

Using a Mobile Device Abroad

It is easier than ever to use a mobile device abroad, and there are many options for doing so. Taking the time to review the options and pick the one that is right for you will save you time and money. To determine which option is best for you, consider a few things:

- Talk, text and data usage
- Frequency of trips abroad
- Length of trips abroad
- Number of countries visited

There are three general options for using a mobile device abroad:

1. U.S. Service Provider

While using your current U.S. service provider is convenient, it can get expensive quickly. Select this option if your trips are short and infrequent or if you anticipate limited use of your mobile device. Increasingly, U.S. service providers are including some degree of free international talk, text, and data in their basic plans. Check to see what is included in your basic plan, and consider purchasing an international plan if necessary. Most U.S. service providers offer short and long-term international plans as well as special packages for specific countries and regions. Estimate your talk, text and data requirements and compare them to available plans: [AT&T](#), [Google's Project Fi](#), [Sprint](#), [T-Mobile](#), [U.S. Cellular](#) or [Verizon](#).

2. Foreign Service Provider

While using a foreign service provider can be inexpensive, you will have to purchase a new device that you likely will not be able to use outside the country or region. For example, a foreign service provider will probably charge you extra for calls to the U.S. Select this option if you make long or frequent trips to a country or region covered by your plan. To find a foreign service provider, review the list of [service providers worldwide](#) to identify the providers operating in your

destination country. You may be able to purchase your device and plan online in advance of your travel or upon reaching your destination. Plan for language barriers as necessary.

Resources for Staying Connected

- **Country Calling Codes** Dialing how-tos
- **HowtoCallAbroad.com** Dialing how-tos

Apps

- **Skype** Internet-based video and voice calls for most devices (and any computer it's installed on)
- **Google+ Hangouts** Internet-based video, voice and messaging for Android and iOS devices (and through any computer's browser)
- **FaceTime** Internet-based video and voice calls between iOS devices
- **Viber** Video, voice and messaging for mobile devices (and any computer it's installed on)
- **iMessage** Internet-based messaging between iOS devices (and Macs)
- **WhatsApp** Internet-based messaging between phones

3. Unlocked Phone and Sim Card

While an unlocked phone and a sim card may require some initial legwork, it can be an inexpensive and flexible option. This is typically the preferred option for international travel.

Phone Requirements

Before purchasing a sim card, make sure you have a phone that meets two basic requirements. First, your phone must have a sim card. Newer phones are more likely to have sim cards whereas older phones, especially if purchased through Verizon or Sprint, are less likely to have them.

Second, your phone must be unlocked from your service provider to allow you to use other networks. Thanks to a new Consumer Code for Wireless Services that took effect in 2015, all nationwide service providers and many regional service providers will now unlock your phone

after you have fulfilled a few requirements. Also, see the Federal Communications Commission's [Cell Phone Unlocking FAQs](#) page.

If your phone does not meet the above requirements, consider purchasing a cheap phone specifically for foreign travel. You can buy an unlocked GSM phone online in advance of your travel.

Sim Card Purchase

Once you have a phone that meets the above requirements, you will need to purchase a sim card. If you are traveling to several countries, consider purchasing an international sim card from an online vendor such as [OneSimCard](#), [Cellhire](#), or [Telestial](#). If your travel is limited to one or two countries, consider purchasing a local sim card from an in-country vendor such as Vodafone or Airtel. Research your destination beforehand to see if there are any requirements to get a sim card. Some countries, like India and Japan, have regulations that limit who can buy sim cards and require documentation to buy sim cards. Be aware that each sim card has its own phone number, and temporarily changing your sim card will temporarily change your phone number as well. Also, be aware that sim cards and their balances have expiration dates that can range from a few weeks to a few years.

Using a Satellite Phone Abroad

If you require the use of a satellite phone while abroad, contact [Global Operations](#). We can put you in touch with a vendor who can rent you one for your trip.