

Tip Sheet

Don't let global roaming ruin your holiday

International roaming charges are very high and many people suffer a nasty surprise when they return home to a phone bill in the thousands. Roaming charges are usually excluded from any “included value” in your plan, so here are some simple steps to help avoid massive smartphone bills.

- Check your provider's roaming charges carefully on their website or over the phone. You'll be charged higher rates to make and receive calls, send SMS and MMS (picture messages) and access email and the web. Prices will differ according to the country you are visiting and will also differ if you are on pre-paid or on a contract.
- To avoid excess data charges on your smart phone, make sure you switch off the “Data Roaming” Setting which can usually be found under the Network menu. If you don't, you'll incur expensive roaming charges when using email, MMS, web browsing and other data services.
- You need to stop emails automatically downloading to your phone by switching to your phone's manual mode. For Blackberry®: Select "No" under 'Send Email To Handheld'. For Apple® iPhone™ make sure you are in 'Fetch Mode'. If you need more help, ask your provider.
- Use wireless hotspots where available in the country you are visiting. Wireless hotspots are places you can access the internet for free – often in libraries and other public spaces. Fast-food chains like McDonalds and Starbucks typically provide free internet services. Buy a drink and stay a while.
- Check if your provider has discounted roaming rates for the country you are visiting. These offers are generally “opt-in” only and need to be selected before you travel.
- Use your phone mainly for SMS. Let friends and family know that receiving calls will cost you. It's a good idea, if you are worried about running up huge bills, to divert all your calls to voicemail and record a message asking callers to send an SMS instead.
- If you do need to make phone calls, it is usually cheaper to buy a local pre-paid SIM card in the country you are visiting, especially if most of your calls are going to be local.
- Consider making international calls with cheap or free online applications like Skype from a hotel or internet cafe. Skype enables you to make very cheap calls over the internet to landlines and mobiles, and you can even make free video calls to anywhere in the world with other Skype users.

Note: if you want to use international roaming, you will need to call your provider before you leave to set it up first. If you want to use a SIM card purchased in the country you are visiting, check first to see if your handset is or can be “unlocked”, meaning you can then use it with any network.

About ACCAN

ACCAN (Australian Communications Consumer Action Network) is Australia's new peak communications consumer organisation. ACCAN's goal is available, accessible and affordable communications that enhances the lives of consumers. The operation of ACCAN is made possible by funding provided by the Australian government. **Published December 2010**