

International mobile roaming

What is international mobile roaming?

International mobile roaming (IMR) means using your mobile device at an overseas location, via the same mobile service provider you use in Australia. You keep the same SIM card in your phone or tablet device as you would normally use, as your provider has agreements with overseas networks for you to 'roam' onto their networks when using your device in that location.

It is important to note that the **charges for using your mobile device overseas can be much higher than within Australia**, and that these charges are usually not part of the included value, if you are on a monthly plan. You may also accrue charges for services which are free in Australia, such as **receiving a voice call** at an overseas location.

What is bill shock?

'Bill shock' refers to unexpected high charges that occur as a result of using your mobile device overseas. Simple tasks, such as using a map function on your phone, may involve the use of downloaded data which can quickly add to the costs of using your device. The bills for this use can run into the many thousands of dollars for just a short overseas trip— as such it is definitely worth planning your communications needs before you travel.

As the charging structures for roaming are usually very different to the charging structures for using your phone at home, you should take note of the following elements of pricing:

- > how call duration is calculated—per second, per minute or otherwise
- > whether there is a fixed charge for call connection in addition to charges for call duration
- > data service prices
- > any difference between peak and off-peak charges
- > whether different charges apply among different mobile networks in the visited country. You may manually select a network when travelling overseas.

What protection is there against bill shock?

To combat bill shock, the ACMA has created the International Mobile Roaming Standard. This standard obliges your mobile service provider to ensure a number of consumer protection measures are in place to help you better monitor and manage your mobile roaming usage while overseas. These measures include:

- > A warning notification sent via SMS to you on arrival in an overseas destination, warning that higher charges for using IMR services may apply.
- > An SMS notification to most roaming customers (those with Telstra, Vodafone or Optus) when they arrive overseas providing price information for using a range of IMR services.
- > Providing you with IMR price information when you activate these services with your provider—separate to the information supplied to you when you sign up for a domestic service.
- > Providing you with the ability to decline the use of IMR services, at no or low cost, at any time, including from an overseas location.
- > Providing spend-management tools via a website or an app, as well as SMS notifications to customers in A\$100 increments for post-paid data usage and notifications at 50 per cent, 85 per cent and 100 per cent of included value, if you have purchased a travel pack from your provider. These usage notifications are available to customers of large providers now.
- > Your telco may offer you the ability to opt out of receiving roaming usage notifications, but they must not do so as part the terms and conditions of a contract or travel pack.

How to avoid bill shock

While this list is not exhaustive, here are some ways you can reduce the chances of experiencing bill shock:

- > Check your charges before you leave. Be aware that making a voice call or sending an SMS overseas can cost a lot more than in Australia. Receiving a call from Australia

CANBERRA
Red Building Benjamin Offices
Chan Street
Belconnen ACT 2617
PO Box 78
Belconnen ACT 2616
T: 02 6219 5555
F: 02 6219 5353

MELBOURNE
Level 32, Melbourne Central
Tower
360 Elizabeth Street
Melbourne VIC 3000
PO Box 13112 Law Courts
Melbourne VIC 8010
T: 03 9963 6800
F: 03 9963 6899

SYDNEY
Level 5, The Bay Centre
65 Pirrama Road
Pyrmont NSW 2009
PO Box Q500
Queen Victoria Building NSW
1230
T: 02 9334 7700
F: 02 9334 7799

may accrue charges for the 'international' leg of that call. However, receiving SMS is usually more affordable than voice or data.

- > Consider your data usage while you are overseas. Apps installed on your smart device often have auto-update settings that rely on data downloads, which can easily chew through the megabytes. Simple actions, such as checking a map on your smartphone, can also incur significant data downloads.
- > Look for places that offer free Wi-Fi. This is a good opportunity to take advantage of free data to upload photos, send e-mails or check your Facebook account. Many smart devices do not need a SIM card to be inserted in them to avail of free Wi-Fi.
- > Consider a travel product from your provider. Major service providers in Australia can offer data packs or similar products that allow for a predetermined level of use while you are overseas. Be careful—significant charges may still apply if you go over your allowance for voice calls, SMS or data.
- > Another option to consider is a passport-style SIM product. This product is designed specifically for travellers with a preset limit of voice, SMS and/or data that often includes its own phone number (or includes a phone number in two countries to take advantage of the cheapest rates wherever you travel) Travellers must ensure they unlock their mobile device prior to using a passport-style SIM product.
- > If you unlock your phone prior to departure, you may purchase a SIM at your destination and use this with your smart device instead of using your regular Australian service. Many major airports around the world now have vending machines that offer local SIM cards with pre-set limits in much the same fashion as a passport style product. Unfortunately, this option does not enable you to use your mobile phone number.

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