

FCC's Road Map to:

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Know Before You Go!



Federal Communications Commission

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When making vacation plans, you compare airline fares, shop around for the best rental car packages and research hotel deals. But one thing you may not think about is the best way to keep in touch with friends and family while away. Consumers have many calling options available while on vacation.



TRAVELING WITHIN THE UNITED STATES

Public and Pay Telephones

Long distance and local rates charged from pay phones and phones in other public places, like hotels, motels, and hospitals, can vary. Operator Service Providers (OSPs) provide long distance service. You may encounter an OSP when using public and pay telephones. When you place a call from a public or pay phone, the OSP servicing that phone usually handles the call if you dial "00" before dialing the phone number.

Tips for Public/Pay Phone Calls

Look at the printed information on or near the telephone to determine which OSP is providing service. FCC rules require each public and pay phone provider to post, in plain view, on or near the telephone, the name, address and toll-free telephone number of the OSP. The posted information must also include a written disclosure that rates for operator-assisted calls are available upon request, consumers have a right to obtain access to the interstate long distance carrier of their choice, and consumers may call their preferred carriers using that telephone.

Tips for Public/Pay Phone Calls (Cont.)

- Listen after you dial the number that you are calling to determine which OSP is handling your call. The OSP will orally identify itself to you at the beginning of a call or before the call is connected and billed. You will also be told how to find out how much your phone call will cost using that OSP by pressing no more than two digits, like the “#” key, or by staying on the line. You will have the opportunity to either use that OSP or to hang up and “dial around” the OSP by using the access code of your preferred carrier. You should note that simply using a calling card issued by your carrier, without dialing its access code, will not connect you with that carrier.
- If you think the local coin rate of a pay phone is too high, a less expensive one could be around the corner. You can also call your preferred long distance carrier’s 800 number and ask for instructions on how to place a call through your preferred carrier.
- You can make some toll-free calls from pay phones without depositing a coin. You can also make toll-free calls to an operator or to directory assistance without depositing a coin. These toll-free calls may include calls billed to calling cards or credit cards, and calls using prepaid phone cards, as well as other 800, 888, 877, or 866 number calls.
- Calls made to emergency numbers, like 911, and local calls to Telecommunications Relay Services (a service that enables calls to and from persons who are deaf, hard of hearing or speech disabled) are free at pay phones.
- Federal law prohibits blocking of 800, 950, or 10-10-XXX access to long distance carriers from pay telephones.

Access Code Calling

To guarantee that your preferred carrier will handle your call, you must first dial that carrier's toll-free number or a local number beginning with the 950 prefix. Using the keypad on your telephone, you then punch in your billing information (credit or calling card number) and the phone number you are calling.

If you know you will be using a public or pay phone while on vacation, call your carrier before leaving home and ask how to "dial around" an OSP using an access code. Your carrier can give you a toll-free access number. If you haven't done this and you are at a public/pay phone and do not want to use the OSP selected by the pay phone provider, call the toll-free number for your long distance company to obtain instructions for placing calls from public telephones/pay phones.

Prepaid Phone Cards

Prepaid phone cards represent telephone time you buy in Advance – not necessarily from your own long distance carrier. You can buy a card with a fixed number of minutes or the amount of time you buy may depend on the rate-per-minute you're charged. For many consumers, prepaid phone calls offer convenience. The phone time is paid in advance; the card can be used from any phone; and there is no need to be concerned with carrying coins or paying a future bill.

Prepaid phone cards are sold at many different locations, including, newsstands, post offices, travel agencies, retail stores, grocery and convenience stores. If you run out of minutes, you can add additional time to some prepaid phone cards, usually by billing the additional cost to your credit card. Some cards have advanced features, like speed dialing for frequently called numbers, and an activity report of called numbers, which may be handy for business purposes.

Prepaid Phone Cards (Cont.)

