

## International Roaming: Using Your Mobile Phone in Other Countries

Planning to take your mobile device along on an international trip? Roaming rules and rates are complicated and vary from one carrier to the next, so take time to understand them before you travel. Advance preparation can prevent disappointments, such as lack of service or unexpectedly high charges on your next bill.

### Before you travel

Before you travel, check with your carrier about the following:

- Find out if your carrier has international roaming arrangements with the service providers in the country you are visiting and whether your mobile phone will work there.
  - Mobile telephone networks differ from country to country, and your phone may be incompatible with the networks in the country you are visiting.
  - If your phone works for voice calls, some other functions – such as sending and receiving data or text messaging – might not work. So, check with your mobile service provider before you depart.
- If your mobile phone will work abroad, check your carrier's roaming rates. If you are willing to pay the charges, verify with your carrier that international roaming is activated before you travel.
  - For most U.S. customers, domestic service plans do not cover usage abroad.
  - Rates may be much higher because of additional roaming fees on foreign mobile networks and vary from country to country and network to network.
  - Higher rates may apply to all of your phone's functions, including voice calls, voice mail, text messages, and Internet access.
  - Ask your service provider about all the available options.
- Track your voice and data usage abroad. Ask your carrier how you can track your usage so that you stay within your plan and do not incur additional charges. Because of delays in processing international roaming, charges may not appear on your bill for an additional billing cycle after your return.

### Explore other options

Before traveling, consider your available options, including:

- **Unlock your phone so you can use a "SIM" card.** If your mobile phone is compatible with the networks in the other country, contact your carrier and ask to have your phone unlocked. Some mobile phones may contain software that prevents them from being used on different mobile networks, including international networks, even when those networks are technologically compatible. Unlocking the phone would allow you to use a "SIM" card (the removable card used by some mobile handsets containing subscriber data and the phone's number) with a local number in the country you're visiting, effectively turning your handset into a local phone.
  - The unlocking process varies by device and by carrier. Contact your carrier for instructions on how to unlock your device. If your wireless service provider is a signatory to the CTIA Consumer Code for Wireless Service (<https://www.ctia.org/the-wireless-industry/industry-commitments/consumer-code-for-wireless-service>), it is required to comply with the Code's standards.
  - You can either purchase a SIM card in the United States or purchase it from a local mobile provider once you arrive in the country.

- If you have a local SIM card installed on your mobile phone, you may be able to call the local emergency calling number. For example, in some European Union member countries, your mobile phone must have a SIM card in order to call the 112 emergency number. (<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/112-your-country>)
- **Use a world phone.** If you're a frequent international traveler, consider buying a world phone that can work in most countries. Check with your provider as to which mobile phones can be used in the countries where you travel.
- **Rent or purchase a handset.** You could also rent or purchase a handset for the country you'll be visiting before you leave home or when you reach your destination. You should research where you can obtain a prepaid or pay-as-you go handset.
- **Use a calling card.** You may save money by purchasing a calling card in the United States or purchasing a card overseas and relying entirely on wireline phones.

## Quick tips when traveling

- Use WiFi spots. Check also with your provider about using WiFi abroad. Using WiFi may not count towards your data allowance. Your carrier may be able to send you written instructions on whether you will need to take additional steps, such as turning off roaming on your particular device, to access WiFi.
  - WiFi abroad may not be free and before you begin browsing the web or using your apps, first determine if there is a charge.
  - Be aware of the security risks when using your phone and/or transmitting personal information over a public wireless network. See our consumer guide: Wireless Connections and Bluetooth Security Tips at [www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/how-protect-yourself-online](http://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/how-protect-yourself-online).
- Turn off Automatic Downloads. Some phones and apps will automatically download data while the phone is on and you can incur roaming charges. Check with your provider or your phone's manufacturer to learn how to disable these automatic downloads.
- Calling apps over free WiFi. You may be able to avoid or reduce voice roaming charges if you use mobile calling apps that rely on Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) and use these apps over free WiFi. Check with the developer of the app and your provider to make sure that you will not incur charges for the calls when using free WiFi.
- Be aware of the emergency calling number in the country you're visiting. If you rely on VoIP services, note they often lack some of the emergency calling features of a regular telephone, so be informed about these differences as well.
- Call the wireline number. If you have an option of contacting someone in the country you're visiting at either a wireline or mobile number, call the wireline. It's likely to be cheaper.
- Find out the dialing instructions for the country you will visit before you leave the United States.
- When using most mobile phones, you can call the United States or another country while traveling abroad by dialing: (<http://www.howtocallabroad.com>)
  1. The plus sign + (<http://www.howtocallabroad.com/qa/plus-sign.html>)
  2. Country code of the country you are calling (<https://countrycode.org>)
  3. City/area code (if applicable)
  4. Telephone number
- Understand how to dial local numbers in the country you are visiting. Research whether you need to dial a trunk prefix before an area code when making domestic calls in that country (<http://www.howtocallabroad.com/codes.html>).



## Resources: contact information for mobile and VoIP service providers

*This section includes a few selected service providers of several types. It is not meant to be a complete list of all providers. Neither the FCC nor the U.S. Government is endorsing the products or services of any provider by including it on this list.*

**AT&T:** 1-800-331-0500 (when calling from overseas: 1-916-843-4685);  
<https://www.att.com/offers/international-plans.html>; <https://www.att.com/offers/international.html>

**Skype:** <https://www.skype.com/en/>

**Sprint:** 1-888-226-7212;  
[http://shop.sprint.com/mysprint/services\\_solutions/category.jsp?catId=service\\_international&catName=International+Services](http://shop.sprint.com/mysprint/services_solutions/category.jsp?catId=service_international&catName=International+Services)

**Truphone:** UK +44 (0) 203-318-0742; U.S. 1-646-360-1689; <https://www.truphone.com/uk/>

**T-Mobile:** 1-877-453-1304 (when calling from overseas: 1-505-998-3793); <https://www.t-mobile.com/travel-abroad-with-simple-global>

**US Cellular:** 1-888-944-9400; <http://www.uscellular.com/services/international/long-distance-cell-phone-plans/index.html>

**Verizon Wireless:** 1-800-922-0204 (or dial \*611 from your mobile phone);  
<https://www.verizonwireless.com/solutions-and-services>

### Filing a complaint

You have multiple options for filing a complaint with the FCC:

- File a complaint online at <https://consumercomplaints.fcc.gov>
- By phone: 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322); TTY: 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322); ASL: 1-844-432-2275
- By mail (please include your name, address, contact information and as much detail about your complaint as possible):

Federal Communications Commission  
Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau  
Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division  
445 12th Street, S.W.  
Washington, DC 20554

### Alternate formats

To request this article in an accessible format - braille, large print, Word or text document or audio - write or call us at the address or phone number at the bottom of the page, or send an email to [fcc504@fcc.gov](mailto:fcc504@fcc.gov).

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