



Calling and Texting Home From Abroad

No Shock Phone Bill Wi-Fi calling and free apps to reach family from overseas

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THE 60-SECOND VERSION

1. The Whole Idea in One Glance

If you remember only this page, you will still avoid the big bill.

When you travel overseas, the thing that runs up a shocking phone bill is using your regular cellular service on a foreign network. The fix is to lean on Wi-Fi instead, which is free in most hotels, cafes, and airports. Over Wi-Fi you can call and message home at no extra cost.

- Turn on Wi-Fi Calling before you leave home, while you still have a strong signal
- Turn off Data Roaming so your phone cannot quietly use the pricey foreign network
- Connect to the hotel or cafe Wi-Fi when you want to call or text
- For calls to US numbers, Wi-Fi Calling reaches them like you never left
- For everyone, free apps like WhatsApp, FaceTime, and Messenger call over Wi-Fi

GOOD TO KNOW

A phone call made over Wi-Fi does not touch the foreign cell network, so it does not trigger roaming charges. Your phone treats it almost as if you were sitting in your own living room.

WHY THE BILL HAPPENS

2. Where a Shock Phone Bill Comes From

It helps to understand the one thing that causes trouble, because once you see it, the rest is easy. When your phone leaves the country, it looks for a local cell tower to latch onto. Using that foreign tower for calls, texts, or internet is called roaming, and your home carrier bills you for it, often at steep rates.

The worst part is that your phone can roam without you doing a thing. Email checking in the background, apps updating, a map loading, all of it can quietly use the foreign network and add up. The whole aim of this guide is to switch that off and route everything through free Wi-Fi instead.

WATCH OUT

Text messages are a sneaky trap. Even if you have unlimited texting at home, a text sent while roaming abroad is often billed separately and can cost many times the usual price. We will route your messages through Wi-Fi instead.

YOUR TWO JOBS

3. The Two Switches That Do the Heavy Lifting

Almost everything in this guide comes down to two simple settings on your phone. Get these two right and you have solved most of the problem before you even board the plane.

- Switch ON: Wi-Fi Calling, so calls and texts travel over Wi-Fi for free
- Switch OFF: Data Roaming, so your phone cannot use the expensive foreign network for internet
- Both of these live in your phone's Settings, and you set them once at home

TIP

Do this at home a day or two before your trip, not at the airport. Turning on Wi-Fi Calling sometimes needs a verification step that is easiest to finish on your home Wi-Fi.

WHAT WI-FI CALLING IS

4. What Wi-Fi Calling Actually Means

Wi-Fi Calling is a feature built into most phones and offered by the major carriers. It lets your phone make and receive ordinary calls and texts over a Wi-Fi internet connection instead of over a cell tower. To the person you are calling, nothing looks different. Your usual phone number shows up, and they answer as they always would.

The magic for a traveler is that when the call rides on Wi-Fi, it does not use the foreign cell network, so there is no roaming charge for it. You are using your own phone number, your own voicemail, and your own contacts, just carried over the internet.

GOOD TO KNOW

Several carriers treat a Wi-Fi call to a US number from overseas the same as a call made at home, at no extra charge. The exact terms vary by carrier, so it is worth a quick check with yours before you go.

TURNING IT ON (IPHONE)

5. Turning On Wi-Fi Calling on an iPhone

On an iPhone the setting lives in a sensible place, and the whole thing takes about a minute. Do it while you are on your home Wi-Fi.

1 Open Settings

- 2 Tap Apps, then Phone (on some versions, tap Phone directly)
- 3 Tap Wi-Fi Calling
- 4 Slide the switch on so it turns green
- 5 If asked, confirm your home address for emergency calls, then follow any verification prompt

TIP

When Wi-Fi Calling is working, you will often see the words 'Wi-Fi Calling' or your carrier's name with 'Wi-Fi' next to the signal bars at the top of the screen. That little label is your proof it is on.

TURNING IT ON (ANDROID)

6. Turning On Wi-Fi Calling on an Android Phone

On an Android phone, such as a Samsung Galaxy, Motorola, or Google Pixel, the setting is in a similar spot but the exact wording varies a little by brand. The idea is the same: find Wi-Fi Calling and switch it on.

