

10 Ways to Prepare Your Cell Phone for a Trip

Charge up that phone the night before a trip: Most of us have this straightforward — yet vital — task down pat. But that's not all you need to do before bringing a phone abroad. Here are 10 additional tips that smartphone-wielding travelers should heed before hitting the road, from adding travel apps to guarding against exorbitant roaming charges.

Know Your Plan (and Your Phone)

Step one: Examine your phone. Only GSM and CDMA phones will work abroad. Check with your provider to verify that your phone is operable overseas. Step two: Examine your phone plan. A thorough investigation of your data and calling contract will reveal exactly how much it will cost to make a few phone calls or download some emails while abroad. It's expensive, right? That's where step three comes in: Consider buying an international calling or data package. If you plan on using your device overseas and don't want to swap out your SIM card (more on that later), an international plan is likely a wise investment. Simply call your provider and request a temporary plan that works in your destination of choice; in most cases, you can cancel the plan upon return (just make sure there's no minimum-length-of-time requirement).

One provider in particular, however, doesn't necessitate the purchase of an international package. Earlier this month, T-Mobile announced that it will get rid of roaming charges for data usage in more than 100 countries, and it will cap international calling rates at 20 cents per minute.

Consider a Text Package

One or two text messages from the road might be all you need to use during your trip. You might want to text your family to let them know you've arrived safely, text your pet or house sitter, or send a cheery text from the beach to make a friend jealous. Sound good? Then purchase a text package before you leave. For example, AT&T offers [Global Messaging Packages](#) that start at

\$10 per month for 50 messages sent from more than 150 countries. Messages received are deducted from your domestic plan.

Get the Right Gadgets

From portable batteries to travel-friendly phone cases, a range of gear and add-ons will enhance and protect your phone while abroad. Some of our favorites include the [MapiCases](#) leather belt-clip iPhone case; [myCharge](#) and [New Trent](#)'s rechargeable, portable battery packs; and [GoSwype](#) microfiber cleaning cloths.

Turn Off Data

If you don't plan on using data while abroad but plan to pack your phone, there are two steps you need to take before departure: Turn off cellular data and turn off data roaming. You'll find instructions for doing so on an iPhone [here](#), and [here](#) for an Android phone. Contact your cellular provider for further details on shutting off data. Fail to shut down the automatic downloads that bring emails, program updates, meeting notifications, and other data to your phone and you'll likely see some very expensive roaming charges on your bill at the end of the month.

Stock Up on Apps

There are umpteen mobile apps that could prove very valuable on your trip. Ideally, you'll want to snap them up well before your departure date, so that you have time to research, compare prices, and, of course, download the apps before you leave. Some of these might include flight-notification apps, map apps, itinerary apps, language-translation apps, destination-guide apps, gas-finder apps, and weather apps. For more ideas, see [Nine Apps That May Change How You Travel](#) and [10 Free Travel Apps You've Never Heard of](#).

Download Entertainment

Avoid data charges for big downloads on the road by lining up your music and entertainment purchases before you head out that door. Does your airline

offer good [in-flight entertainment](#)? If not, a few episodes of your favorite show might make coach class a little more bearable. Will your hotel room have an iPod player? If yes, then a new album or two could enliven your stay. Further, there's little that will improve a long cross-country rail trip or an interminable wait at the airport more than a diverting and fun new playlist.

Pack Chargers and Adapters in Your Carry-on

On the road, chargers and adapters are as important as your phone itself; after a day or two, your device is useless without them. You wouldn't put your iPhone in your checked luggage, right? So your charger and adapter need to go in your personal item or carry-on bag with your other essentials (medicine, wallet, identification, etc.). This way, if your suitcase gets lost, you won't need to pay a visit to one of these [airport vending machines](#) to buy a new charger.

Take Some Important Photos

This tip is more about *using* your phone to prepare for your trip than preparing your phone; nonetheless, it belongs on your to-do list. Prepare a digital backup in case your identification gets lost or stolen. With your camera phone, take a photo of your passport or driver's license, and email the photo to yourself. You might also want to take a photo of the contents of your checked bag, which may come in handy if the airline loses your luggage. (Use the photo to help document your missing belongings when filling out a claim form.) Throughout your trip, take advantage of the camera on your phone and snap photos of anything that might serve as a helpful reminder, from your airport parking-lot spot to your hotel-room number.

But first, you need to ensure that you have space on your phone to store such images, which brings us to our next tip.

Check Available Storage

The perfect yet ephemeral travel shot appears: a candy-red sunset or a humpback's tail emerging from the ocean. You aim, shoot ... and a message

appears on your phone saying that there is no available storage left. You lost the shot! Argh! To prevent this pesky little mishap, check your phone's storage before you leave. On an iPhone, for example, you can do this via the "General" tab within "Settings."

Free up room on your phone by transferring photos and videos to your computer, deleting unused apps, and clearing your Internet cache.

Get a Country-Specific SIM Card

Will you be spending a lot of time in one particular country? A prepaid SIM card for the region you're visiting is an economical choice for overseas phone usage, and it allows you to make calls and use data exactly as many locals do: through a local provider. Switch your SIM card and you'll have a new local phone number and likely an affordable plan that puts scary-expensive international calling packages to shame. You won't be able to make or receive calls via your usual phone number, though.

Here's how to get one: Either pick one up prior to your departure date or get one from a local store after you arrive. We recommend the former, especially for those who don't want to waste precious trip time shopping around for SIM cards. You can order the cards online from companies such as [Telestial](#) and [Brightroam](#).

But remember that not all phones will accept new SIM cards. You must have an "unlocked" GSM phone for this to work.

—*By Caroline Costello*