### How to set up your American iPhone when traveling in Europe to avoid a billing "surprise"

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Know how to set up your iPhone when traveling abroad to avoid any unpleasant billing surprises. Photo: **yourdon** 

So, you're planning to use your American smartphone during your upcoming trip to Europe. Great. But how can you ensure that you're not going to accidentally blow through all of your data and come home to a \$800 bill from your carrier?

For starters — read through our guide!

### Using data? Get a plan.

If you're an AT&T, Verizon or Sprint iPhone customer and are planning, at any point during your trip, to use a data network to access the web or use emails, you are strongly advised to get some sort of plan (unless you plan to buy a SIM card in Europe for your phone). Otherwise, it will cost you. (AT&T, for example, charges a hefty \$0.0195 per KB without a plan. Sure, that sounds like pennies, but it gets ugly quickly!)

Click through to read more about international data and phone plans for **AT&T customers** and for **Verizon customers**.

**Sprint customers** should first call the carrier to activate your phones for international roaming (and to make sure that your specific device will even work in the countries you're visiting). You could then sign up for Sprint's underwhelming <u>international options</u>, including their "Worldwide Voice" package that lowers per-minute charges for phone calls from \$1.99 (without a plan) to \$.99. <u>Data packages</u> run \$40 (40 MB) or \$80 (85 MB), and texts cost \$.50 each to send.

**T-Mobile customers** who have signed up for one of the carrier's "Simple Choice" plans are in much better shape, as the carrier offers free text messaging and data use throughout Europe, and much less expensive phone calls than its rivals (only \$.20 per minute). Note that other T-Mobile plans are much less generous, so confirm that you're on a "Simple Choice" plan before you fire up your iPhone and start Instagramming from Istanbul.

If you are a T-Mobile customer with a Simple Choice plan, congrats. You don't really need to follow the rest of this article or change the way that your phone is set up. Just know that those phone calls will be billed at an additional \$.20 per minute.

### How much data do you need?

Let's imagine that you've signed up for AT&T's \$30 passport plan, which comes with 120 MB of data transfer, unlimited texting, and "discounted" phone calls (still a steep \$1 per minute). What exactly does 120 MB represent?

#### As I mention in this post, here are some data use estimates:

- Sending or receiving an email (without attachment): Approx. 20 KB per email; (with attachment) Approx. 300 KB per email
- · Loading 1 webpage: 1 MB per page
- Streaming music: 500 KB / minute (30 MB / hour)
- Streaming video (standard quality): 2 MB / minute

I'm going to assume that we're all steering clear of streaming music and video while traveling (when not connected to Wi-Fi), and that your data use primarily consists of checking emails, using Google maps and pulling up an occasional web page.

If you just stick to emails (and don't open any large attachments), you could download or send more than 6,000 normal-sized emails with AT&T's \$30 120 MB plan! That's, um, quite enough for me (especially while on vacation!).

But hey, everyone's data needs are different. Check out AT&Ts handy data calculator to **estimate how much data you require**. This is especially handy if you plan to browse the web or (heaven forbid!) fire up your apps.

### How to set up your iPhone for international travel

Okay, you're ready to configure your phone. The following is how I set up my iPhone 5. Note that new phone models may have different

locations for some of the settings listed below. A bit of detective work may be required to find them.

Also, please note: Buying a European SIM card for your phone is a relatively simple and cheaper alternative to all of this. Be sure to read our guide to this option, as well.

## 1. Turn off data roaming.

First things first. Turn off your data roaming to stop your phone from hooking up with a data network while traveling.



Chances are your carrier doesn't operate cell towers in the country you're visiting. Thus, if you need to access a data network, your phone will need to roam around and find a network with which it can work. By turning this off, you're effectively blocking your phone from joining these partner networks.

Note: When you do want to use your data plan and access these data networks, you'll flip this button back on. But remember, as a default, it's best to keep this off.

Go to: **Settings > Cellular > Data Roaming**. Turn off.

(To make it easy, the iPhone even says "Turn data roaming off when traveling to avoid charges when web browsing and using email and other data services.")

## 2. Turn off Cellular Data.

When I'm traveling in Europe, I usually turn off my cellular data, as well. Even if I've been assured many times by AT&T that I only need to turn off Data Roaming, I still turn off cellular data, just to make sure that my phone is blocked from using data until I want it to use data. (Apple also suggests turning both off when traveling abroad.)



By turning off your cellular data, you effectively block your phone from accessing all data networks, restricting its use to placing calls and sending SMS text messages, although you can use all of your other features (apps, email, Internet, iMessage) when you connect it to a Wi-Fi network.

Note that if you flip the order of #1 and #2 here, turning off your cellular data first, your data roaming will also turn off. You can't roam for data if you've already turned off your phone's access to data.

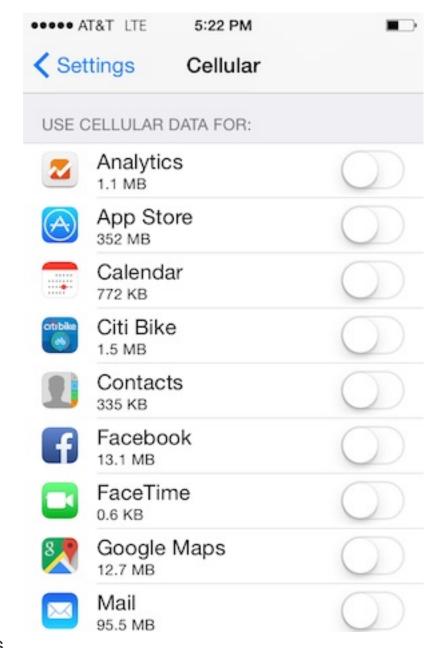
As with data roaming, if you want to use your data package, you'll need to turn cellular data back on, then turn on data roaming.