- 1 Open the Phone app, then tap the three-dot menu and Settings, or open the main Settings app
- 2 Look under Connections or Network, or search the settings for 'Wi-Fi Calling'
- 3 Tap Wi-Fi Calling and switch it on
- 4 Confirm your emergency address if it asks

GOOD TO KNOW

If you cannot find the setting, your carrier's app or a quick call to them will point you to it. Not every plan includes Wi-Fi Calling, so confirming with your carrier is time well spent.

THE 911 ADDRESS

7. Why It Asks for Your Home Address

When you first turn on Wi-Fi Calling, your phone will ask you to confirm an address for emergencies. This is normal and nothing to worry about. Because a Wi-Fi call has no cell tower to pinpoint your location, the system uses the address you provide if you ever have to dial for help.

Put in your home address and you are done. For a traveler calling home over Wi-Fi, this is a one-time setup step, not something you need to change at each hotel.

WATCH OUT

The emergency address is for the rare case of dialing 911 over Wi-Fi. Abroad, you would dial the local emergency number instead, so treat this setting as a formality and simply enter your home address.

TURN OFF ROAMING

8. Switching Off Data Roaming So Nothing Sneaks Through

This is the other half of the job and just as important. Turning off Data Roaming tells your phone it may not use the foreign cell network for internet. Your phone will still work normally on Wi-Fi, but it cannot quietly rack up data charges on the pricey network.

- 1 On iPhone: Settings, then Cellular, then Cellular Data Options, then turn Data Roaming off
- 2 On Android: Settings, then Connections or Network, then Mobile Networks, then turn Data Roaming off
- 3 Leave Wi-Fi switched on so the phone still works over Wi-Fi
- 4 Double-check the switch is off before you land

GOOD TO KNOW

With Data Roaming off and Wi-Fi Calling on, you get the best of both. Calls and texts to US numbers work over Wi-Fi for free, and the phone cannot surprise you with data charges.

THE STRICTEST OPTION

9. Airplane Mode Plus Wi-Fi, the Belt-and-Suspenders Way

If you want to be completely certain your phone cannot touch the foreign cell network, there is a stricter approach. Turn on Airplane Mode, which shuts off all cellular connection, and then turn Wi-Fi back on by itself. Your phone now lives entirely on Wi-Fi.

In this mode, Wi-Fi Calling and all your free apps still work whenever you are connected to Wi-Fi. The only trade-off is that your phone cannot receive a regular cellular call or text, so lean on Wi-Fi Calling and apps instead, which is exactly the plan anyway.

GOOD TO KNOW

Airplane Mode with Wi-Fi on is the surest way to avoid every roaming charge. Many careful travelers keep their phone this way for the whole trip and connect to Wi-Fi wherever they stop.

HOTEL WI-FI CALLS

10. Making a Call Over Hotel Wi-Fi

Once you are set up, calling home from your hotel room is wonderfully ordinary. You connect to the hotel Wi-Fi, and then you dial exactly the way you do at home. The call travels over the internet, reaches the US number, and costs you nothing extra.

- 1 Connect your phone to the hotel Wi-Fi
- 2 Confirm you see the Wi-Fi Calling label near the signal bars
- 3 Open the Phone app and dial the US number as you normally would, including the area code
- 4 Talk as long as you like, since the call rides on Wi-Fi

WATCH OUT

Some hotels charge for their Wi-Fi or have a slow free tier. The Wi-Fi Calling itself is free, but if the hotel bills for the internet connection, that fee is between you and the hotel. Most hotels offer free Wi-Fi to guests.

DIALING US NUMBERS

11. How to Dial a US Number From Abroad

Over Wi-Fi Calling, dialing a US number is the same as at home: the area code and the seven digits, nothing fancy. Because your phone behaves as if it were in the States, you do not need to add country codes or long strings of extra numbers.

Saving your family's numbers in your contacts before you leave makes this even simpler. You just tap the name and the call goes through. There is no math and no code to remember.

TIP

Before your trip, make sure the key numbers you will want, family, your doctor, your hotel, are all saved in your contacts with names you recognize. Fumbling with a keypad in a strange country is no fun.

