

FOLK ALLIANCE INTERNATIONAL

Summary of [2015 Department of Transportation Final Ruling on FAA Modernization and Reform Act of 2012 : Carriage of Musical Instruments](#) on US Aircrafts.

This rule effective as of March 6, 2015 and applies only to scheduled and charter flights operated by US carriers operating to, from, or within the US.

Airlines must treat small instruments (including guitars and violins) like any other carry-on bag. But while this rule allows you to take instruments on board and stow them in overhead bins or under your seat, it does NOT give you priority over other passengers or their bags.

The rule states instruments are to be stored like all other carry on bags -- ON A FIRST COME, FIRST SERVED BASIS. That means no one has to remove their bag to make room for your guitar...but once your guitar is safely stowed, you can't be forced to remove it from the plane. The DOT suggests that you take advantage of pre-boarding options that are offered to passengers, such as the ones sold on a pre-flight basis or bundled into the airline's credit card program, often along with free checked bags.

If you do decide to bring an instrument on board, you are still limited in the number of free carry-on items you can bring with you. Most carriers allow two: one personal item (such as a purse or briefcase) and a larger item (usually a roller bag). If you bring an instrument, it counts as one of your carry-ons. The rule states that carriers are not allowed to charge passengers with a musical instrument as carry-on baggage any fee other than the standard one they charge for any carry-on bag. So, if you are allowed one carry-on and a personal item and you also have a guitar, you may not be allowed to bring everything on the plane, unless you pay the extra fee charged to all passengers wanting to bring three items on the plane. But it's more likely you'll be asked to check one of the three.

For larger instruments (bigger than a guitar, like a cello), the rule says "Each covered carrier shall permit a passenger to carry a musical instrument that is too large to meet the requirements of section 251.3 in the aircraft cabin, without charging the passenger an additional fee, as long as certain rules are met:

- Your instrument must be in a case or cover so as to avoid injury to another passenger
- It can't weigh more than 165 pounds with the case/cover (or applicable weight restrictions for the specific plane)
- You can't have anything in the case that isn't legal on a plane, including sharp objects.
- The instrument is stowed in accordance with FAA regulations

You've purchased an additional seat for the instrument & it is not blocking signage

If you purchase a seat for your instrument, you won't be able to sit in an exit row. Your instrument must be strapped into a window seat or in the bulkhead.

For the complete government document:

<http://www.dot.gov/airconsumer/final-rule-musical-instruments>

Travel tips documents available at <http://www.folkalliance.org/enjoy-folk/travel-rights>

Want to get involved in FAI Air Advocacy? Email us at travelrights@folk.org.

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TIPSHEET FOR TRAVELING WITH INSTRUMENTS ON AIRPLANES

by Dan Navarro

IF YOU CHECK

- Choose a case that will provide sufficient strength but be light enough for you to manage.
- Pack your instrument securely. Loosen strings, secure or remove loose or bulky objects in case.
- Make sure latches are secure. Tape over them if possible.
- If you use a Skycap, tip big, \$5 and up per bag.

IF YOU CARRY ON

- Choose a case with sufficient protection, stability and lightness.
- Make every effort to secure priority boarding in advance.
- Wear the case like a backpack, on both shoulders, to minimize its profile
- Keep a copy of the FAA regulation available, as a printout or on your smartphone or tablet.
- If asked to check the bag, politely request that you be allowed to try to get it onboard.
- Explain that the instrument is not as big as it appears because of narrowness of the neck area
- Once on the plane, take the most convenient open overhead, unless they are in short supply.
- If an overhead is already partially occupied, ask before rearranging things so both items fit.
- If your instrument is on the plane and fits, it cannot be forced to be removed or checked.
- If your instrument will not fit onboard, ask for a description of the hold area it will occupy.
- Ask to speak to the attendant who will place your instrument in the hold.
- Request the instrument be returned to you at the arrival gate, not at baggage claim.
- Above all, be polite. Being convincing is helpful. Being aggressive is not.
- Get names of flight attendants and gate clerks if needed.
- Get numbers and name for Customer Service in case of issues.

UPON LANDING

Check your instrument for damage BEFORE leaving the gate area or baggage claim area.