

\$5.95 U.S./Canada

# UKULELE BUYER'S GUIDE

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## Introduction

The Ukulele has quickly become one of the most popular instruments today. You'll see many different artists playing Ukulele's...Paul McCartney, Jason Mraz, the band "Train" features the Ukulele in their song "Soul Sister" and who could forget "Somewhere over the Rainbow" by Israel Kamakawiwo'ole from the movie "Finding Forrester".

There are several reasons for the popularity of the Ukulele but one of the main reasons is that the Ukulele is so easy and fun to play. From ages 4 to 104 just about anyone can have fun playing and making music with a Ukulele.

There are only 4 nylon strings to play and they're very easy on the fingers. If you've played the guitar you know it can take some time for your finger tips to get used to the soreness that you experience when you first start playing the steel strings on most guitars. Not so with the Ukulele...the nylon strings are very easy and comfortable to play. Many chords on the Ukulele can be played with only 2 or 3 fingers. That's what's so great about playing the Ukulele, in no time at all you'll be making music and loving it.



Here's a little Ukulele history lesson for you!

## History of the Ukulele: Then and Now

The Ukulele is a small four stringed instrument from the guitar family. The instrument is usually considered a Hawaiian version of the Portuguese cavaquinho. The cavaquinho was first brought to Hawaii in August of 1879. An immigrant ship called the Ravenscrag brought three Portuguese musicians named Augusto Dias, Manuel Nunes, and Jose do Espirito Santo to Hawaii. Shortly after their arrival on the island, the three men thrilled the populous, and King David Kalakaua, with their music.

The name "Ukulele" is usually translated as "jumping flea" because the Hawaiians were so amazed at the way the fingers of the Portuguese musicians would move while they played the instrument. However, Queen Lili'uokalani stated that the name was taken from the words



“uku” which means “gift” and “lele” which means “to come”. Therefore, the word “Ukulele” means “the gift that came here”.

King David Kalakaua promoted the Ukulele all across Hawaii and even included it at royal music events. The Ukulele is now almost solely associated with Hawaiian folk music.

The instrument did not become popular in the United States until the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition. Several of the music events featured Ukulele ensembles. Jonah Kumalae, a Ukulele maker and player, also appeared. The American audience was fascinated by the instrument. Because the Ukulele was, and is, inexpensive, portable, and easy to play, it became very popular with vaudeville artists. One of the most popular Ukulele players and vaudeville artists from this era was Cliff “Ukulele Ike” Edwards (1895-1971).

The instrument was also popular with professionals and amateurs during the Jazz Age. In fact, Ukulele chord tabs were often sold with the sheet music of popular songs.

During, and after World War II, the Ukulele reached the height of its popularity. Mario Maccaferri, a plastics manufacturer, made a fortune selling hundreds of thousands of Ukuleles. The instrument’s popularity was partly due to the Arthur Godfrey television show and to the new musical hit “Tiptoe through the Tulips” by the American singer/Ukulele player Tiny Tim.

After the late 1960s, the Ukulele, unfortunately, experienced a severe drop in popularity that lasted for nearly two decades. It was not until the late ‘80s and early ‘90s that the instrument again became of interest to the general public. During the ‘80s, the Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain was formed. Also during the ‘80s, the music of Hawaiian born Israel Kamakawiwo’ole became popular. Ukulele virtuoso Jake Shimabukuro made his breakthrough during the late ‘90s. More recently, the instrument has become popular with several indie pop performers.

## **Ukulele: Sizes, Shapes and Woods**

When buying a Ukulele it is important to consider the size and shape of the instrument as well as the wood used in its construction. The most popular sizes are Soprano, Concert and Tenor. A Soprano style uke is best for small hands. You will also see a few novelty shapes from time to time, like oval, pineapple shape, a watermelon shape or even a square cigar box shape.



