

Buying your first Ukulele

Ukuleles come in several sizes. The most popular are:

Soprano

The Soprano ukulele measures 21" inches (53.3cm) in length and is the smallest of the three main sizes (makes the perfect travel companion). The Soprano offers an undeniably sweet percussive sound of yesteryear which causes so many people to fall in love with it. Generally speaking however, the Concert and Tenor are more melodically pleasing and offer greater length of note. Most starter ukuleles will be Sopranos, but it's worth mentioning that for larger hands and broader shoulders, if you want to get started on a comfortable instrument that's easier to play, it is recommend looking towards the Concert or Tenor sizes.

Concert

The Concert ukulele usually measures about 23" inches (58.4cm) in length and was designed to be slightly larger with a louder, deeper and more melodic tone, more fitting for concert playing. In recent years Concert ukuleles have gained in popularity for their rounder and more melodic overall tone, and its size which many people find a little more comfortable than the smaller Soprano size. With its extra comfort and mellower tone the Concert ukulele is often the first choice for beginners.

Tenor

The Tenor ukulele measures on average, 26" inches (66cm) in length and has become the preferred size for many professional players. It offers a louder overall sound, with greater sustain in the notes making it more suitable for playing melody. Beginners may find the Tenor ukulele harder to strum than Concert or Soprano.

All three types of ukulele are tuned to the same four notes (G C E A).

Most people start with a Soprano. However, guitarists often go for something bigger. People with large hands often find the Soprano too small to play. Also, think about how wide the neck is at the nut - the top near the tuning pegs - a bit wider than the norm can make playing easier. The bigger the uke, the higher it can play (because it has more frets).

Nearly all ukes at popular prices are made in China and there is nothing wrong with them. The very cheapest ukes tend to be priced at £12-£20 and are often brightly coloured. These are aimed at schoolchildren and might be worth avoiding. They have a tinny sound, strings that are hard to play and tend to have poor intonation.

It is suggested that you spend at least £20 - £30 on a uke. As a rough guide, for basic models Sopranos cost £20 to £50, Concert ukes about £60 and Tenors £70. However, you can spend much more than this if you want to!

There is an argument for trying before you buy. However, if you have never played one then you may not know what to look for.

As a guide some good 'starter' ukuleles are made by Lanikai (L21 series), Brunswick and Ohana (among others).

If you want to do some online research then online shops such as Southern Ukulele Store (<http://www.southernukulelestore.co.uk/>) or World of Ukes (<https://worldofukes.co.uk/>) - have a good selection of 'middle' to 'upper-end' ukuleles. Good place to see what's available and both will happily give advice and suggestions if you call them and both will (if you ask) allow you to return an instrument if you do not like it.

If you do buy a cheap uke (e.g. at a charity shop) consider buying it some decent strings. (e.g. Aquila Nylgut - about £5).

Please note that if you have long fingernails, then you may need to shorten them on the hand that forms the chords (usually the left).

As well as buying a uke we would recommend you also acquire:

a bag to keep it in (preferably one with a pocket)

a clip-on tuner for tuning

a music stand for your music.

When you have bought your uke then look on YouTube for videos explaining how to tune it and play it. You may also find 'Got A Ukulele' (<https://www.gotaukulele.com/>) a useful website for ukulele reviews and tuition videos.

Come along to our Hillingdon U3A Ukulele sessions where beginners are always welcome!