



Communication:

International Calling/Texting

Before traveling, consider how you will make calls, send texts and use data while traveling and within the country you are visiting.

International Phone Plans

Many service providers (AT&T, Verizon, T-Mobile, etc.) offer international plans. These plans can include anything from calling, texting to data usage, etc., so be sure to check with your provider regarding the plans they have. For shorter trips (a month or less), this might be the cheapest/easiest option.

SIM Cards

Most cellphone plans also have the option to use a SIM card or “unlock” a cellphone for international calling, texting and data usage. This option will need to be completed before leaving the U.S.

If your cellphone carrier doesn't offer an international plan, you may also choose to purchase a SIM card at the final destination of travel. In order to use a SIM card, the mobile device must be “unlocked.” If your phone carrier or device is unable to be unlocked, this will not be an option.

If you're planning to use a SIM card, be sure to check the size and type of card needed for your device prior to departure. In countries where Wi-Fi is extremely limited, many travelers find this easier than relying on their mobile network or Wi-Fi and can make things, such as booking reservations, etc., much easier.

Note: When obtaining a local SIM card, it will change your number to that of the SIM card.

Prepaid Phone Cards

If you choose to use a prepaid phone card, they can be purchased and used for a flat fee to make long-distance telephone calls. Cards provide a specific amount of call time to certain destinations. Before purchasing a card, ask someone who may have traveled if they have a recommendation for a card brand.

- A prepaid card may be considered when just arriving to a country until a more permanent phone arrangement can be made.

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- Read the fine print on the packaging or back of the card to understand any conditions or limitations on the use of the card. Bear in mind that packaging will be in the local language. Doing some research prior to departure will help minimize confusion.

Calling Card Considerations

- Understand the rates for your particular phone card and any fees that may be assessed to use the card. In some cases, the card's value will be reduced by "post-call," "disconnect" or "hang-up" fees after each time you use the card, or by a "maintenance" fee charged after you use the card for the first time and again at regular intervals. Hidden fees are the largest downfall of calling cards.
- Check whether the advertised minutes for the card apply only to a single call or if the minutes can be used for multiple calls.
- Check the card's expiration date to avoid losing unused minutes.
- Look for a toll-free customer service number provided with or on the card, and make sure you will not be charged for calling it.

Avoiding Roaming or Hidden Mobile Charges

- Read the fine print of whichever method you choose (international plan, SIM card or calling card).
- When arriving, be sure to turn off roaming data, background apps, data for apps you do not plan to use, etc. Even having an automatic background update on apps, incoming texts/calls, etc., can create some surprise charges if using allotted data, texting or calling.
- Many find it easier to have a "travel phone." If you're getting a phone upgrade or terminating a carrier contract, consider keeping the older device and having it unlocked to use as a travel phone.