**Sizes “When it comes to buying your Ukulele size matters”**

Ukuleles come in four standard sizes, Soprano, Concert, Tenor, and Baritone but overall length varies slightly by maker and brand.

The “original” size known as the “standard” size Uke is called the Soprano. A Soprano Uke is the smallest size and has a scale length of only about 13” with a total length of about 20-21 inches from top to tail. The Soprano Ukulele is excellent for beginners or children because of its smaller size. It also produces the sound most associated with Ukuleles. The tuning of the Soprano Uke is the same as the Concert and Tenor Ukes, which is G-C-E-A, but more about tuning later.

The next size larger is the Concert size Ukulele with a scale length of 15” with a total length of about 23-24 inches in length. The larger size is more accommodating for larger hands and has a slightly louder, deeper sound while still retaining much of the same distinctive sound of the Soprano Ukulele.

Then you move up to the Tenor size with a scale length of about 17” with a total length of about 26-27 inches. The Tenor Ukulele gives the fingers more freedom to move and provides greater overall volume and bass than the smaller Soprano or Concert Ukuleles.



The largest of the Ukuleles is the Baritone. The big brother of all the

Ukuleles has a scale length of 19 inches and a total length of about 30 inches. It produces a much deeper sound than any of the other Ukuleles. The Baritone Ukulele is different from all other Ukuleles because it is tuned from low to high tones, similar to that of a guitar. It still has the standard four strings of a Ukulele. It is tuned like the 1<sup>st</sup> 4 strings of the guitar D-G-B-E.



## **Woods**

Ukuleles also come in a variety of woods. No species is necessarily better than any other but they do produce slightly different sounds; Mahogany seems to be the most common. Mahogany is a good wood used in the construction of many types of musical instruments. Mahogany holds up to years of playing and typically produces a rich sound.

Koa wood is the best known hardwood on the Hawaiian Islands and is the wood associated with the "authentic" or traditional Hawaiian Ukuleles.

Other hardwoods used in the construction of Ukuleles include nato, maple, rosewood, spruce, sapele, cedar, ebony, imbuia and a real unique sounding wood called curly mango! Each has their own distinctive sounds and unique grain patterns and colors. Woods such as spruce, maple or curly mango can produce a sound that is a bit brighter than mahogany.

The fingerboard and bridge of most ukes is crafted from rosewood. Rosewood is commonly used in both uke's and guitars because it is a very hard, dense wood.

Some Ukuleles are made from solid pieces of wood and some are made from laminated sheets similar to plywood. Most mass produced Ukuleles are made of plywood laminates (thin sheets of wood glued together). Ukuleles made from laminated woods are less fragile than solid wood instruments and are less prone to cracks. They also tend to be less expensive than "solid" wood ukes. The sound of a solid wood Ukulele will age or "mellow" when played over the years. A Ukulele made from laminated woods will not age or "mellow" over time. A laminated wood Ukulele will typically sound the same 10 years from now as it does today. One benefit of laminated wood instruments is that they tend to be more resistant to cracking or splitting in dry environments due to the cross lamination of the thin sheets of wood.

## **Shapes**

There are three recognizable basic Ukulele shapes. The first and most common is the standard figure-eight body shape similar to that of a guitar. The second basic Ukulele shape is the pineapple shape typical of Hawaiian style Ukuleles and invented by the Kamaka Ukulele Company. The third basic Ukulele shape is called the boat paddle shape because of it's



resemblance to a boat paddle. Sometimes square Ukuleles are categorized as part of the boat paddle shape.

