and chartered fixed-wing traffic. The terminal features many big-name shops and outlets including; Costa, Boots, WHSmith, Travelex and Dixons, to name only a few. In addition to the main terminal, there are **three exclusive helicopter terminals**, used by Bond, CHC-Scotia and Bristow, and one for charter flights for oil companies – due to the large amount oil industry based traffic at Dyce. Other features of the main terminal include the departure lounge having a direct view onto the stands and airfield, and the main runway (16/34) being almost parallel with the positioning of the terminal - so you can get a great head-on view of aircraft parked at the gates, and a side-on view of aircraft using the main runway (16/34). The main terminal is due for expansion and improvement as part of a larger plan for expansion at the airport up until 2030. The expansion will include larger capacity for the terminal, improved baggage reclaim, and an improved customs and immigration hall. For further details on the expansion, have a look at the BAA website [here](#).

✈ RUNWAYS

Aberdeen airport has **four runways; one main runway and three for helicopters**. The main runway, 16/34, has a current length of 6,001ft, but is due for extension by 984ft in the coming years (as yet, there is no firm start date on the expansion of the main runway). The main runway (16/34) has a category 1 ILS system. The three additional helicopter-only runways are all visual. Currently, the largest aircraft that the airport can handle are types such as the Boeing 767 or Airbus (A)310. The proposed runway extension would allow for not only a larger amount of aircraft of this size, but for aircraft to have heavier loads. Additionally, the main runway has recently undergone a complete resurface, adding fifteen years of life to the surface. The runway resurfacing and extension is part of the larger plan for expansion at the airport up to 2030, which includes improving the runway and taxiway facilities.

✈ PASSENGER AIRCRAFT STANDS

Aberdeen airport has a total of sixteen passenger aircraft stands. The largest stand, of which there is only one, is for aircraft types such as the Boeing 767. The medium stands, of which there are five, are for aircraft types such as the Boeing 757, Airbus (A)319/320 or Boeing 737-800. The smallest stands, of which there are ten, are for aircraft types such as the Boeing 737-400, Embraer 145 or ATR 42. All of the stands are within short walking distance of the main terminal, so they are described by BAA as “contact” stands. In fact, as already mentioned in the “terminals” section, when you’re in the departure lounge you’ll get a great view down the nose of the aircraft currently on the stands.

✈ AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL

Air traffic control at the airport is managed by **National Air Traffic Services** (NATS). The most relevant frequencies are listed below. I cannot provide the full list, but airscene.co.uk has a great, and free, aviation frequency database.

TOWER	118.100	GROUND	121.700	ATIS	121.850
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✈ SPOTTING AREAS

There is no shortage of spotting areas at Aberdeen airport, although all of the best spots are un-official ones. I'll be talking about the un-official ones in this guide, so it is important to note that you have to **abide by the Scottish Outdoor Access Code** (a summary of outdoor access law in Scotland). The main limitation in spotting near the airport is that **you may not trespass onto the airport grounds** (marked by a perimeter fence), **or interfere with the airport facilities** – this may include being too close to the perimeter fence or other property of the airport. You may be approached by the airport authorities or the Police, in which case you must abide by their instructions. However, it is unlikely that they will have any problems with your presence as long as you abide by the outdoor access code and are not breaking any other laws related to aircraft – for example; using certain types of radio equipment (such as transmitters). *It is useful to use the Google placemarks along with this section, to see where these areas are.*

THE GRASSY KNOLL

This is one of the best spots at the airport for getting a close-up view of arriving and departing aircraft using the main runway, or helicopters using one of the smaller runways close to this spot – sometimes manoeuvring or hovering right in front of you. Runway 16 is to your right at this spot, and runway 34 is to your left – although you cannot see the end of runway 34 very well because of trees blocking the view. This spot is slightly elevated, hence the name “grassy knoll”, so you get a view that is uninterrupted by the airport perimeter fence.

THE APPROACH

This is where you'll get a great view of aircraft on the approach up to the landing lights for runway 34 – however once the aircraft is past the landing lights your view is blocked by a fence and higher terrain. Aircraft pass quite low here, as they are on final approach, so it's great for close-ups of the lower-half/underside of aircraft. However, if you're looking for a distant view of aircraft on the approach, go to **the overview** spot.

THE OVERVIEW

This is the widest viewing angle available for the airport, which also provides a great view of aircraft on the approach to runway 16. It's also great for getting a panoramic view of the airport, and with the substantially raised elevation in relation to the airfield, you get a lovely backdrop of Aberdeen City (to get a perspective on how raised this spot is, in relation to the airfield, you can actually see the dip(s) in the 6,000ft main runway!). However, you're going to need a lens with a large focal length, or a camera with a large optical zoom - binoculars are also a good idea!

