Read This before you buy a Travel SIM Card

Making the wrong Travel SIM card or Phone plan decision could cost you thousands!

On this page we have tried to put together an overview of the options available to people traveling abroad. For US travelers heading overseas, the phone charges can literally ruin your trip when you get a four figure bill. There are many options, but we have covered the most popular and we give you our recommendation. A note of caution: prices change all the time and people have different circumstances, so please validate for yourself anything that we have quoted.

As American travelers overseas, staying in communication is not just nice to have: it should be mandatory. This article discusses Europe, but also applies to many other countries. The examples we give are for Spain. But as an example, Vodafone has a similar offer for other European countries. As Americans, we tend to be overcharged for our global roaming. In Europe, however, carriers can no longer charge a premium for roaming, including not charging extra for texting another European country.

An example of where we pay too much: a friend of mine who visits from the UK pays less in the States for his data, text, and calls than I do with my AT&T plan—crazy!! The other conclusion we drew from this exercise is that global SIM cards seem to be a complete rip off; don’t use them, you will be sorry. We found some that require you to make a pre-call to a phone number before you dial the number. Not only is this process cumbersome, but we deem it to be downright dangerous in an emergency and should not be used at all. As someone who travels a lot, I have found most countries have good wifi and you should only need your data and mobile calling in the times when you are on the move. Pretty much every town or village has a cafe that provides wifi. Finally, a plug for KeynectUp: if your college is not using our service to distribute trip information, then tell them they should take a look; you will be safer and your trip will be more enjoyable.
Overseas Phone Plan Comparison

We based this on a trip to Spain, 1GB of data, 600 SMS messages, 20 minutes of calls to the US and 40mins of calls to Spain.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Carrier</th>
<th>Monthly Fee</th>
<th>SMS</th>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Calls to Spain</th>
<th>Calls to USA</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verizon</td>
<td>$300</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATT</td>
<td>$300</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATT (Passport)</td>
<td>$120</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$30</td>
<td>$14</td>
<td>$7</td>
<td>$171</td>
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<tr>
<td>T-Mobile (One)</td>
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<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$8</td>
<td>$4</td>
<td>$12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T-Mobile (Non-Customer)</td>
<td>$70</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$8</td>
<td>$4</td>
<td>$82</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sprint (Open World)</td>
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<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$8</td>
<td>$4</td>
<td>$12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vodafone.es</td>
<td>$16</td>
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<td>$0</td>
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<td>$20</td>
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<tr>
<td>World Sim</td>
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<td>$230</td>
<td>$8.80</td>
<td>$4.40</td>
<td>$291.20</td>
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<td>Go-Sim</td>
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<td>$54</td>
<td>$250</td>
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<tr>
<td>iNext, PicCell</td>
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<td>$90</td>
<td>$45</td>
<td>$6</td>
<td>$3</td>
<td>$144</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Unlocking your Phone
Your carrier will unlock your phone as long as you are out of contract. If you are not, then you must use an unlocking service. The service people have reported to us that the most reliable service is UnlockScope. The price is around $20 and can usually be completed within 48hrs. The link to their service is below.

https://www.unlockscope.com/

Buying Unlocked Phones
Smart phones have become very cheap these days. In fact, there is almost no reason to get a feature or flip phone, considering the safety features of having a map at hand on a smartphone. You are unlikely to get yourself a cheap, unlocked iPhone, but traveling overseas with an Android device should be perfect. There is typically very little difference in functionality between the phones. Just keep in mind the capability of the camera on your new unlocked phone if you plan to use it as your primary photo-capturing device, and make sure the phone has storage room for photos and videos. Remember to sync with the cloud via wifi to backup your photos.

Here are some Android phones we found on Amazon as examples. If the links fail, just search for Android phone unlocked on Amazon.

Android Premium $69 or an Android Basic $59

Tips and Tricks

- Download Google Offline Maps (will save data)
- Make sure your phone is backed up before you leave for abroad
- Find the addresses of a few phone stores in your host city that you may use
- Print out the phone plan that you want in the local language and English, for when you arrive
- Save important trip information to the phone
- Avoid Travel SIM Cards where you have to pre-call a number to dial.

Summary
World or overseas SIMs are very rarely a good option; these companies use great marketing and, thus, they are rewarded with great commissions.

Our recommendation would be to unlock your phone and go with TMobile before you leave. If you can wait and you want a local number, go with a Vodafone Tourist SIM.
**Notes/disclaimer:**

We have tried to be as accurate as possible, but make sure you validate for yourself any of contracts, figures and penalties especially as they will change from time to time.

**Technical Info**

Spain runs on GSM Bands (900, 1800) and LTE (1800, 2600). Models of iPhone do support these and so does Samsung S7. You need to check your specific brand and model to make sure it will work in Spain and most of Europe.

- GSM Bands used around the world: [http://www.worldtimezone.com/gsm.html](http://www.worldtimezone.com/gsm.html)

There is another carrier in Spain, Movistar, with good rates and great coverage, but unless you are a local, it can be tough sorting out the right plan.

PicCell requires you to type in a 9 digit number before you make a call, which to us makes this a no-go, along with the fact that the service is very expensive.

**EU Countries:**

Austria, Italy, Belgium, Latvia, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Croatia, Luxembourg, Cyprus, Malta, Czech Republic, Netherlands, Denmark, Poland, Estonia, Portugal, Finland, Romania, France, Slovakia, Germany, Slovenia, Greece, Spain, Hungary, Sweden, Ireland, United Kingdom