



How Can I Stay Connected in Europe?



By Rick Steves

One of the most common questions I hear from travelers is, "How can I stay connected in Europe?" The short answer is: more easily and cheaply than you might think.

These days, traveling abroad with a mobile phone, tablet, or laptop (or some combination of the three), makes it easier than ever for you to inexpensively communicate on the run and keep in touch with friends and family back home. Plus, having a mobile device on hand can help you make the most of your travel time. You can pull up maps when you're lost, enhance sightseeing with audio tours and podcasts, call a restaurant for reservations while riding the bus, or buy advance tickets for a blockbuster museum and have them sent right to your phone.

Use your device to enhance your trip as well as a means of keeping in touch while on the go.

Your Basic Options

I recommend bringing at least a phone. Even with near-universal Internet access, smart travelers still use the telephone. I call museums to see if an English tour is scheduled, restaurants to check if they're open or to book a table, hotels and car-rental agencies to confirm reservations, and so on. Having a phone on hand is also useful when you're traveling with a group. It's comforting to know you can make a quick phone call or send a text if you get separated, need to make plans, or if there's an emergency.

When it comes to staying connected, here are your basic options. Choose the best option for you, after considering how you plan to use your device.

1. **Bring your own phone and sign up for an international/global plan.** For most travelers, who don't visit Europe as frequently or for as long as I do, it's easiest to set up your own mobile phone with a basic international calling and/or data plan that's customized to your needs — and it doesn't have to cost an arm and a leg. You get to travel with all of your contact information and your US phone number, making it easy to connect with folks back home. With the cost of international plans dropping, more and more travelers are willing to pay for the freedom to call, text, and go online anytime, anywhere.
[> See my tips on setting up an international plan on your phone](#)
2. **Bring your own phone and do everything over Wi-Fi.** More budget-conscious travelers can forego their carrier's international plans altogether and do everything over Wi-Fi. Not only can you use Wi-Fi

to get online, but you can also make phone calls and send text messages at no charge. Sounds great — but you've got to find a hotspot first.

> [See my tips on getting online in Europe](#)

3. **Buy a European SIM card.** This option works best for people who plan to make a lot of calls while traveling. You buy a European SIM card (a microchip that stores your phone number and other data) to insert in your current phone — or into a cheap mobile phone that you buy for your trip. This gives you a European number — and the same local rates Europeans enjoy.

> [See my tips on using a European SIM card](#)

4. **Leave the devices at home.** Of course, you can still travel abroad without any of your mobile devices. You can check email or browse websites using public computers and Internet cafés, and make calls from your hotel room and/or public phones.

> [See my tips on staying in touch without a mobile device](#)

Bad-Value Options: Many car-rental companies, mobile-phone companies, and even some hotels offer the option to rent a mobile phone with a European number. This is a terrible value, as hidden fees (such as high per-minute charges) can add up.

Resources for Staying Connected

- [Country Calling Codes](#) Dialing how-tos
- [HowtoCallAbroad.com](#) Dialing how-tos
- [This site's Tech Tips Forum](#) Tips from my readers

Apps

- [Skype](#) Internet-based video and voice calls for most devices (and any computer it's installed on)
- [Google+ Hangouts](#) Internet-based video, voice, and messaging for Android and iOS devices (and through any computer's browser)
- [FaceTime](#) Internet-based video and voice calls between iOS devices
- [Viber](#) Video, voice, and messaging for mobile devices (and any computer it's installed on)
- [iMessage](#) Internet-based messaging between iOS devices (and Macs)
- [WhatsApp](#) Internet-based messaging between phones