A surcharge or connection fee may apply if you make a call using a prepaid card from a pay phone.

One potential drawback of a phone card is that if you lose it, and you don't know your Personal Identification Number (PIN) number, you could lose the unused time. Some issuers provide a replacement number on a separate document when you buy the card, but others do not provide any protection. If you have your card's replacement number, and it is lost or stolen, you can give the issuer the replacement number to recover your unused calling time.





I NTERNATIONAL CALLS

An international telephone call is regulated at its point of origination (the country where the call originates). The FCC does not regulate or review rates for incoming international calls.

Companies carrying traffic from foreign countries do not have to disclose their prices unless the foreign government requires it.

However, you have options for calling back to the United States if you are vacationing overseas – options beyond using a public phone in a foreign country.

Post - Paid Calling Card

For people traveling outside the country, who plan on making calls back to the United States, one option is a post-paid phone card: you pay a bill at the end of the month, as opposed to a pre-paid card where you pay for a certain number of minutes programmed into the card. When you purchase a post-paid phone card, you can ask for a list of International calling codes, or you can obtain it from www.the-acr.com/codes/cntrycd.html if you have Internet access.

Post-paid phone cards are readily available and have no credit limit. Advantages of using a post-paid phone card:

- You never run out of credit.
- You can use it to access a modem or a fax machine.
- It provides an itemized bill of your calls.
- It cannot be used by anyone who does not know your security PIN.

Drawbacks of using a post-paid phone card:

- It takes longer to use because of the number of digits you need to key in.
- Some carriers attach an additional connection fee. Mobile phone calls are charged at peak rates regardless of the time.
- In addition to the connection fee, you may be charged a surcharge for long distance calls (in addition to the per-minute charge).

Internet Cafes

You can purchase public Internet access at “Internet cafes” or “cyber cafes.” These cafes provide Web and electronic mail access. Some cafes provide Internet Relay Chat facilities, file transfer protocol, computer conferencing, and other Internet tools.

You usually pay by the hour or half hour.

International Call Back Services

International call back services allow consumers to make calls from outside the United States at U.S. international services rates, which are often lower than the rates in the foreign country. Call back services require advance subscription. The services allow a person outside the U.S. to make a call, usually by using a toll-free number and an access code assigned by the callback provider, to obtain a dial tone that permits a call back to the United States or to another country.

Tips for International Calls

- Operator-assisted calls are generally much more expensive than calls dialed directly.
- Calls placed to Canada and the Caribbean are charged at international rates, even though it may seem like you are making a domestic long distance call by dialing 1 + the area code + the phone number.
- International rates often vary dramatically, based on the country called or the method used to place the call (prepaid card, post-paid card, etc.). Calling plans, dial arounds, pre-paid cards, and call back services often offer rates that are much lower than a company’s basic international rates. Research your options before you leave, so you are not caught by surprise when your phone bill arrives.

International Call Back Services (Cont.)

Call back services are illegal in many countries. The FCC Website has a list of countries where call back is illegal at www.fcc/ib/pd/pf/call-back.html#b. Like most options, this service should be researched and discussed with the service provider before leaving the United States.

Prepaid Phone Card/Calling Card

Calling cards and prepaid phone cards may be used for international calls from most phones with toll-free access. Read the card carefully for costs associated with international calls because the rates might be much higher for international calls.

International Phone Card

Each international calling card is different and may be restricted for use in the countries with which the phone card company has reciprocity. Make sure that your International Phone Card works from the country you will be visiting before you leave the United States. International phone cards are also used to bypass a country's existing carriers and use the carrier of another country, often with considerable savings.

International Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS) Calls

TRS enables standard voice telephone users to talk to people who have difficulty hearing or speaking on the telephone. TRS is provided throughout the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and all of the U.S. territories. TRS may be used to make international calls into the U.S. Many TRS providers have separate 10-digit numbers for making calls into the U.S. from international locations. You should contact your state TRS program to determine how inbound international calls are handled. Since many foreign countries have their own relay centers, you should check with the country's directory services for more specific information.

