THE LINK
YOUR FLIGHT PLAN TO
A CAREER IN AVIATION
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Cabin attendants create a safe, enjoyable atmosphere for passengers while supporting the flight crew.

Airport managers make sure that the entire airport is running smoothly as a business.

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Air maintenance engineers ensure that the airline’s fleet is safe, reliable and airworthy.

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You could work in one of the most exciting industries on earth as a pilot, cabin attendant, engineer, airport manager, cargo manager or customer service agent. There are a host of opportunities for dynamic young people interested in aviation. Check out these options and decide for yourself!
That's not just the captain's job; the first officer also helps with navigation and landing, while the co-pilot helps with take-off and landing. For every flight, the pilot must complete pre-flight, in-flight and post-flight technical checks to meet the strict aviation safety regulations. You have dozens, if not hundreds of people's lives in your hands, so safety is vital. No pressure!

A pilot is not simply the taxi driver of the skies. He or she is also involved in strategic planning to ensure flights are profitable, with most seats filled and scheduled at times most convenient for passengers. They also plan flight paths according to the weather, decide cargo distribution and seating plans, and communicate with the control tower for take-off and landing. While a pilot can fly a small plane single-handedly, most large commercial flights will have a Captain and a First Officer, or Co-Pilot. The captain flies the plane, handling take-off, in-flight and landing, while the co-pilot helps with navigation.

Cabin attendants have one of the most glamorous jobs out there. You get to travel the world, meeting new people and staying in cool hotels, all while looking good in your stylish uniform. Glamorous as it is, it is hard work.

Cabin attendants’ main responsibility is creating a safe, enjoyable atmosphere for passengers. Cabin attendants give the pre-flight passenger briefing, explain safety instructions, where the emergency exits are and how to use life jackets. Reciting the safety script day after day can get quite tedious, but some mix it up in a creative way to make it fun, but informative. They are part of the airline’s customer service team. They ensure passengers have the best possible experience in the air, and that all their needs are taken care of. Whether someone needs a glass of water before they nap, or a blanket at midnight, they must be on call to serve and assist.

If you become a cabin attendant, you will deal with all kinds of passengers, from unaccompanied minors and people with disabilities, to nervous first-time flyers. You'll also need patience when dealing with rude and difficult passengers. You can't afford to lose your cool no matter how obnoxious that businessman gets, or how unreasonable that elderly lady's requests are. Luckily, you'll be part of a strong supportive team. You'll always be able to call on your fellow colleagues for help.

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To become a pilot you need to matriculate with mathematics, science and geography. From there, you'll want to move on to an aviation academy, where you will study towards your pilot's qualifications and start racking up flying hours.

Airlines that recruit cadets are your best option and depending on the airline, you could become a Junior First Officer at 1000 hours and move on to Captain after attaining 2500 to 3000 hours! Like we said – becoming a pilot takes passion and dedication!
Airports are businesses. To operate effectively, they must be run efficiently and it takes a skilled and committed airport manager to do this. Thousands of people pass through the airport every day and the airport manager must keep everything running smoothly.

If you imagine yourself as a businessperson, managing staff and budgets and planning strategy, then airport management is the perfect job for you. An airport functions just like a big corporation. You have to be on the ball at all times, keeping tenants, customers and passengers satisfied.

As an airport manager, your responsibilities will take you all over the airport – from passport control to duty-free, to check-in, to air-traffic control. You won’t be stuck in your office from nine to five, but it can be a high-stress job. You’ll also need a good understanding of safety regulations and you’ll perform inspections across the airport to ensure worker and passenger safety. An airport manager works closely with a wide array of people – air-traffic controllers, the security team, tenants and the public. You need to be both a leader and a team player.

Airports are all about structure, good leadership, safety, security and respect for the law!!

**Pros**

There’s no such thing as a bored airport manager! No two days are the same.

**Cons**

Sometimes the stress, responsibility and pressure can be overwhelming. This one’s not for softies.

**Have you got what it takes?**

**Education**

To become an airport manager you need to matriculate with mathematics, science and commerce studies. From there you can go on to study business administration or marketing. An airport manager needs a deep knowledge of airport operations. You must understand everyone’s roles and responsibilities and the regulations of the aviation industry.

**Personality**

- Are you a natural leader?
- Can you multitask and think clearly when you’re under pressure?
- Can you communicate clearly and effectively?

Managing an airport can get crazy, as flights are delayed, passengers get impatient and security concerns arise. You must be able to work under pressure and keep a level head while those around you are losing it. You’ll have to juggle several tasks at once. It can be overwhelming at times but luckily there are shifts to share the workload. Good communication skills are also crucial.

**Customer service agent**

Customer service agents are the face of their airline and a key part of the workings at the airport. They help customers make bookings and manage their itineraries.

Missed flights are a fact of life. A customer-service agent must be calm when dealing with stressed, frazzled customers, who might have been on a plane for 10 hours only to miss a connecting flight. As a customer-service agent, you’ll make new bookings, explain where and when to board and send them back on their journey with minimum fuss. You also need to help at the check-in desk, making sure that passengers with special needs, unaccompanied minors and baggage enquiries are looked after.

Customer service agents are representatives and ambassadors of their airline and the airport, so you must be presentable and well informed. You’ll need to field questions about everything from flight schedules to airport layout and aviation regulations.

**Pros**

The satisfaction of helping people and their gratitude to you for ensuring a seamless journey.

**Cons**

Difficult customers, who blame you for everything that goes wrong. We’re not going to lie, it can be stressful.

**Have you got what it takes?**

**Education**

A qualification in travel and tourism and good communication skills are essential. To be a customer services agent you need to know the airport like the back of your hand, because customers will rely on you to direct them when they’re clueless and their flight is about to depart. You’ll also need to know regulations around maximum baggage size and weight.