FREE APPS OVERVIEW

12. The Free Calling and Messaging Apps

Alongside Wi-Fi Calling, there is a whole family of free apps that make calls and send messages over the internet. They are especially handy for reaching family who may not answer a regular call, or for video chats so you can see faces. All of them work over Wi-Fi at no cost.

- WhatsApp: works on any phone, hugely popular worldwide, free calls, texts, and video
- FaceTime: built into every iPhone and iPad, free calls and video between Apple devices
- Facebook Messenger: free calls and video, already on many people's phones
- Google Meet: free video and voice meetings that even work through a web link

GOOD TO KNOW

These apps do not use your phone number for the call itself; they use your internet connection. That is why they work the same whether you are in Ohio or overseas, as long as you have Wi-Fi.

WHATSAPP

13. WhatsApp, the Traveler's Favorite

WhatsApp is the app most of the world uses to stay in touch, and it is free. It works on both iPhone and Android, so it bridges households where one person has an iPhone and another has a Samsung. You can send text messages, make voice calls, and do video calls, all over Wi-Fi or data.

The one catch is that the person you are calling also needs WhatsApp on their phone. The good news is that setting it up takes only a few minutes, and once your family is all on it, calling between you is simple and costs nothing.

- 1 Download WhatsApp from the app store before your trip
- 2 Open it and verify your phone number with the code it texts you
- 3 Let it find family who already use WhatsApp from your contacts
- 4 Tap a name and choose the phone or video icon to call

TIP

Set WhatsApp up at home and do a practice call with a family member before you leave. Working out any kinks from your own couch is far nicer than figuring it out jet-lagged in a hotel.

FACETIME

14. FaceTime for Apple Households

If you have an iPhone or iPad and your family does too, FaceTime is already built in and ready. There is nothing to download. It makes free voice and video calls between Apple devices over Wi-Fi, and the picture quality is excellent for seeing grandchildren up close.

You start a FaceTime call from the FaceTime app or straight from a person's contact card. Because it is built into the phone, many Apple families find it the easiest option of all.

GOOD TO KNOW

FaceTime can now include people on Android or Windows through a shared web link, so even a family member without an Apple device can join a FaceTime call in their browser. The host simply shares a link.

MESSENGER AND MEET

15. Facebook Messenger and Google Meet

Two more free options round out the set. Facebook Messenger is handy because so many families already have a Facebook account, and Messenger lets you call or video chat with anyone else who uses it. Google Meet is a free video service that works through the Meet app or even just a web link, which makes it friendly for group calls with the whole family.

- Messenger: good if your family is already on Facebook, free calls and video
- Google Meet: free video meetings, joinable from a link, nice for several people at once
- Both work over Wi-Fi at no cost, just like WhatsApp and FaceTime

WATCH OUT

You do not need all four apps. Pick the one or two your family already uses and stick with those. The best app is simply the one the people you call are already on.

PICKING ONE

16. Choosing Which App to Use

It is easy to feel you must learn every app. You do not. The right choice is the one that matches the people you talk to most. A short conversation with your family before the trip settles it quickly.

- If everyone in the family has an iPhone, FaceTime is effortless
- If the family is a mix of iPhone and Android, WhatsApp bridges both
- If your family lives on Facebook, Messenger is already in their pocket
- For a big group call with children and grandchildren, Google Meet shines

GOOD TO KNOW

There is no harm in having two apps installed, one for one branch of the family and one for another. You only ever open the one you need for that particular call.

TEXTING FOR FREE

17. Sending Messages Without a Charge

Texting is where many travelers get stung, because a roaming text can cost many times the normal rate. The fix is to send your messages through an internet app instead of as a regular cellular text. Over Wi-Fi, these messages are free.

WhatsApp and Messenger both do text messages beautifully. On an iPhone, messages to other Apple devices travel as iMessage over Wi-Fi for free, shown in blue bubbles. The rule of thumb is simple: if the message rides the internet, it costs nothing.

WATCH OUT

A green message bubble on an iPhone can mean a regular cellular text, which may cost money while roaming. A blue bubble travels over the internet and is free. When in doubt, use WhatsApp, where every message is free over Wi-Fi.

