

# Traveling with your Harp

I know, you have been practicing a lot! Before you know it, you will be giving your first performance somewhere – maybe a wellness retreat or to an audience at an event. Whatever you do, this means traveling with your harp and you will want to know how to care for your harp when you travel.

First things first: ***Get to know your harp.*** *This is very important!*

Understand the size of your harp: A lap harp up to a small to medium sized (34 strings or smaller) harp should be easily transportable no matter where you go. Obviously, if you happen to have a pedal harp no matter the size I would not recommend transporting it.<sup>1</sup> However, harps can be rented if you are traveling somewhere and a reputable harp dealer can point you in the right direction.

For now, we will focus on transporting a small to medium sized harp of 34 strings or smaller. These harps are manageable to carry around.

## Pre-Trip Planning

Make sure that you have a gig bag where you can safely transport your harp. If you did not get a gig bag for your harp these are easy to find and can be purchased from harp dealers. You want to make sure that your harp fits securely into the gig bag.

Be sure that you have your harp accessories in your gig bag including the stand as well as your other items including a tuning key, a tuner and extra strings. The extra strings is very important: You don't want to have a string break on you especially when you are on the road. If you have a reputable quality harp, strings for your harp should be easy to purchase either from your harp manufacturer or a harp dealer.

Examine your harp for any defects and check your strings to be sure that they are adequate. You might want to give your harp a good cleaning before you place that harp in that gig bag.

Be sure that you can lock your gig bag. You can purchase a small luggage size padlock to secure your harp and hardware stores do have them. Tag your bags with your name and address.

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<sup>1</sup> Besides, pedal harps are meant for home use.

You will also want to invest in a music carrying bag for carrying your accessories including your sheet music. Additionally, you will also want to invest in a travel music stand that can fold down for travel.

Another good investment would be a folding harp cart that folds down so that you can place it in the trunk of your car. This makes carrying your harp a breeze whether it is to your hotel room or to an event venue.

### **Traveling by Car**

Traveling by car is the easiest of all when it comes to transporting your harp. It's with you wherever you travel.

Depending on the size of car you have, I would recommend placing the harp in the back seat of your car. Brace the harp sideways so that any movement is minimized during transport and secure the harp with the seat belts if you can.



*An example of placement of a harp in your car. Notice how it is braced to help prevent any movement during transport. This is a 34 string harp.*

Placement of your harp inside its gig bag also depends on how large your harp is. If you have a small travel harp it might fit inside the trunk of your car, but keep in mind of other items such as baggage. The best way to check it out is to place the gig bag both in the back seat as well as the trunk.

Your music bag as well as your music stand bag can go into your trunk along with your baggage. Pack your items securely to help prevent damage as well as to prevent theft. The importance of locking your vehicle when you make a stop for meals

or other items cannot be overemphasized. ***However, never leave your harp in your vehicle when you park for the night.***

### **Traveling by Amtrak**

Traveling with your harp on Amtrak is manageable and doable, but it requires preplanning beforehand. Small and medium sized harps can be accommodated in a luggage rack or an overhead bin, but large size harps may require the purchase of a second seat.

Before you plan your travel on Amtrak I would strongly suggest taking your harp gig bag to an Amtrak station near you. Inform the agent on duty that you will be traveling with your harp and the agent can make a determination whether your harp can go into the overhead bin or you will require the purchase of a second seat for your harp. Do this well in advance of your travel so that there are no surprises when you go to check in for your trip.

Keep in mind of Amtrak's policies regarding the transport of musical instruments:

- Carry on: Up to 50 lbs. and 28" x 22" x 14". Oversized items cannot exceed 72" in height.
- Checked: Up to 50 lbs. and 100 linear inches. ***Due to the delicate nature of the harp instrument, checking any harp on Amtrak as checked baggage is not recommended due to the inherent risk of damage during transport.***

If your harp exceeds the size limits you will have to end up purchasing a second seat for your harp. That second seat will be sold to you as a full revenue seat according to Amtrak's website.

***Amtrak's Auto Train:*** Your harp can stay in your vehicle. However, locking your harp gig bag is strongly recommended.

If your harp fits into an overhead bin on board the train, special care should be taken so that passengers do not put their items on top of your harp.

### **Traveling by Air**

My recommendation: ***Never travel with your harp of any size by air.*** It's a lot easier and less complicated to rent a harp at your destination. In fact, rental harps can be delivered to your hotel. The *only* exception would be a small Harpsicle harp that could more than likely fit in the overhead bin.

If you *have to* travel with your harp by air:

Before you book travel, consider taking your harp gig bag to the airport and let the ticketing agents at the ticket counter for your airline make a decision whether your harp can go into one of the overhead bins or you will need to purchase an additional seat. This will save you a lot of disappointment the day of travel.