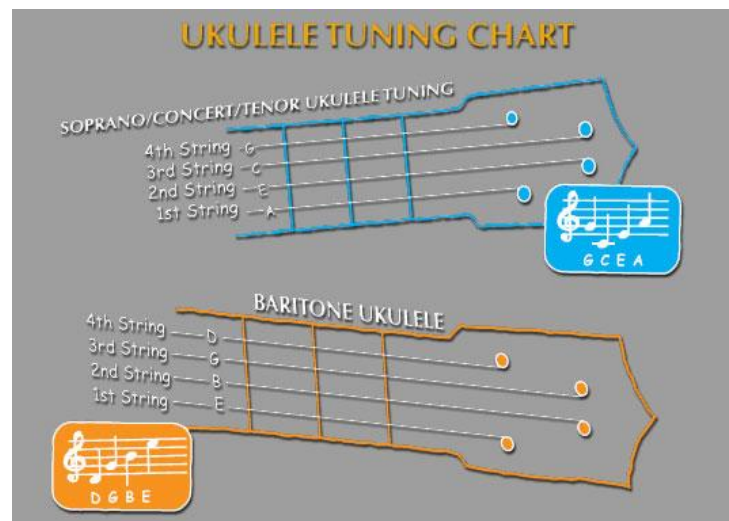
***The hardware is also important!***

The most important hardware you'll find on a Ukulele is the tuning gears. Quality tuning gears make it easy to tune your Uke. High quality tuning gears won't slip due to the strings pressure on the gear and this will help your Uke to stay in tune.

**Ukulele Tuning**

The standard tuning for most Ukes is G-C-E-A except for the Baritone Uke which is tuned D-G-B-E. You may be asking why the different sizes? The bigger the Uke the more volume and bass it produces. As you can see from the different scale lengths there are only a few inches that separate one style from another.

Ukuleles are very sensitive to temperature and humidity. It can take days for a new uke or a new set of strings to find their set point and until this happens you will need to re-tune quite often. New strings will need to stretch for a while until they stabilize; this is true for all new musical instrument strings. If your Ukulele has friction tuners, tighten the screws on the ends of the buttons now and then. These should be lightly snug, not tight. Tuning your uke has been made much easier as a result of the introduction of a variety of



simple, affordable and easy to use electronic tuning devices. Many such tuners can actually be clipped-on (similar to a clothes pin device) to the headstock of the Ukulele. These devices will tell you as you turn the tuning peg on each string when the string is in tune. They are easy to use and very accurate.



## Owning a Ukulele: Tips and Tricks

Is the Ukulele a tiny guitar? If you've played guitar many of the techniques you use to keep it in shape will work on a uke, but the instrument has its own idiosyncrasies. These tips will help you keep your new instrument in shape for years to come.

### *Cleaning*

The Ukulele should be wiped off with a dry cloth after playing to help control moisture. The perspiration from your hands on the strings and back of the neck should also be wiped off with a dry cloth, this will keep the strings clean and they will last longer. Microfibre clothes are ideal for musical instrument care. Never wash the Uke with water. There are numerous finishes used on Ukuleles and each one has specific needs. Regardless of the finish, oil based furniture polish should never be used. Polishes designed for guitars will work. Most musical instrument polishes are water based. Water based polishes will tend to evaporate after use and therefore not leave an oily residue or fingerprint as easily as oil based polishes.

### *Storing*

Your uke should be stored in an area with air between 40% and 60% humidity. Dryness can be a major issue in the winter as air from your heater will be almost moisture free. Most home heating systems remove much of the moisture/humidity from the air. Storing the Ukulele in a gig bag will often be enough to keep the instrument in the proper humidity range. Some players have had luck with moisture-controlling balls designed for cigar humidors. These absorb and release moisture to maintain a set humidity level. Planet Waves makes a collection of humidity control devices to help protect musical instruments and to help you to measure and monitor the humidity of the air around your instrument. When storing your Ukulele always avoid hot and cold temperature extremes. Any instrument made from Wood can be negatively impacted by extremely hot or cold conditions. When you're done playing your Uke it is best to put it back in its bag or case for protection.