A WAY TO REACH YOU

18. Giving Family a Reliable Way to Reach You

It is not only about you calling out. Your family wants to know they can reach you too. The kindest thing you can do is agree, before you leave, on exactly how everyone will stay in touch, so no one is left guessing.

- Pick one main app the whole family will use, and make sure it is installed on everyone's phone
- Explain that you will be on Wi-Fi, so you may not answer a regular call instantly
- Share your hotel name and the dates, so family has a backup way to reach you
- Agree on a daily check-in time that suits the time difference

TIP

Leave a simple written note with a trusted family member listing your main app, your hotel, and your travel dates. If your phone is ever lost, they still know how to find you.

MIND THE CLOCK

19. Being Kind About the Time Difference

When you travel far, the clock at home can be many hours apart from the clock where you are. A cheerful call for you at breakfast might ring at your daughter's bedside in the middle of her night. A moment of planning keeps your calls welcome.

Your phone can help. It shows the time at home if you add a second clock, so you can glance before you dial. Agreeing on a good window, say your evening and their morning, means your calls always land at a friendly hour.

GOOD TO KNOW

On most phones you can add a World Clock showing your home city alongside your current one. On an iPhone it is in the Clock app; on Android it is in the Clock app's World Clock tab. A quick look saves a midnight wake-up call.

SECOND CLOCK

20. Adding a Home Clock to Your Phone

Setting up a second clock takes less than a minute and spares you from doing time-zone math in your head. Once it is there, you simply glance at it before calling.

- 1 Open the Clock app on your phone
- 2 Find the World Clock section or tab
- 3 Tap the plus sign to add a city
- 4 Choose your home city, such as Cleveland or your own town's nearest city
- 5 Now both times sit side by side whenever you open the app

TIP

Write a small note of the time difference on a card in your wallet, like 'Home is 6 hours behind.' Even without opening an app, a glance at the card tells you whether it is a good moment to call.

VOICEMAIL

21. What Happens to Your Voicemail Abroad

Your voicemail still works while you travel, but checking it can be a roaming trap if you are not careful. With Wi-Fi Calling on and Data Roaming off, you can usually listen to voicemail over Wi-Fi the same as calling, at no extra cost. Dialing in over the foreign cell network, however, may cost you.

Many phones offer Visual Voicemail, which shows your messages as a list you can tap to play. Over Wi-Fi, this is the easy and free way to catch up on who called.

WATCH OUT

Avoid dialing in to listen to voicemail when you are not on Wi-Fi, since that can use the foreign network. Wait until you are back on Wi-Fi, then check your messages through Visual Voicemail or Wi-Fi Calling.

A GREETING THAT HELPS

22. Updating Your Voicemail Greeting Before You Go

A small, thoughtful touch is to update your voicemail greeting before your trip. A short message telling callers you are traveling and how best to reach you saves everyone confusion and keeps people from worrying when you do not pick up right away.

You might say which app you will be checking, or that you will return calls in the evening your time. It turns a missed call into a reassured caller.

TIP

Keep the greeting general for your safety: say you are traveling and will return calls, not the exact dates your house is empty. 'I am traveling and checking messages each evening' is friendly and wise.

A LITTLE DATA

23. If You Want Data Away From Wi-Fi

Everything so far relies on free Wi-Fi, which covers most of what travelers need. But sometimes you want internet out and about, for a map or to call home from a park bench. For that you need a little data, and the modern way to get it is an eSIM, a kind of digital SIM card you add to your phone.

An eSIM lets you buy a small amount of data for your destination, often for the cost of a few coffees, without swapping any physical card. Once you have data, your Wi-Fi calling and apps work away from Wi-Fi too. This is a bigger topic with its own guide.

GOOD TO KNOW

This guide focuses on free calling over Wi-Fi, which is enough for many travelers. If you want data in your pocket wherever you go, see our separate guide on eSIMs, which walks through buying and turning one on step by step.

CARRIER DAY PASSES

24. The Carrier Day Pass, in Brief

Your home carrier likely offers an international day pass, a flat daily fee that lets you use your phone abroad like you do at home, calls, texts, and data included. It is the most familiar option because nothing about your phone changes. The trade-off is that the daily fee adds up on a long trip.