Go to: **Settings > Cellular > Cellular Data**. Turn off. (Note that "Enable LTE" will also disappear as soon as you turn off Cellular Data.)

## 3. Cut off your apps' cellular data connection.

Your apps can't work without a data connection or a Wi-Fi network. Even so, you should go in through your cellular settings and manually turn your apps off to prevent them from hogging your data plan.

But wait, if you're planning to already turn off your cellular data (by following the two previous steps), isn't this a bit redundant? Not necessarily.



Don't forget that many of us

allow our apps to send us push notifications and to run on their own in the background. If you keep all of them activated, the moment that you turn on your data roaming in Paris to check your emails, they could kick into gear, tearing through your data allotment.

To prevent this, take a moment to scroll through your list of apps and turn off their data connection, one by one. (Note that you'll need to do

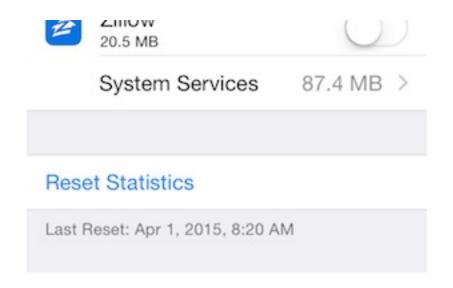
this prior to turning off your cellular data, as turning off your cellular data makes these buttons inaccessible.)

Once these apps have had their cellular data access turned off, they will still be usable over a Wi-Fi network. If you wish to use cellular data for these apps (for example, using Google Maps over cellular data, which I do all the time from abroad), simply turn them back on when you need them!

Go to: **Settings > Cellular > Use Cellular Data For**. Turn off apps, one by one.

# 4. Reset your statistics and monitor your data usage.

This one is fun and essential. At the very bottom of the "Cellular"



page is a simple little link that states, "Reset Statistics". Once you've arrived abroad, click this link and start tracking your international data usage. You'll see your total data usage and your telephone usage at the top of the "Cellular" page (under "Cellular Data Usage").

Keep track of your usage here and you shouldn't come home to any unpleasant billing surprises, especially if you've purchased the right data package for your trip.

The only hiccup with this, unfortunately, is that the stats aren't always totally up-to-date. It turns out that AT&T can have delays in reporting international data usage (as international carriers are actually providing you with the network and then, later, reporting it back to AT&T). I'd suggest erring on the side of caution here.

Go to: Settings > Cellular > Reset Statistics. Click it.

### 5. Turn "Fetch New Data" to "Manual" to stop automatic email downloads.

When I'm traveling, I also turn off my phone's ability to automatically check and download emails. Even if



my data roaming is almost always set to "off" (preventing me from accessing emails), I still don't like my phone automatically fetching anything the moment I turn the data roaming to "on".

Go to: **Setting > Mail**, **Contacts**, **Calendars > Fetch New Data**. Switch "Push" to "Off" and click "Manually" at the bottom of the screen under "Fetch".

Once switched to "Manually", you'll be able to check and send emails by turning on your data roaming and cellular data, then opening your mail program. Simple.

## 6. Turn off iMessage.

This one drives me crazy. iMessage has made it quick and easy to send messages to other iMessage users on Apple devices over a Wi-Fi network without being charged for sending a text. That's great, but iMessage uses a Wi-Fi network to send and receive your messages, so if you're not connected to Wi-Fi, it won't work. Your message will just sit out there, and not get delivered until you connect to Wi-Fi.

The solution? I choose to send old fashioned text messages (through SMS) when traveling. AT&T's \$30 "Passport" package includes unlimited SMS



texting, so these texts don't cost me anything extra to send.

To force your phone to turn off iMessage, go to: **Settings > Messages** > **iMessage.** Turn off

Note that you might still encounter iMessage problems, even with it turned off. Others might send you an iMessage, but it won't be delivered until you connect to a Wi-Fi network. When I'm traveling and expecting a text from a friend and suspect that iMessage is to blame, I sometimes send them a text to say, "If you're trying to text me, make sure your iMessage is turned off!"

## 7. Paranoid? Put your phone in airplane mode.

If you've followed the steps above, you've now turned off your data roaming, cellular data, apps and email from running in the background. What's still working?

Well, for starters, your phone! You will now still be able to make and receive telephone calls (provided



Call home for pennies (or free) with the Skype iPhone app.

that you've called your carrier and have activated your phone for international use). You will also be able to send and receive regular old SMS text messages (if you've turned off iMessage).

However, this might still make you uncomfortable. Perhaps you don't want people to be able to get in touch with you. (Don't forget that you'll be charged for incoming calls and for listening to your voicemail.)

If this is you (and it was me for many years, so there's no shame), you can place your phone in "airplane mode" and simply rely upon Wi-Fi networks to use the web, send emails, and use apps. This is a great solution if you want to place calls through your Skype app, for example, and never want to pay for a call.

Traveling through Europe on airplane mode does offer peace of mind, as it takes away any insecurity that your phone is secretly drinking up your data plan. However, it can also feel quite limiting, as you won't be able to send and receive text messages in real time (except through iMessage or Facebook Messenger when you're connected to a Wi-Fi network), or place standard phone calls.

If this is for you, go to: **Settings > Airplane Mode**. Turn on.

If using your phone in Airplane Mode, note that you'll need to then switch "Wi-Fi" to "On" and choose a Wi-Fi network.

#### Original article:

http://www.eurocheapo.com/blog/iphone-in-europe-tips-for-avoiding-a-billing-surprise.html