

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 on your travels. Here are 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 unlocked 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 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). Make sure as well that the travel plan has minutes, texting and data at reasonable amounts based on your usage when at home.

One fantastic alternative is to buy a local SIM card once you arrive at your destination. This will make it easier to filter who can get a hold of you on your journey (only whoever you give your travel number to), as well as being the most cost effective solution in nearly every country. On a recent trip to Europe, rather than paying Verizon 85 dollars per line for only 250 minutes/messages/megs of data, I bought a local sim that had 10,000 minutes and messages, as well as 10 gigs of data for only 35 dollars per line. This is often the most cost effective route. As an important note- generally if you don't own your phone outright then it's not unlocked, and therefore this method won't work- back to paying your carrier in that scenario. So if you're still paying Verizon or Att a monthly installment to buy your phone, this means your phone is locked to your chosen carrier and roaming plans are your best bet.

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: <https://support.apple.com/en-us/HT201643>

and here for Droid users:

<http://www.droid-life.com/2013/02/13/how-to-disable-mobile-data-usage-beginners-guide/>

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.

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 and deleting unused apps.

With these things in mind, you'll have a far better trip, and be ready to use your phone as you do!