For a short trip, or if the idea of apps and settings feels like too much, a day pass is a perfectly fine choice. Just know it is the convenient option, not the cheapest one. Free Wi-Fi calling costs nothing by comparison.

WATCH OUT

If you buy a day pass, you still want Wi-Fi Calling on, so calls over hotel Wi-Fi do not eat into any limits. The two work together nicely. Confirm the current daily price with your carrier before you leave.

BEFORE YOU FLY

25. A Quick Setup to Do at Home

The secret to a calm, cheap trip is doing the setup at home, on your own Wi-Fi, where help is a phone call away. Run through this short list a day or two before you leave and you are ready.

- 1 Turn on Wi-Fi Calling and confirm your emergency address
- 2 Turn off Data Roaming
- 3 Install the one or two calling apps your family uses
- 4 Do a practice call with a family member over Wi-Fi
- 5 Add a second clock for home and note the time difference

GOOD TO KNOW

Everything on this list is free and takes about fifteen minutes at the kitchen table. That small effort at home is what saves you from a nasty bill later.

CHECK WITH YOUR CARRIER

26. A Phone Call Worth Making Before You Go

Carriers differ in exactly what they allow abroad, so one short call to yours clears up any doubt. Ask them to confirm that Wi-Fi Calling works at your destination and that calls to US numbers over Wi-Fi are free. It takes a few minutes and lets you leave with confidence.

- Ask: does Wi-Fi Calling work in the country I am visiting?
- Ask: are calls to US numbers over Wi-Fi free from there?
- Ask: what would a day pass cost if I want regular service as a backup?
- Ask: is there anything I should turn on or off before I travel?

WATCH OUT

A short list of countries block or limit Wi-Fi Calling, and the list changes. This is exactly why a quick check with your carrier before you go is worth the few minutes it takes.

RECEIVING CALLS

27. Letting People Call You Over Wi-Fi

Wi-Fi Calling works both ways. With it turned on and your phone connected to Wi-Fi, people can dial your regular number and it rings on your phone abroad, with no roaming charge to you. From their end, they dial your number as they always have.

The same is true of the apps. If your family calls you on WhatsApp or FaceTime while you are on Wi-Fi, your phone rings and you answer. The trick is simply to be connected to Wi-Fi when you want to be reachable.

WATCH OUT

Tell your family that you are reachable when you are on Wi-Fi, which is most of the time in a hotel. If you do not answer at once, you were likely away from Wi-Fi, and you will see the message or missed call when you reconnect.

CALLING A FOREIGN NUMBER

28. Calling a Local Number Where You Are

Most of your calling will be home to US numbers, which Wi-Fi Calling handles for free. But sometimes you need to call a local number at your destination, such as a restaurant or a tour company. That is a different matter, because it is an international or local call, not a call home.

The simplest approach is to let an app or your hotel help. Many businesses abroad have a WhatsApp number, which you can call for free. Otherwise, the hotel front desk is glad to place a local call for you, and a translation app can smooth the conversation.

GOOD TO KNOW

A call to a local foreign number over Wi-Fi Calling may be billed at international rates, since it is not a US number. For local calls, ask the hotel desk or look for the business's WhatsApp, which is free.

KEEP APPS WITHIN REACH

29. Keeping Your Calling Apps Easy to Find

An app only helps if you can find it when you want it. Before you travel, move your one or two calling apps to the first screen of your phone, where they are easy to spot. You should not have to hunt through folders when you want to say goodnight to the grandchildren.

It is also worth opening each app once before you go, just to be sure you are signed in and it remembers you. A moment of checking at home spares fumbling later.

TIP

Put the Phone app, your main calling app, and your messaging app together on the first screen. Three taps, three ways to reach home, all in one tidy row.

BATTERY AND CALLS

30. Keeping Enough Battery for the Important Call

Calls and video chats use battery, and so does hunting for Wi-Fi in a new place. A dead phone cannot call home, so it pays to keep yours topped up. A small power bank in your day bag means you are never caught with an empty battery when you most want to reach family.

