

AIRPORT DESIGNATORS[©]

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I reside in Kissimmee, Florida, near Orlando, and on various local television channels I constantly hear reporters referring to Orlando's International Airport as "OIA". OIA is not and never was the correct designation for the Orlando International Airport! I wish all our local reporters would get their story straight and correctly identify the airport and stop calling it OIA! The correct full designator for Orlando's International Airport is in fact "KMCO". Let's explore the subject of Airport Designators a bit further in the following paragraphs.

Certainly for some airports, the assigned and recognized designations make sense and for others not! Let's start off by examining the correct designator for Orlando's International Airport. The current-day site of Orlando's International Airport was originally the site of McCoy Air Force Base through the years of 1940-1975. During these years, the US's Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Location Identifier (LID) for the site was "MCO" and the International Civil Aviation Organization's (ICAO) designation for the site was "KMCO". Please note that the 4-letter designations for all major airports in the USA begin with a "K" prefix; other countries' airports have different letter prefixes assigned to that country for the 4-letter airport designators. During 1975, the McCoy Air Force Base was closed and the property was redeveloped into today's Orlando International Airport; at the time, and is also the case today, both the original noted FAA LID of "MCO" and the ICAO identifier "KMCO" for the Orlando International Airport have been retained.

Here are a few US & world airport designators that seem to make sense:

ATL/KATL – Atlanta, Georgia
MIA/KMIA – Miami, Florida
OAK/KOAK – Oakland, California
LAS/KLAS - Las Vegas, Nevada
SEA/KSEA - Seattle, Washington
SFO/KSFO – San Francisco, California
PIT/KPIT - Pittsburg, Pennsylvania
LHR/ELHR – London Heathrow Airport (E prefix = ICAO code for northern Europe)
LGW/ELGW – London Gatwick Airport
MAN/EMAN – Manchester, UK
MAD/LMAD – Madrid, Spain (L prefix = ICAO code for southern Europe)

The following airport designators obviously may make one wonder where the airport is; never-the-less, official/established airport identifiers should always be used and clarifications added if/when needed!

GIG/SBGL – Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (S prefix = ICAO code for S. America)
ORD/KORD – Chicago, Illinois
ARN/ESSA – Stockholm, Sweden (again, the E prefix = ICAO code for northern Europe)
EWR/KEWR – Newark, New Jersey
FCO/LFCO - Rome, Italy (again, the L prefix = ICAO code for southern Europe)

It is estimated that the total number of airports around the world exceeds 40,000; of these, ICAO has assigned designators to over 10,000 and of course these would be the world's major airports.

Just a few more words about the 4-letter designators assigned to the various airports around the world. The 4-letter airport identifiers are those that are entered into an airplane's Global Positioning System (GPS) and/or Flight Management System (FMS) by the flight crew prior to takeoff to define the route of the upcoming flight – both for domestic and international destinations.

An array of web sites is available for further insight into airport designators; thus, if you wish to explore this subject further, please do have a look!



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