We'll use Southwest Airlines policies for carrying musical instruments on board as an example.<sup>2</sup> Keep in mind, policies for carrying musical instruments on board vary from airline to airline, so your airline's policy should be followed.

The maximum size limits for a musical instrument on Southwest Airlines is 24" x 16" x 10". If it exceeds this limit it can still be carried on board provided there is space available.

However, if your harp exceeds the size limit then an additional seat will need to be purchased. Most airlines including Southwest should be able to sell you that additional seat at a child's fare.

On the day of your travel, plan to arrive at the airport early and check in at the ticket counter – *never* curbside. Inform the ticket agent that you have purchased a second seat for your harp. According to Southwest Airlines policy, you will be required to sit in the front bulkhead seat with your harp in the window seat<sup>3</sup>. Further, your harp must be secured with a seatbelt and it cannot block any aircraft signage.

In support of getting you and your harp on board more than likely you will be given an opportunity to preboard so that you can secure your harp to the seat. Seatbelt extensions are available and can be requested from the flight attendant.

***NEVER, NEVER check your harp in checked baggage!!!*** The rough handling environment of checked baggage could mean damage to your harp! It cannot be over-emphasized enough that trip pre-planning is necessary when you plan to travel with your harp by air.

When you pass through the TSA security checkpoint inform the officer that you have a harp with you and that it needs to be hand searched. This may take some time, so arriving early for your flight is highly recommended.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://support.southwest.com/helpcenter/s/article/traveling-with-a-musical-instrument>

<sup>3</sup> Specific airline policies should be followed regarding pre-boarding and securing your harp on board.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.tsa.gov/travel/frequently-asked-questions/what-steps-are-taken-screen-musical-instruments>

## **At your Hotel**

Be sure that you complete hotel check in well before you are on your way. Most hotel chains including Hilton will allow you to check in to your room 24 hours before your arrival including selecting your room, so you'll want to do that to avoid any delays at the front desk.

Once you arrive, the first items you should bring up to your hotel room on your luggage cart should be your music bag, your music stand in its carry case and your personal luggage. Your harp in its gig bag should be the *only* item you place on the luggage cart by itself. Once you are settled in your hotel room, check your harp for any damage.

Make sure that you have the website of a reputable harp dealer programmed into your smartphone's web browser favorites. That way, in case you need strings for your harp while you are on the road you can order them online and you can have them shipped overnight to your hotel. However, having extra strings on hand before you travel is ideal.

## **Rental harps while you're on the road**

As I mentioned earlier attempting to travel with your harp by air isn't recommended, save for a small lap harp such as a Harpsicle harp. If you are flying somewhere for a performance, harps can be rented while you are at your destination. Budget Harp Rentals<sup>5</sup> out of Jacksonville, Florida (as an example) has rental harps which can be shipped to your hotel.

All you would have to do is to arrange the logistics of having your rental harp shipped to your hotel. As soon as you have the shipping arrangements confirmed, you will want to contact your hotel and let them know that you will be having a harp shipped their way for when you arrive. Ensure that who you rent your harp from marks on the shipping paperwork to hold for guest arrival along with your reservation confirmation number and your arrival date – this alerts the hotel staff to hold the harp for when you arrive.

When you depart for the trip home, getting the harp back to the harp dealer should be a snap. Your harp dealer should arrange for the logistics from picking up the harp from your hotel and shipping it back to the harp dealer. In any event, make sure you get package tracking numbers both when you have your harp shipped and when you return the harp – that way, you can have proof of delivery in case of any problems that may arise.

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<sup>5</sup> Budget Harp Rentals' website is at [www.budgetharprentals.com](http://www.budgetharprentals.com)

## **One Final Thought on Traveling with your Harp**

Traveling with your harp can be easy as long as you provide for protection of your harp during transit. Traveling by car is easiest as you would have your harp with you at all times. Traveling by train or air can present some challenges depending on the size of your harp.

Being informed when you travel with your harp by train or air is the best. Checking out policies and procedures beforehand goes a long way into planning your trip and avoids unpleasant surprises the day of your travel. If cost is a factor and you have to travel especially by air, the option of renting a harp at your destination is highly recommended.

Besides, having your harp with you when you travel enables you to get some practice in while you are on the road, especially when you are in your hotel room. And if you are taking regularly scheduled harp lessons with your harp teacher, more than likely your harp teacher can arrange to continue your lessons on the road via online videoconferencing such as Zoom.

*Have a safe trip! Don't forget to set some time for practice when you are on the road!*

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