Turning off Data Roaming actually helps your battery too, because the phone stops constantly searching the foreign network. Airplane Mode with Wi-Fi on helps even more. Our guide on charging on the road covers power banks in detail.

GOOD TO KNOW

A phone left hunting for a weak foreign signal drains faster. With Data Roaming off, your phone rests easy on Wi-Fi and the battery lasts noticeably longer through the day.

GROUP CALLS

31. Getting the Whole Family on One Call

One of the real joys of these apps is gathering the whole family onto a single call, even when they are scattered across different homes. Instead of calling each person in turn, everyone joins the same video chat and you see all their faces at once.

- WhatsApp lets you start a group video call with several family members
- FaceTime gathers your Apple family, and others can join by link
- Google Meet is built for group calls and joins from a simple link
- Messenger supports group video for families already on Facebook

TIP

Set a standing weekly family video call at a time that works for your travel schedule. Many families say these calls make a long trip feel far less far away.

WHEN WI-FI IS WEAK

32. What to Do When the Wi-Fi Is Poor

Not every hotel Wi-Fi is strong, and a weak connection can make a call drop or sound choppy. This is not your phone's fault; it is the internet connection struggling. A few simple moves usually fix it.

- Move closer to the Wi-Fi router, often near the hotel room door or the lobby
- Switch a video call to a voice-only call, which needs far less connection
- Try again at a quieter hour when fewer guests are using the Wi-Fi
- If the room Wi-Fi is hopeless, the lobby or breakfast area is often stronger

GOOD TO KNOW

A voice call sips far less internet than a video call. If a video chat keeps freezing, switching off the camera and just talking will usually give you a clear, steady connection.

PRIVACY AND SAFETY

33. Keeping Your Calls Private

You may wonder whether calling over hotel Wi-Fi is safe. For ordinary voice and video calls to family, the popular apps protect your conversation with strong encryption, meaning the call is scrambled so others on the network cannot listen in. WhatsApp and FaceTime both do this automatically.

The sensible caution is less about your calls and more about other things you do on public Wi-Fi, like banking. For that, our guides on hotel Wi-Fi safety and keeping your accounts safe on the road have you covered.

TIP

Your calls and messages on WhatsApp and FaceTime are scrambled end to end, so a chat with your daughter stays private even on hotel Wi-Fi. For banking and shopping, see our safety guides for extra care.

A PAPER BACKUP

34. Carrying a Simple Written Backup

Phones can be lost, stolen, or simply run out of battery at the wrong moment. A small card in your wallet with a few key details means you are never truly cut off, even if the phone is gone.

- Your own phone number, so you can recite it if asked
- Two family phone numbers you would want to reach in an emergency
- The name and phone of your hotel
- Your main calling app and the email or number you use to sign in

GOOD TO KNOW

If your phone is lost, a kind stranger, hotel desk, or local police can use that card to help you reach family. It is old-fashioned and it works when the battery does not.

ON A CRUISE

35. Calling Home From a Cruise Ship

Cruise ships are a special case, because far out at sea there is no cell tower and often no free Wi-Fi. The ship sells its own internet package, and the ship's cellular service, if you leave roaming on, can be very expensive. Keep Data Roaming off at sea without question.

If you buy the ship's Wi-Fi package, your calling apps and Wi-Fi Calling can work over it, though the connection may be slower than on land. In port, you can often find free Wi-Fi ashore for your calls. We have a separate guide on cruise ship internet.

WATCH OUT

At sea, the ship's own cell signal can cost a great deal if you roam on it. Keep Data Roaming off and use only the ship's Wi-Fi package or free Wi-Fi in port. Our cruise internet guide explains the packages.

COMMON WORRIES

36. The Questions Travelers Ask Me Most

A handful of worries come up again and again, and the answers are reassuring.

- Will Wi-Fi Calling cost me? No, the call rides on Wi-Fi, so there is no roaming charge
- Does the person I call need anything? For Wi-Fi Calling, no; for apps, they need the same app
- Will my number still show up? Yes, Wi-Fi Calling uses your normal number
- Can I text for free? Yes, through an app or a blue-bubble iMessage over Wi-Fi

GOOD TO KNOW

The thing that costs money is using the foreign cell network. Everything in this guide routes you around it, through free Wi-Fi, which is why your bill stays normal.