MOBILE PHONES



Taking Your Mobile Phone While Traveling in the United States

Mobile or “cell” phones are convenient, but they may not be cost effective when you are traveling outside of your home calling area, especially if you don’t have a nationwide long distance calling plan. Your home calling area is defined by your service plan. If you make or receive a call outside the boundaries of your home calling area, you may be charged long distance and/or roaming fees. “Roaming” is when you make and receive calls outside of your home calling area. Each cell phone provider has a service area, its own billing system, and fees for roaming. Before selecting a plan, make sure you understand your home calling area boundaries and your roaming fee plan. Also, keep in mind that in the United States, whether you place or receive a call on your cell phone, you pay for the call.

If you plan to use your cell phone while traveling, call your carrier to ask about rates outside your home calling area, roaming rates and whether or not you can make international calls. Read the fine print of your cell phone plan or call your carrier to find out whether pre-paid phone cards can be used with your cell phone. A prepaid card with a cell phone may not work, or it may boost the per-minute rate to where it would not be cost effective to use the cell phone with the pre-paid card.

Taking Your Mobile Phone While Traveling Overseas

Using a cell phone while traveling abroad is not as simple as remembering to pack your U.S.-based cell phone. Due to incompatible standards, most people need to get a different cellphone altogether. That’s because several different digital standards are used in the United States, as well as the analog standard, Advanced Mobile Phone System (AMPS), while most of the world uses the digital

Taking Your Mobile Phone While Traveling Overseas (Cont.)

Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM) standard. (PCS phones use the GSM standard as well, but at a different, incompatible frequency than the one used internationally.) Wireless carriers are starting to sell cell phones that work with several technologies and multiple frequency bands, but they're very expensive at the present

Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM)

If you travel in Europe and many other parts of the world, GSM is the only type of cellular service available – it's an international digital cellular standard. GSM, like other digital standards, allows a variety of network access, voice, and data services.

Many cell phone companies sell unlocked GSM phones to global travelers. With an unlocked phone, you'll be able to switch SIM cards whenever you want. Most GSM phones sold in the United States are locked to a single Subscriber Identity Module (SIM) card. If another SIM card is inserted in a locked phone, it won't work. An unlocked phone lets you change SIM cards. If another SIM card is inserted in a locked phone, it won't work. An unlocked phone lets you change SIM cards.

Global System for Mobile Communications (Cont.)

Changing your phone's SIM card for an SIM card from your destination country can save you money. Check with your carrier to determine whether your GSM phone is "locked" or "unlocked."

If you'd like to use your mobile phone when you travel overseas, remove the SIM card from your phone and place it in a handset that operates on international frequencies. The SIM card stores your personal information, including your phone number and address book.

Call your wireless carrier to make sure your SIM card will work overseas.

Be aware that taking your SIM card overseas may be expensive. You are likely to be charged international roaming and other fees. You'll also need to buy or rent a GSM phone that works overseas.

Renting a Cell Phone for Travel

Renting a cell phone for use in Europe makes a lot of sense if you travel infrequently abroad. You can rent a cell phone from an international cell phone provider. They can outfit you with a phone, adapters, and accompanying service for your travel. When choosing a service, you will first want to learn whether they offer service in the country or countries you will be visiting. Then, there are the costs. This usually breaks down into equipment rental, plus per-minute calling charges. Some services will also charge an activation fee.

Be warned, cell phone calling rates are not cheap. You will find that it will generally cost over \$2 per minute to call the United States from abroad. While these rates may be somewhat comparable to hotel calling rates, they are significantly more than calling card rates.

If you will receive calls from the local area, find out where the phone you will be using is registered, so that you can check the service plan and rates. Also make sure the company offers free 24-hour customer service.

