

The Charter Vetting Checklist

12 questions to ask before your next charter flight

Most charter quotes leave out one thing: whether the aircraft you're quoted is the aircraft you actually fly, operated by the company you actually vetted. Not because anyone's hiding anything — it's just how the broker model usually works. These are the questions that close that gap.

BEFORE YOU BOOK — OPERATOR & SAFETY

1 Who is the certificate holder for this flight — name and certificate number?

A specific answer confirms you're flying with a legitimately certificated operator, not just the company whose name is on your booking confirmation.

2 Has this operator had any incidents, diversions, or unscheduled maintenance events in the last 12 months?

A broker who's actually tracking their operators will have an answer. "Not that I know of" without having checked isn't the same thing.

3 What third-party safety rating does this operator carry, and is it current?

Part 135 is the regulatory floor. Ratings like ARGUS Platinum, Wyvern Wingman, and IS-BAO are voluntary programs layered on top. Ask which tier the operator carries, and confirm it's current.

4 Has the assigned crew's qualifications been independently verified — not just the operator's certification?

Certifications cover the operator. A CHEQ-style crew check covers the individual pilots — current type ratings, recent hours, any FAA enforcement history.

BEFORE YOU SIGN — CONTRACT TERMS

5 Does the contract name the specific aircraft type, operator, and tail number — not just "similar aircraft"?

"Similar aircraft" is a gap. If the contracted aircraft becomes unavailable, "similar" can mean something materially different from what you booked.

6 What are the exact cancellation fee percentages at each time window?

These should be spelled out explicitly in the contract — not referenced to "standard industry terms."

7 How is force majeure defined, and who bears the cost if weather forces an overnight — crew, FBO, hotel?

If the contract doesn't say explicitly, it gets decided against you when it actually comes up.

8 What are the substitution notification and approval rights if the confirmed aircraft becomes unavailable?

A contract that allows substitution without notice or approval gives the operator flexibility that comes at your expense.

9 What fees aren't included in the quoted price, and are they itemized upfront?

Positioning, de-icing, overnight crew, catering, ramp fees — the question is whether you see them at quote time or on the invoice after the flight.

DAY OF DEPARTURE

10 If there's a last-minute substitution, has everyone coordinating your ground logistics been notified?

Any ground coordination built around the original aircraft — FBO, ramp access, catering — needs to be re-confirmed before departure, not after.

11 If the aircraft has a mechanical issue before departure, what's the operator's recovery plan?

Every aircraft can have a mechanical. What separates operators is backup aircraft access and a realistic timeline. Ask before you need the answer.

EVALUATING THE RELATIONSHIP OVER TIME

12 Do your quotes move with market conditions, and does your broker work with more than one or two operators regardless of trip profile?

Static pricing regardless of season, or consistent routing to the same one or two operators, isn't necessarily wrong — but it's a pattern worth noticing across more than one trip.

None of this is about distrust. It's about knowing enough that the first time something feels off, you have a framework for evaluating it instead of just hoping it works out.