To use the Google Earth placemarks to find out where these spotting areas are located, simply [click here](#). If a security warning pops up, just click “allow”. This is just so that this file can access and load the placemarks.

TRAFFIC

Aberdeen airport has quite a diverse range of traffic – from light aircraft to large commercial jets – giving the airport the title of the second-busiest in Scotland. It's not beyond possibility that within the peak operating hours you may see everything from the light private aircraft, to the heavy commercial helicopters and airliners. As already explained in the "runways" section, due to the restrictions of the main runway's length and available aircraft stands, the largest aircraft that come to Aberdeen are types such as the Boeing 767. However, aircraft types as large as the Boeing 767 are not common, so most fixed-wing traffic consists of small to medium sized jets or turbo-props.

Some of the aircraft that I've personally seen at Aberdeen airport; Airbus (A)319/320/321, Boeing 757/737, Embraer 145/170/190/195, CRJ 200, BAe 146, Dash 8, Saab 2000, Jetstream 41, Eurocopter AS332/SA 365/AS365/EC225, Fokker 70 and many others! For further information on the operators and aircraft that can be seen at Aberdeen airport, make sure you read the following section titled "fixed-wing operators & aircraft".

✈️ FIXED-WING OPERATORS & AIRCRAFT

This section consists of a table listing the majority of regular scheduled operators at the airport, the aircraft types they most often use, and the destinations they serve. Chartered operators are not listed due to seasonal differences.

However, due to airlines changing routes and frequencies all the time I cannot guarantee that this table is accurate at the time when you view it. For the most up-to-date information on routes, check the airline's individual website.

OPERATOR / AIRLINE	AIRCRAFT	DESTINATION(S)
Air France	Embraer 135/145/170/190	Paris
bmi	Airbus (A)319, Embraer 135/145	London-Heathrow, Birmingham, Esbjerg, Groningen, Manchester, Norwich
British Airways	Airbus (A)319/320/321	London-Heathrow
Eastern Airways	Saab 2000, Jetstream 41	Bergen, Bristol, Durham Tees Valley, East Midlands, Humberside, Leeds/Bradford, Liverpool, Newcastle upon Tyne, Norwich, Scatsta, Southampton, Stavanger, Stornoway, Wick
easyJet	Boeing 737-700, Airbus (A)319	London-Luton
Flybe	Embraer 195, Dash 8-Q400	Belfast-City, Birmingham, Exeter, Jersey, Leeds/Bradford, London-Gatwick, Southampton
KLM	Boeing 737 NG/Classic, Fokker 70	Amsterdam
Loganair (for flyBe)	Saab 340	Kirkwall, Sumburgh
Ryanair	Boeing 737-800	Dublin
SAS	Boeing 737 NG/Classic, CRJ	Copenhagen, Stavanger
Widerøe	Dash 8-Q100/300/400	Bergen, Stavanger

LOCAL TRANSPORT

✈ RAIL

Rail transport in the Aberdeen area is largely operated by Scotrail (now a subsidiary of FirstGroup). Conveniently, for the plane-spotters or regular travellers among you, there is a train station only around ten minutes walk from the airport grounds. Dyce station is served by regular services from Aberdeen City Centre, so it's a viable, and much quicker, alternative to taking the bus. Another benefit is the price – it's around the same price as the bus. For more information on train travel with Scotrail in or around the Aberdeenshire area, go to the Scotrail website [here](#).

✈ BUS

Bus transport in Aberdeen City is operated in the majority by FirstGroup (as 'First'). There are several bus services that route to, or through, Dyce, including a bus that goes all the way to the airport terminal building. Aside from First, Stagecoach (operated by Bluebird), another of the biggest operators in Aberdeen, offers a few services that route through Dyce. So there really isn't a shortage of public transport available in the Aberdeen area. For more information on bus travel with First, go to the First website [here](#). For Stagecoach, go to their website [here](#).

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✈ DISCLAIMER

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✈ USEFUL LINKS & FURTHER READING

The official Aberdeen airport website, from BAA - <http://www.aberdeenairport.com/>
UK Aviation ATC Frequency Database - <http://www.airscene.co.uk/airband.php>
Google Maps (satellite & illustrated maps) - <http://maps.google.co.uk/>
Airfield charts (click on IAIP > Aerodrome Index – Specific) - <http://www.nats-uk.ead-it.com/>
Scottish Outdoor Access Code - <http://www.outdooraccess-scotland.com/>