**Personality**

- Do you have good communications skills?
- Can you handle stressful situations?
- Can you deal with a highly emotional person without getting upset yourself?
As a cargo handler you’re responsible for loading and off-loading air cargo. The coolest part about being a cargo handler is getting to drive a forklift! Air cargo handlers must be able to multitask on tight deadlines to transport goods safely and effectively.

As you work your way up in the field, you can move into freight management and cargo-forwarding services, which involves logistics and planning the transport of cargo – often through several airports and cities.

Cargo management is another job that requires clear thinking under pressure. Everyone checks cargo in late for their flight, and everyone expects their cargo to be at their destination when the flight arrives. It’s your job to ensure that happens. Cargo managers are involved in planning the routes and movements of cargo and understanding complex bills of lading to know special instructions, charges and tariffs. They must also calculate the aircrafts centre of gravity and supervise handlers so cargo and baggage is loaded safely and effectively.

A million and one things can go wrong at an airport. Children go missing, luggage is misplaced, and boarding gates change at the last minute. And that’s not even considering the very real dangers of terrorism and plane crashes.

For airports to work efficiently, we need people with an eye for detail, an understanding of safety and a calm ability to handle small problems before they become big ones. As a safety officer, you will constantly be putting out fires, and also making sure the fire extinguishers are in working order. In an emergency, when it all goes down, there’s no time to call a supervisor. An airport safety officer must take charge and make decisions in the moment. You need to show initiative, work independently and be versatile.

You inspect sites and equipment to maintain health and safety, enforcing the rules of the airport safety regulatory board. As an airport safety manager you’ll monitor everything from runway visibility and surface conditions to abandoned bags and unsafe building situations. You’ll need to relay safety information to senior management and be assertive so your recommendations are implemented, not shrugged off.

To become an airport safety manager you need to have a matric certificate, preferably with geography and life sciences as subjects, which you supplement with good marks in languages. There are specialised degrees you can take in Aviation Management, which encompass the Safety, Quality and Security around airport operations.

The satisfaction of keeping people safe and educating others on best safety practices; teaching the importance of safety means saving lives.

Safety is inconvenient, so people will try to dismiss your concerns. It takes strength of character to ensure safety rules are adhered to.

An airport safety officer must be observant and inquisitive. If an accident happens, you must be able to ask the difficult questions people don’t always want to answer. What happened and why? Who’s responsible? Could it have been prevented? You need to find causes and ensure accidents can be prevented in future.

The satisfaction of solving logistical problems in a practical way to ensure customer needs are met.

All the heavy lifting can sometimes get a bit much, and the constant deadlines never stop.
An air traffic controller is responsible for keeping the skies safe by directing airplanes and ensuring that there’s enough distance between planes in order to avoid air collisions or inconvenient delays. The air traffic navigation officer has to be in communication with the flight crew, at all times from the minute they take off until they shut down after landing. For this reason you need to be a team player with good communication skills. Air traffic navigation officers must be able to work well under pressure and think fast on their feet as things can change in an instant.

As an engineer or aircraft-maintenance technician, you must ensure your airline’s fleet is safe, reliable and airworthy. You must run an effective, controlled maintenance programme. Engineers need to know their aircraft like the back of their hand so they can spot potential issues before they arise. Because people put their lives in the airline’s hands, aircraft maintenance must happen on schedule. Parts must be serviced and replaced, greased and lubricated. This is a job for someone who doesn’t mind getting their hands dirty – in more ways than one.

**Have you got what it takes?**

**Education**

In order to become an Air Traffic Navigation Officer, you need a matric certificate with high marks in mathematics, English, geography and science in order to apply for a bursary with the Air Traffic Navigation Services (ATNS). Before you’re selected, you’ll be interviewed and given a Psychometric test that will determine if you are the right person for the job. Once you’ve passed, you’ll move on to a three month long training course where you’ll be professionally introduced to the exciting world of Aviation and air traffic services. There are a lot of different steps towards specialisation in air traffic navigation, but it’s definitely worth it!

**Personality**

- Do you like working with your hands, preferring to do-it-yourself when it comes to fixing things?
- You’re not only good at maths and science, you love it!
- Do you like to understand how something works?

**Pros:**

- Your hard work is keeping the airline’s fleet soaring across the skies with passengers safe in their steel bellies!
- Meeting maintenance deadlines and ensuring you have all required parts at the right time is stressful.

**Cons:**

- Days are never quite the same; you work flexible shifts so you never have to worry about getting stuck in traffic.
- You can never take work home, so you have to stay for long hours until your shift is over.

- Can you think fast on your feet?
- Can you work well under pressure?
- Do you always have a plan B and plan C (and sometimes D) in your back pocket, just in case?
So you’ve got the aviation bug and you’re determined to carve out a career in the exciting world of global air travel and transportation. Here are some resources to help get you there. Visit the links provided for more info on how you can learn more about careers in aviation.

- South African Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) - [www.caa.co.za](http://www.caa.co.za)
- International Air Transport Association (IATA) - [www.iata.org](http://www.iata.org)
- Transport Education and Training Authority (TETA) - [www.teta.org.za](http://www.teta.org.za)
- South African Air Force (SAAF) - [www.saairforce.co.za](http://www.saairforce.co.za)
- International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) - [www.icao.int](http://www.icao.int)
- Department of Transport (DOT) - [www.transport.gov.za](http://www.transport.gov.za)
- Air Traffic Navigation Services (ATNS) - [www.atns.co.za](http://www.atns.co.za)
- Airports Company South Africa (ACSA) - [www.airports.co.za](http://www.airports.co.za)

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