

TOURING 101

TAKING YOUR MUSIC ON THE ROAD



**NEW ZEALAND
MUSIC COMMISSION**
TE REO REKA O AOTEAROA

Now that you've got a few home town gigs under your belt, it's time to take your show on the road! Before going, it's important to do your research and consider all the factors that may help elevate your tour experience for yourselves, loyal fans and future fans.



Networking

Before playing a new city, it helps to form connections in that scene.

It's helpful to do your research and find out what bands in that location are playing similar music or, at least, music that you find interesting. Getting in touch with these bands can help you discover what venues are best to play at and which groups you should play alongside when you visit.

There's also the chance of cross promotion - for a start, you could consider putting each other's music on your artist playlists. Perhaps you could even help arrange a show with a band from out of town at your local venue. If you help them out first, then they'll be more likely to help you when you visit their city.

When it comes time to tour, you can arrange to play a gig with them (putting you in front of their audience) and hopefully borrow their gear and crash at their place as well. It can be expensive traveling to other places, so it's always great if there's an opportunity to cram a couple of shows into a single visit - whether it's doing an in-store performance at a record shop or playing a house party the night after the official show. These are also both great ways to meet people and create links with the scene.

Booking Your Show

Once you've narrowed down your venues, it's important to map out and understand exactly what you are responsible for and what the venue is responsible for.

Firstly, you need to know exactly what the venue is able to supply. Most venues will have their own PA and mics, but it's worth double-checking this - especially if you have more than two singers. If you're a band and the venue have told you that they supply backline, it's still important to ask for specifics - does this just mean a bass amp and drumkit with no cymbals, snare or kick pedal? Or are there guitar amps as well? The same will go even if you're a DJ, since you'll need to know what mixer, turntables, and foldback monitors and speakers are on offer. The worst case for a DJ (or any act that relies on beats) is booking an event at a live venue that usually has bands and finding that they don't have subs and instead just have a vocal PA (which you might blow up!). How the PA is arranged might be important too e.g. a DJ playing vinyl won't want to be too close to the bass/woofer speakers so their needle doesn't skip - which isn't an issue for a DJ using Serato.

Another question to be asked is - does the venue have an in-house sound engineer that can mix the show? If there are complexities to your sound, then it can be worth bringing your own soundie (especially if you have a friend who will do it cheaply, plus a place for them to stay and room in your vehicle). This is a particular consideration if you're playing a venue that doesn't usually have your type of music - for example, if you're a country artist and you're playing at a venue that usually does DJ nights or vice versa.

The basic layout of the venue is also good to know. Some venues require acts to load-in through a back door, rather than the main entrance so it's no good parking a vehicle out the front in that case. Venues also vary in the times at which they'll allow acts to soundcheck, different policies for free drinks, and may (or may not) have backstage areas for musicians to hang out and/or leave gear (usually referred to as the "green room").

The money side of things is also important to get straight from the start. If the venue offers a guarantee, then this makes things more simple. In other cases, acts might have to arrange someone to take money from punters at the door - it may be possible for members of each group that's performing to take turns at this, otherwise a door person will need to be hired.

Transport

Once you've booked your gigs, you need to decide how you are going to travel.

Travelling by plane tends to be the fastest way across the motu. Air tickets can be relatively cheap if you book far enough in advance (always keep an eye out for sales) and also if you are willing to fly at unusual times (early in the morning or mid-week). It's also worth considering whether you need to check in your gear as checked baggage and how much additional cost that might incur.

Make sure you weigh your gear ahead of time if you think you're going to be over the allowance, so you can pre-purchase extra luggage; it is much cheaper to purchase luggage in advance than on the day at the airport. Band gear will often need to go to the oversized baggage counter too, so make sure you leave enough time to check in at multiple counters.

Driving a car/van and turning the tour into a road trip is another option. This is likely the better option if you've missed out on cheap flights, you have a considerable amount of gear to transport and/or you have a significantly sized touring party. The less gear you have, the more flexible you can be!



Accommodation

Just like your flights, it's much easier and cheaper to book your accommodation in advance. If no one puts their hand up to provide accommodation, then scoping out a cheap hostel might be the next best option. It's important to consider whether you'll be able to store your gear in a secure area – it could be a smart idea to call your accommodation prior to booking to see if the rooms will be able to accommodate the amount of instruments/gear you have or whether they've got a specific area you could securely store your items. If you're driving your own vehicle, it would also be a good idea to see if they have secure off-street parking in case you are able to leave your gear in the van.

If you have a fair few people in your touring party, you could even consider renting a house. It's wise to do a price comparison between hostels and other alternatives, as it may not make too much of a difference if you've got a larger touring group.

Do remember to check the proximity of your performance venue to your accommodation. It's likely that you won't want to do a hefty drive after playing a great show, so it's important that your accommodation is a safe and short walk/drive away!

On the Day

It's hard not to feel at least a bit of nerves on the day a tour starts, so it's better to have everything laid out ahead of time if possible. For example, packing your gear the day before could be a good idea or writing a list of what you need to grab before you leave the house. Forgetting gear is a major hassle and this is magnified when you're on tour and moving cities from day-to-day. This is why it is good to get in the habit of doing an fool-proof checklist and it is used every time before leaving a location. Regardless of a checklist, it's good practice to scan and scour the venue (stage and backstage) after loading the van for one final check that nothing has been left behind. It can be incredibly stressful if you need to hit the road the next day and the venue only opens in the evening.

What's equally important is having a back-up plan if things go wrong. If you're a DJ and you are playing off a laptop but it crashes mid-set, then it's great if you've already organised a way to plug in your phone and put on a playlist so you can fill the silence while it reloads.

If you're a guitarist and you break a string, then it's handy if you've already arranged with the other band to borrow one off them if necessary, or at least brought spare strings, leads, and picks along with you. Travelling in a band, it can also be handy to have a Swiss army knife, torch, and drum key. This is pretty standard advice for any show, but somehow it always seems to be on tour when things decide to suddenly stop working!

As you progress, you may even start bringing more of your own equipment to ensure you get the sound you want - singers might get their own set-up (e.g. SM58/stand/XLR cable/XLR-jack cable) and bands might invest in their own DI boxes, since ones at venues aren't always in the best condition.

Playing outside your home city is always a mix of excitement and stress, but with a bit of planning you can reduce the chance for dramas and allow it to be a fun endeavour. If it does all go pear-shaped, just remember – there's always a new crowd in the next town. It's worth the risk since there's no better feeling than looking out at an audience of unknown faces to find that your music has connected with them and you've managed to make a new set of fans and friends by bringing your music to their doorstep.

