

Leaving on a Jet Plane: Flying with your Props

Image credit: [Ross Parmlly](#)

As flowmies, we like to have our props with us wherever we go. When travelling by land, this is generally not a problem. However, if you're travelling by air, you may run into some complications, especially if you want to take your fire props on the plane with you.

There are many horror stories out there of people having their props confiscated, or even not being allowed into their arrival country with them. So, here are a few things you can do to minimise any potential hassles, and the risk of getting your prop confiscated at the gate. Have a look at the prohibited items on your airline's website, and if you are travelling internationally, be sure to check your destination's regulations. Singapore, for example, has very strict regulations around weapons, including replicas – items like swords and nunchakus, fire or otherwise, will run you the risk of a fine or even jail time.



Travelling domestically is a little more 'laxed, but it still pays to take precautions when travelling with your prop, especially fire props. Often when we travel domestically, it's done so with light packing so there is no need for checked baggage. Unfortunately, it is a little riskier to fly with your props in your hand luggage, but it's not impossible!

Generally speaking, you shouldn't run into any issues with non-fire props in your hand luggage. The exception to this may be larger items like a non-collapsible staff or dragon, as these won't fit safely under the seat or in the overhead compartment and will likely need to be checked.

However, even with smaller props, it does pay to do everything you can to avoid any issues. If you can, dismantle your prop into separate parts, and store the parts in separate areas of your bag. For example, take the tether off your rope dart and store the head and rope separately. This way, there's less of a chance of it being considered a weapon.

Flying with fire props is a bit of a different story. Some people have flown with theirs in carry-on and have had no issues. Others have encountered major problems and have had their props confiscated. Below are some tips you can use to minimise the risk of hassles when flying with your fire props, and you should use these regardless of whether you're taking them in carry-on or are checking them. We recommend using checked baggage, if possible, but if you are limited to carry on, use these tips and hopefully you'll have no problems!



Image credit: [Phil Mosley](#)

One of the biggest risks when flying with fire props is the smell of residual fuel. Any smell of fuel from inside the plane triggers warning bells for airport staff, as this could mean a potential leak somewhere in the plane. If you're using Pegasol (Solvent 3440 Special) as your fuel (our recommendation) this won't be too much of an issue 'cos it doesn't really stink. However, we know not everyone has access to Peg. Many people still use Kerosene, which does really stink!

If you don't have access to Peg and instead use Kerosene to spin, you can (very carefully) use methylated spirits or isopropyl alcohol on your wicks to help burn off the smell of the Kero. This should be done with extreme caution as these substances are much more volatile than the recommended spinning fuels.

Under no circumstances should you spin your prop with these substances!

Pour a little on your wick, hold your prop so the flame will not rise up to burn you or the unwicked parts of your prop, light it up and let it burn off. If you are taking this step, please do so with extreme caution, and ensure you have your fire safety equipment handy in case things go wrong.

Regardless of what fuel you use, the following steps should be taken when flying with your fire props.

- First and foremost, this should go without saying but we'll say it anyway – never, never, ever, ever try to fly with fuel. That's just asking for trouble. Pick some up at your destination.
- Avoid burning your prop in the few days leading up to your flight. This will give it time to air out and minimise any odour coming from the wicks. Leave your prop out in the sun and fresh air, if possible, for a couple of days to help reduce the smell.
- Clean, clean, clean! Use soapy water, or cleaning wipes to clean the non-gripped, non-wicked parts of your prop to remove as much sooty residue as possible. The cleaner you can get it, the better – and let's face it, whether or not we're flying with our props, we should all be doing this step more regularly than we do!
- Seal your wicks. You can use glad wrap or a plastic bag, seal it with tape at the bottom, and then put some funky socks, balloons, drink koozies, or purpose made wick covers over the top. This will help it look less like a fire prop and as such, less 'menacing'.
- Include a note that clearly states the item is 'juggling equipment' or 'circus equipment'. Those not involved with flow arts are more likely to understand juggling and circus, and leave it be.
- You can also include a business card, or simply write your contact details on a piece of paper too. Some people even include a photo of them using the prop (unlit) although this is probably not necessary.

- Regardless of whether you are checking your prop or taking it in your carry-on, it's a good idea to dismantle it as much as possible and store the parts separately. For example, remove the heads of your poi (then wrap as outlined above), pop them into a Ziplock bag and pack them in an area of your luggage that is separate to the tether and the handles.
- Smaller props can be packed in your luggage after wrapping.
- Larger props will likely need to be checked as oversized. We recommend using a sports equipment bag for this, such as a surf or snowboard bag, as this type of luggage is often more affordable than just an 'oversized item'.
- If you are questioned about your prop/s, remain calm and rational. You're less likely to get through unscathed if you get agitated, aggressive, or appear nervous. The airport staff are just doing their jobs, and if you cause a scene, it will not end well for you.
- Remember: in most cases, flying with fire props is not prohibited! They can not spontaneously burst into flames, and they do not hold fuel – this gets burned off when we spin.
- Be prepared to answer questions without going overboard on the details (some people take this as a sign of hiding something). Use the magic words 'toy, juggling, circus' and avoid the nasty words 'fire, fuel'.
- If you're still concerned, you could consider this as a time to refresh your wicks. Remove the old wicks before flying and put the new ones on at your destination. You will, however, still need to get your prop home - unless it's a one way trip!
- The alternative is to courier your prop/s to your destination.

While we cannot guarantee you'll get your prop on your flight with these tips, it will certainly reduce the chance of running into problems. You may not do any of these things and breeze through without an issue, or you may take every precaution and happen to land a Gandalf on a bad day who simply will not let you pass. And sometimes, that's just the way things are.



If your prop does get confiscated when departing from anywhere in New Zealand, remain calm. There is still a chance you can get it back. Call the airport once you arrive at your destination (the sooner the better) and ask for the Avsec (aviation security) supervisor. This person should be a different person to the on-duty supervisor who was actually on the floor at the terminal.

Calmly explain what happened and ask them to check the regulations. It also pays to double check the prohibited items before this call so you can explain that your prop does not meet any of the criteria for these items. Chances are, they'll find the item was wrongly confiscated and arrange to get it back to you.

The more of us who fly with our props, and remain cool, calm, and collected throughout the process, the higher the chances are of issues becoming a thing of the past. So, if you're flying with your prop, please play it cool so we can continue to spin and burn wherever the road (or air) takes us!