

Travelling by Air with a Musical Instrument

What to expect at airport security screening

The Canadian Air Transport Security Authority (CATSA) is responsible for security screening at Canadian airports. All musical instruments must be screened before entering the secure area. This guide explains what musicians can expect when travelling with an instrument.

1. Before you travel: check with your airline

Airlines determine whether an instrument can travel in carry-on based on their size restrictions.

- Confirm your airline's rules for size, weight, and carry-on eligibility.
- Most airlines limit the number of carry-on items.
- Some airlines may allow you to purchase a seat for your instrument.

2. At the airport: security screening

If you opt to bring your instrument as carry-on, you'll bring it with you through the security screening checkpoint. You can accept your instrument to be screened by the X-ray machine, or you may request a physical search.

X-ray screening

If the instrument fits safely through the X-ray machine.

- Place it in a bin.
- Tell the screening officer if the instrument is fragile or valuable.
- If you're unsure, ask for assistance.

Physical search

If the instrument is too large for the X-ray machine, or if you prefer to bypass the X-ray for any reason, both the instrument and its case will undergo a physical search. Please let the screening officer know about any special handling instructions or protocols.

During a physical search:

- The instrument must be removed from its case so both items can be screened separately. The screening officer will explain each step of the process.
- You may ask to hold your instrument while the screening officer conducts the search.

- After the search, the screening officer will offer to repack the instrument or let you repack it yourself.

3. Items that travel with your instrument

- **Liquids, aerosols and gels:** Items such as valve oil, slide oil, cork grease, guitar polish or violin varnish must be in containers of 100 mL or less. These containers, along with any other liquids you are carrying, must fit in one clear, resealable plastic bag no larger than 1 L. Pack larger containers in checked baggage.
- **Tools:** Small tools, such as drum keys and hex keys, are permitted in carry-on baggage if the head and shaft measure 6 cm (2.4 in.) or less from the joint to the tip.
- **Solid wax or resin:** Products that remain solid at room temperature are permitted in carry-on baggage in any quantity.
- **Sharp objects:** Restrictions vary by item and destination. For flights within Canada or to an international destination other than the United States, blades measuring 6 cm (2.4 in.) or less may be permitted in carry-on baggage. Knives of any type or length are not permitted in carry-on baggage on flights to the United States. Pack larger blades and saws in checked baggage.
- **Other accessories:** Items such as strings, reeds, tuners, capos, mouthpieces, mutes, bows and slides are permitted in carry-on baggage.
- **Batteries:** Spare lithium batteries must travel in your carry-on baggage. This includes batteries for items such as tuners, pickups or pedals. Visit [CATSA's Guidelines for Batteries](#) for more information.

Use the What Can I Bring? tool on CATSA's website to confirm if a specific item is permitted, where to pack it and what restrictions apply. The screening officer makes the final decision about items allowed through the checkpoint.

4. Quick tips for musicians

- Allow extra time at the checkpoint, especially if your instrument is large or requires a physical search.
- Inform the screening officer immediately that you are travelling with a musical instrument.
- Screening procedures may differ at airports outside Canada.