### *Changing Strings*

Never use metal strings on a wood uke, they're easy to over-tighten which can damage the instrument. The lone exception is some electric ukes which must have metal strings for the



pickups. Nylon strings don't corrode like metal, so they tend to last longer. However, they are still susceptible to damage and sweat compounds. Ukulele strings are not available with ball ends, so you will need to tie them to the bridge the same way you would on a classical guitar.

### ***Shipping***

If you want your Uke to travel safely by truck, it needs some protection. One of the best ways to ship is to put the Uke in a gig bag and then place that in a large cardboard box filled with packing material. It should be packed in such a way that the bag cannot come in contact with the box. The gig bag will help maintain moisture levels and the layers of padding will keep any outside stress from warping the neck.

### ***Switching over from a guitar***

If you know how to play a guitar, playing a Ukulele will require a little adjustment. In fact if you've ever played the guitar you'll be amazed to find that playing the Ukulele is much easier than playing the guitar. Since Ukulele strings are nylon they're easier on your fingers than the steel strings you'll find on most guitars. Many of the chords on a Ukulele can be played with only 2 or 3 fingers and the small size of the Ukulele's body and neck makes it extremely easy to hold and play.

### ***Caring for Your Ukulele***

*Although we provided some quick tips earlier, here are more ways to ensure you get the most out of your Ukulele... for as long as you can.*

Most people look at a Ukulele and see an exotic instrument, something rarely seen or heard truly utilized outside of a tropical venue. However, with all the merits and benefits this instrument provides, one can quickly begin to find the everyday and modern appeal of the instrument and wish that they themselves had one. The tropical caste for the instrument remains, though. You may ask yourself "Isn't there a special way to take care of such a particular and uncommon instrument?" Well, gathered here is the information you need, my friend. It's not as hard as you may think!



### ***Cleaning and Storage***

First of all, you'll want your instrument pristine and shining, right? The first rule is to never use oil-based products. The residue from these products can eventually damage the finish and strings on your Ukulele. While every finish has specific needs when it comes to cleaning, it's safe to use a general guitar polish that is water-based if you're not sure what you need to be doing for yours in particular. It also helps if you dry off your Ukulele with a simple dry cloth of some sort, to reduce oil buildup and perspiration from your hands. Depending on the finish, excess moisture can cause swelling, and this would alter the sound. It's also beneficial to your strings if they are wiped down regularly.

Ideally you never have to repair any dents, cracks, or swelling in your Ukulele, since repair is very difficult once any instrument is damaged. The sound is almost universally found to be forever changed. There are some simple ways to avoid any damage, however. Having a shape-specific case is a must, of course, but when taking your instrument to far away places it is wise to insulate any case on the inside and out with packing peanuts, bubble wrap, even blankets if you have nothing else. Anything that dulls impact will work. If you put enough love into the care of your Ukulele, damage can be avoided.

### ***Instrument Peculiarities***

Every instrument has a few oddities to its care, and the Ukulele is no exception. The biggest one for most is the humidity tolerance. A Ukulele should be stored in a place that has a humidity of roughly 50%. This can be stretched up or down about 10%, and it's completely expected that it will since environmental controls aren't incredibly common in the average house. However, if it goes beyond that, it can be detrimental to your tuning, and in extreme cases your frame. If you're not sure what the average humidity is in your area you can find it at any weather site that shows localized reports, and there are easily affordable humidifiers and dehumidifiers with which to adjust a room in your home.

Other oddities include the fact that there aren't ball strings for Ukuleles, you have to tie them traditionally, and most strings are nylon. With these things in mind, the care of your new instrument should be both easy and effective!



## Final Tips on Buying Your Ukulele

### ***Purchase a reliable, well known brand***

After researching and trying out many brands we've selected only 5 brands that we believe offer our customers the best quality at a fair price. These brands are Kala, Makala (made by Kala), Lanikai, Ibanez and Yamaha. All of these companies are very well respected and have years of experience creating high quality instruments that our customers can be proud to own for many years.

