



Hot issues

Tis the season to be travelling – staying connected overseas

Australian telcos have taken action to reduce bill shock from global roaming by introducing roaming packs. But before travelling, you should consider all your options for global roaming, especially if you are on a tight budget. Check out your options for global roaming below.

Do you need to use your phone number while overseas?

[Telstra](#), [Optus](#) and [Vodafone](#) offer their customers global roaming packs that include calls, text and data, at an extra cost. Virgin Mobile offers [roaming packs that only include data](#). Signing up to a roaming pack can be a good option if you need to be contactable overseas on your Australian mobile number.

Questions to ask your telco before signing up to a roaming pack are:

1. What country can I use the pack in?
2. How much does it cost and how am I charged for it? Some packs are charged on a per day basis, while others you pay an upfront fee for a set amount of inclusions that last a set amount of days.
3. What are the inclusions? Some of the packs include calls, text and data, while others just include data. Some of the packs only include a small amount of data you can use per day which can easily get used up if you are relying on your phone for navigating and browsing the internet for information on your destination.
4. What are the charges for going over the inclusions and how do I track my usage?
5. When my roaming pack expires, what rates will I get charged for calls, text and data?

Other Australian telcos will allow you to use your mobile phone overseas but will charge you for calls, texts and data individually. This option can be very expensive and can lead to bill shock when you return home from your trip.

Consumers who do not wish to use global roaming overseas should also talk to their provider before travelling as some companies have an automatic opt-in setting for roaming which could result in unexpected charges.

Limited special offers

- Vodafone customers can get free international roaming in New Zealand until 31 January, 2017. Check the [Vodafone website](#) for more details.
- Until 27 March, 2017, if you are a Telstra mobile (prepaid or postpaid) or home broadband customer, you can access overseas Wi-Fi for free at over 19 million hotspots in 15 countries. Go to the [Telstra website](#) for more information.

Options using a different phone number

While the telco travel packs are convenient as they let you use your own mobile number, budget conscious travellers can consider alternatives such as:

Buying a local SIM card at your overseas destination

If you are spending your time in just one country, it might be a good idea to buy a local SIM card when you arrive there. Generally, this will mean you pay cheap local rates and you can top up credit when you need to. They may even offer the same rates for nearby countries. Here is a checklist for choosing a local SIM when travelling:

1. Research your options before travelling to your destination so you know what to look for when you arrive. If you know any locals you could ask them for advice on which SIM to buy.
2. Compare the available plans to select the one that suits your needs. Choose one that will be able to call and text Australia if needed.
3. Find out whether there are restrictions around foreigners buying SIMs at your destination.
4. Before leaving, check with your provider to see if you need to unlock your phone.
5. Purchase the local SIM when you arrive at your destination. Often these are available at the airport.

Buying a pre-paid roaming SIM card before you go

Pre-paid roaming SIMs generally provide cheap call and SMS rates and you simply recharge your credit when it runs out. These can be good if you are going to lots of countries across different regions. Here is a checklist for buying a pre-paid roaming SIM before leaving Australia:

1. Research the options. Look at the different pre-paid plans available to choose the one that best suits your needs. Also ensure you are buying a SIM that will work in your destination. Some roaming SIM providers are: [Globalgig](#), [TravelSIM](#), [GO-SIM](#), [RoamingSIM](#), [GoTalk](#) and [Woolworths Global Roaming](#).
2. Find out where you can buy these. If you need to order a travel SIM online then you should allow enough time for it to be delivered to you before you leave.
3. Check with your Australian provider to see if you need to unlock your handset to use the travel SIM.
4. Ensure that the travel SIM is activated and ready to use before you leave.
5. When you reach your destination replace your regular SIM with the travel SIM.

Using free Wi-Fi

Many hotels, cafes and shopping centres now offer free Wi-Fi. If you do not want to spend money on global roaming and do not need to be connected for your whole trip, you can use these free Wi-Fi hotspots. You can use free apps such as FaceTime, WhatsApp and Viber over Wi-Fi to stay in touch while you are overseas.

Remember, public Wi-Fi networks may not be secure. It is important to be aware of the security risks associated with hotspots. Stay Smart Online has some helpful advice on [protecting your mobile device](#).

Handy tips for travellers

- If you do not want to use global roaming services you should switch your phone to “Flight Mode” or switch off data roaming in your settings to avoid any accidental charges. You can still connect to Wi-Fi hotspots in Flight Mode or with data roaming switched off.

- If you are using your Australian service overseas, your telco has to send you SMS usage alerts when you reach certain limits. Take note of these and be aware that the usage alerts can be delayed in getting to you.