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

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.
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 (a summary is included in this document) 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

UPON LANDING

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

Summary of 2015 FAA Ruling on Air Travel with Instruments*

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.