### ***Buy your uke from a company that specializes in ukes***

Your Ukulele purchase is an investment. Be sure the music store you're buying it from knows the difference between one uke and another. Companies that specialize in Ukuleles [like [ParadiseUkes.com](http://ParadiseUkes.com)] can answer your questions and give you tips to help you get the greatest enjoyment from your Ukulele purchase.

### **Reasons to purchase your Ukulele from [Paradiseukes.com](http://Paradiseukes.com)**

Here at Paradise Ukes we know and understand Ukuleles. That's right, we don't just sell Ukes our staff knows the Ukuleles we offer inside and out and we can answer your questions or offer advice when you need it. We make selecting just the right Uke easy! We've done the homework for you! Don't get confused by looking at hundreds of Ukes, we've already done that. The Ukulele's that we offer represent the absolute best value in terms of price, quality of construction and sound. We take great pride in the quality Ukuleles and accessories that we sell.

After you purchase your Uke from [ParadiseUkes.com](http://ParadiseUkes.com) you'll have access to our FREE "Get you started" online Uke lessons and "How to care for your Uke" videos. When you buy from [ParadiseUkes.com](http://ParadiseUkes.com) we want to be sure that you have the help you need to enjoy playing your new Uke that's why we offer free online Uke lesson videos to all our customers. These simple videos will show you how to tune your Uke, how to play a few simple chords and how to care for your Uke. Our many years of experience in the music business tell us that purchasing a musical instrument is just the beginning, you're going to need a helping hand to get started and that's what our Free Uke lesson videos are all about.



At [ParadiseUke.com](http://ParadiseUke.com) you can buy with confidence. [ParadiseUkes.com](http://ParadiseUkes.com) is a division of our retail store, [The Musician's SuperStore](http://The Musician's SuperStore). Our company has been in business since 1974 thanks to thousands of satisfied customers that have come to count on us for all their musical needs. Every Uke we sell comes with a 30 Day Satisfaction Guarantee! If you're not happy we're not happy!

**Purchasing your Uke from [ParadiseUkes.com](http://ParadiseUkes.com) just makes sense!**

**1. We know Ukuleles – We'll help you buy the right Uke the 1<sup>st</sup> time.**

That's right we don't just sell Ukes our factory trained staff knows Ukes inside and out and we can answer your questions or offer advice when you need it.

**2. We make selecting just the right Uke easy**

We've done the homework for you! Don't get confused by looking at hundreds of Ukes, we've already done that. The Ukulele's that we offer on our site represent the absolute best value in terms of price, quality and sound.

**3. Buy with confidence...We've been selling instruments since 1974**

[ParadiseUkes.com](http://ParadiseUkes.com) is a division of The Musician's SuperStore. We've been in business since 1974. We're proud to be of service to thousands of satisfied customers every month that have come to count on us for all their musical needs.

**4. We inspect every Uke before it's shipped**

When you buy from [ParadiseUkes.com](http://ParadiseUkes.com) you won't be disappointed when you take your new Uke out of the box.

**5. FREE "Get you started" online Uke lessons and "How to care for your Uke" videos**

When you buy from [ParadiseUkes.com](http://ParadiseUkes.com) we want to be sure that you have the help you need to enjoy playing your new Uke that's why we offer free online Uke lesson videos to all our customers. These simple videos will show you how to tune your Uke, how to play a few simple chords and how to care for your Uke. Our many years of experience in the music business tell



us that purchasing a musical instrument is just the beginning, you're going to need a helping hand to get started and that's what our Free Uke lesson videos are all about. We'll send you your very own VIP Paradise password, the key to enter our lesson site, with your purchase.

#### **6. 30 Day Satisfaction Guarantee**

If you're not happy we're not happy! If you're not completely satisfied we will gladly refund your purchase or if you'd prefer exchange your Uke for another. Even after you purchase your Paradise Uke we're here to help with your questions. We promise to do all that we can to make it easy for you to enjoy your new Uke.

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