

Travel Tips for Musicians

UPDATE: March 1, 2015, the FAA finalized the rulebook for airlines concerning musicians who wish to carry instruments on to flights. The action completes the pre-implementation process that has been underway since 2012, when the bill was signed into law. Please remember to check the overhead capacity of the plane on which you will travel to make sure your instrument will fit. Also, try to board as early as possible when overhead compartments are less full. For more information, or to report a problem with an airline, call the local at 615-244-9514, or email Rachel@afm257.org.

NATIONAL MUSICAL INSTRUMENT POLICY:

The FAA Modernization and Reform Act (H.R. 658) established a uniform national policy regarding musical instruments on airplanes. Any musical instrument that can be stored safely in the overhead bin or under the seat may be brought on board as a carry-on item. Maximum size and weight requirements for checked instruments are now 150 linear inches and 165 pounds, including the case. Musicians may also purchase an additional seat to stow their instrument in the passenger cabin, as long as the instrument fits in the seat and has a maximum weight of 165 lbs.

Although the law goes into effect immediately, please be aware that there will be a transition period as airlines change their stated policies to conform to the new law and educate their employees. During this time, musicians are asked to work cooperatively with ticket agents, airport security personnel, gate attendants, and flight crews to resolve any difficulties encountered with regard to the transportation of musical instruments.

Taking the following steps will minimize problems at the airport:

1. Carry a [copy of the law](#) with you and present it to airline employees if necessary.
2. Know the weight of your instrument in its case, and its size in linear inches. Linear inches refers to the sum of the three dimensions. (For example, if your case has dimensions of 20" x 10" x 10", the linear measure would be 40".)
3. Try to be one of the first on board. That way, you will have more time to stow your instrument, and more space options. When making your reservation, request a seat assignment at the back of the plane. During the boarding process, passengers seated in the rear of the aircraft are boarded immediately after first class and special needs passengers. You can also request pre-boarding at the gate. Not all airlines will allow it, but you can ask to board with the special needs passengers.
4. Limit the number of carry-on items. On most airlines, passengers are permitted one carry-on bag (stored in the overhead bin) and one personal item (stored under the seat). Your instrument will be counted as one of these items. The new law does not allow for exceptions to this rule.

PACKING AND CARRYING YOUR INSTRUMENT:

1. Remove all extraneous items from the case. All tools and other items should be checked or carried separately to simplify the screening process. What are completely familiar items to you -cleaning fluids and tools, valve oil, end pins, reed knives, mutes, tuners, metronomes - may seem mysterious to screening personnel. Know what items are prohibited in carry-on bags by [TSA regulations](#) . If you are unsure whether an item is permitted, the safest course is to keep it in your checked baggage.
2. In the event TSA considers an item suspect and takes possession of it, there are potentially two options available if you cannot surrender the item. Some airlines will provide passengers with a box or envelope, obtained at the airline's ticket counter, in which the item can be shipped back home. Also, in some airports, private shipping companies have set up self-service kiosks. Envelopes are provided, in which the refused items are placed, along with money to cover the shipping costs. Because neither of these services are mandated by any federal agency, it is not possible to know in how many airports these options exist. However, know there may be alternatives to having an item confiscated.
3. Arrive early. You may hear that check-in and screening takes only minutes - THIS MAY NOT BE TRUE FOR MUSICIANS. Arriving early will allow for the time you may need to work with security and flight crews to make sure your instrument gets safely on board. Bear in mind that problems may take some time to correct. Therefore, it is imperative that you arrive AT THE GATE at least one hour before boarding time.

DEALING CALMLY WITH LAST-MINUTE PROBLEMS:

It is crucial that as a traveling musician you recognize several important facts.

1. The most important responsibility of airport and transportation officials is security.
 2. The most important responsibility of gate attendants and flight attendants is safety.
 3. The most important responsibility of the captain is safety AND security.
- Your instrument represents an unusual item that could very well be unexpected. Gate attendants and flight crews have a very short period of time to seat passengers in an aircraft. You (and your instrument) are only one of many passengers that will likely have special needs. Don't take it personally when a gate agent or flight crewmember seems indifferent to your concerns. Their time is limited.

In many cases, the problem may be resolved easily. Remain calm and polite, and consider these options:

1. If stopped by a flight attendant, calmly and quickly explain the precautions you have taken to prepare your instrument to safely travel in-cabin.
2. Be accommodating by suggesting placing the instrument in the rear of the aircraft, or securing the instrument with cords or ties (bring your own).

3. If necessary, immediately ask to deplane so that you can resolve this matter with airline supervisors. Remember that you have fifteen minutes at most to resolve this issue before the plane backs away from the gate.

4. DO NOT block the way of boarding passengers.

Finally, prepare yourself for the possibility that you may not be able to travel with your instrument in-cabin - even if you have followed all possible procedures.

What will you do? Are you willing to send your instrument by air courier? Is it packed well enough to withstand transportation in the cargo hold? Should you, or can you, travel by train or car?