Satellite Telephones

Cellular phones are great as long as you are within their coverage area. But, if there are no cellular transmitter towers within range to connect to, your cell phone won't work. In certain circumstances, a satellite phone can be very handy. Satellite telephones use satellites rather than cellular towers to receive and transmit signals.

When you turn on your satellite phone, its antenna directs your call up to a satellite. The satellite then bounces your call down to the nearest "earth station." Your call is then routed into the ground-based telephone network.

Some satellite phones, however, are larger than cellular phones – about double the size of a standard PCS phone – and weigh twice as much. The extra weight is a result of the larger battery and technology needed to place both land-based cellular and space-based satellite calls. (The cellular function saves you money when you are within tower range because satellite phone time costs anywhere from \$1.99 to \$2.49 a minute.)

Using a satellite phone in the city can be difficult because buildings get in the way of the satellite signals. Also, the phone will work only when you are pointed toward the satellite and does not work indoors. For these reasons, most satellite phones come with a built-in cellphone.

Surcharges for International Calls to Wireless Phones

Placing an international long distance call from your wireline telephone in the United States to a wireless phone in another country may result in a "surcharge" on your bill, in addition to your usual charges.

The surcharges occur because many foreign countries use a "calling party pays" framework. Under a "calling party pays" framework, wireless phone subscribers pay only for the outgoing calls they place to others. The "calling party" must pay for calls placed to wireless phones. As a result, when wireline U.S. customers call foreign wireless customers, foreign carriers may pass through to the U.S. carrier the

Surcharges for International Calls to Wireless Phones (Cont.)

additional cost of connecting the wireless call. The U.S. carrier may then pass this cost through to the U.S. customer as a surcharge on his or her bill.

International Calling: Steps You Can Take Before You Go

- Check with your long distance carrier for more specific information about international wireless surcharges and for international rates.
- Check your carrier's Web site, which may list surcharges for calls to particular countries.
- Some countries use unique telephone numbers for wireless telephones. Your carrier may be able to provide those numbers (including on its Web site) so that you will know in advance whether you are about to incur a surcharge in calling a foreign number.

Using Cell Phones in Planes, Subways or Trains

FCC rules prohibit the use of cell phones in airborne aircraft. The purpose of this prohibition is not to protect the aircraft's avionic system from interference from the cellular transmitter; it is to protect the cellular service from interference.

As the altitude of a cellular handheld transmitter increases, so does transmission range and, consequently, coverage area. At high altitudes, the handheld unit places its signal over several cellular base stations. It could prevent other cellular users from using the same frequency.

Cell phones are generally permitted in subways and trains, but you should check for a signal. It can be difficult to obtain a constant signal when you are traveling underground. Also, some larger transportation systems have their own communications systems that may interfere with your cell phone usage.

Using Cell Phones While Driving

Several states have passed or are considering laws banning the use of hand-held cell phones while driving.

Know the rules before you leave - for a safe trip, and hopefully, fewer billing surprises!





CONSUMER BEWARE - DON'T GET FOOLED!

“Fat Finger Dialing”

A few long distance companies use toll free access telephone numbers such as 1-800-COLLECT or 1-800-CALL-ATT to allow you to reach your long distance carrier of choice. Some other companies are using 800 “look-alike” telephone numbers that are one digit or letter off from these numbers, for example, 1-800-CALL-LAT. Here’s what happens: you place a collect or a toll call from a public or away-from-home phone, intending to use a service like 1-800-CALL-ATT or 1-800-COLLECT. Accidentally, you misdial the number. Your call is connected, but, unbeknownst to you, through a carrier other than the one you intended to use. The company that connects you usually charges you a higher rate. So, a simple slip of the finger could wind up being expensive.

Remember, the major long distance companies usually “brand” the call or identify themselves when you use their 800 numbers to make long distance calls. If you do not hear identifying information, hang up and redial the number.

“Call Splashing”

When you place a long distance call from a public phone (a payphone, hotel, or airport phone, for example), your call might be routed to a distant call center before being “handed off” to your chosen long distance carrier. Your preferred long distance carrier might then, either unintentionally or intentionally, bill you as if your call originated from the distant call center, rather than from your actual location.

“Call Splashing” (Cont.)

As a result, you may be charged higher long distance rates for the call than what you expected. This is called “call splashing” and it is against FCC rules. A carrier is permitted to base charges on an artificial point of origination if the caller requests to be transferred to a different carrier’s operator or if the caller is informed (before incurring charges) that the call may be billed as if it originated somewhere other than where the caller is calling from and he/she consents to the transfer.

Listen carefully to the telephone operator and don’t consent to any call transfers unless you understand what the operator is asking. Carefully read your telephone bill to ensure the origination and destination of your long distance phone calls are correct. If you find your phone call has been billed without your consent as if the call originated from a distant call center, and the rate is higher than you anticipated, you can complain to your preferred long distance carrier so you can receive the correct billing rate. You can also file an informal complaint with the FCC.

Read the Fine Print

Carefully examine telephone or mail solicitations and television advertisements that offer big savings if you switch your service to a new company. These claims usually compare only the highest rates of well-known carriers. Your current service provider may offer a plan with lower rates and fewer restrictions than the plan being advertised. In any case, ask more questions and find out about any hidden costs or restrictions associated with discount plans. Do the discounts offered fit your calling habits? Do the special calling plans have monthly fees? Is the special rate good for a fixed period only and then a higher rate will begin once the promotional period is over? Will the company provide other services you need, such as 24-hour customer service and reliable billing? If you’re not getting straight answers, you probably have reason to be suspicious.

Carefully read all forms and promotional materials -- including all of the fine print -- before signing up for a calling plan. Companies compete for your business, so use your buying power wisely and shop around.

When You Make an Away-From-Home Call

- FCC rules guarantee you the right to place calls through the long distance company you want to use by dialing an access code such as an 800 number; a local number that begins with 950; or an access number, known as a 10-10-XXX number, before entering your calling card number or dialing the number that you are calling.
- The FCC has rules that protect you when you make operator-assisted long distance calls from away-from-home phones, such as pay phones and hotel room phones. In these situations, audible identification ("branding") of the long distance carrier is required. When you dial a 0+ call from such a phone (as opposed to "dialing around" using a 1-800 access number or a "10-10" number), you are routed automatically to the long distance operator service provider (OSP) chosen by the owner of that phone.
- You must be told both audibly by the OSP and in a written notice on or near the phone who is the pre-selected OSP for a public phone (which long distance company). You should be able to ask the OSP about the rates. You should be able to end that call at no charge before the call is connected. When you make long distance calls from home, you have already chosen your long distance carrier, and the branding requirement does not apply. Generally, the branding requirement also does not apply when you dial a 1-800 number to access a long distance provider because you have chosen the particular carrier by dialing that 1-800 number. The only exception would be where you initiate an operator-assisted call by dialing a 1-800 access number from a payphone or hotel room and you do not have an established billing relationship with that carrier (i.e., you don't have a phone card for that carrier, etc.). In those situations, the carrier associated with that 1-800 number should brand the call. If you are concerned that these rules are being violated, file a complaint with the FCC (by calling 1-888-CALL-FCC).

FILING A CONSUMER COMPLAINT

Consumers may file an informal complaint with the FCC. There is no fee. You can use one of several different methods to file a complaint. You may telephone us at 1-888-CALL FCC (1-888-225-5322) (voice) or 1-888-TELL FCC (1-888-835-5322) (TTY); fax us at 202-418-0232; e-mail us at fccinfo@fcc.gov; fill out an online complaint form at <http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/complaints.html>, or simply send a letter describing the problem to:

Federal Communications Commission
Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau
Consumer Inquiries & Complaints Division
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

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