HELPING A SPOUSE

37. Setting Things Up for a Less Techy Partner

In many couples one person handles the phones and the other would rather not fuss. Calling home is a gentle place to share the load, because once it is set up, the hard part is done. Your partner only ever needs to tap a name and talk.

Set both phones up together at the kitchen table. Turn on Wi-Fi Calling on each, install the same app on both, and do a practice call. Then write a two-line note: connect to Wi-Fi, tap the family's name, talk. That is all either of you needs to remember.

TIP

Keep it to one task that matters: connect to Wi-Fi, then call. There is no need to learn every feature. A calm walk-through once at home is worth more than any manual.

A SAMPLE PLAN

38. A Simple Plan That Works for Most Trips

If you want a plan you can just follow, here is one that keeps nearly everyone happy and costs almost nothing. It leans on free Wi-Fi for all your calling and keeps your regular service switched safely off.

- 1 At home: turn on Wi-Fi Calling, turn off Data Roaming, install one family app
- 2 On the trip: connect to hotel Wi-Fi each evening
- 3 Call US family over Wi-Fi Calling or your chosen app, for free
- 4 Check voicemail and messages while on Wi-Fi
- 5 Keep a power bank and a paper card of key numbers in your bag

GOOD TO KNOW

This plan has kept countless travelers in daily touch with home without a single surprise charge. Simple, free, and dependable, which is exactly what you want when you are far away.

YOUR CHECKLIST

39. Your Pre-Trip Calling Checklist

Run through this the night before you travel and you are set to call home with no worry about the bill.

- Wi-Fi Calling turned on, emergency address confirmed
- Data Roaming turned off
- One or two family calling apps installed and tested
- Family numbers saved in contacts with clear names
- Second clock added, time difference noted on a card
- Voicemail greeting updated to say you are traveling

- Power bank packed and a paper card of key numbers in your wallet

GOOD TO KNOW

Do this setup at home on your own Wi-Fi, calmly, never in a rush at the airport. Fifteen quiet minutes at the kitchen table is all it takes.

VOICE MESSAGES

40. Leaving a Voice Message Across Time Zones

One lovely feature of apps like WhatsApp is the voice message, a little recording you tap and speak into, then send. It is perfect for a big time difference, because your family can listen whenever they wake, and you can record whenever suits you. No one has to be awake at the same moment.

It feels warmer than a typed text, since they hear your actual voice, and it is far easier than typing on a small screen. You hold the microphone button, say your piece, and let go to send.

TIP

When the clocks are far apart, a voice message is the kind way to stay close. Record a cheerful hello at your bedtime, and your family hears your voice over their morning coffee, no one woken at an odd hour.

A FAMILY GROUP CHAT

41. Keeping One Family Group Chat

A family group chat is a single conversation that everyone in the family can see and add to. Set one up before your trip, and it becomes the easy place to share a photo, a short note, or a quick 'we arrived safely.' Everyone stays in the loop without you repeating yourself to each person.

WhatsApp and Messenger both make group chats simple. You create the group once, add your family, and give it a friendly name. Then a single message reaches the whole family at once.

GOOD TO KNOW

A group chat spares you from sending the same update five times. Post one photo of the view from your hotel, and children and grandchildren alike see it, and can reply when they have a moment.

SMOOTHING A LOCAL CALL

42. Using a Translation App on a Call

If you ever need to speak with someone abroad who does not share your language, a translation app can help. Apps like Google Translate can listen to what you say, show it in the other language, and read it aloud, taking turns like an interpreter. It is a gentle help for a call to a local shop or a taxi.

Download the app and its language pack at home over your Wi-Fi, so it works even without data. Then it is ready to smooth a conversation whenever you need it, without any roaming charge.

TIP

Download the languages you expect to need before you leave home, while you have strong Wi-Fi. A downloaded language works offline, so the translator is ready even when you have no signal at all.

WHEN TO CALL

43. When It Is Worth Calling Me

Most people can set all of this up themselves in under half an hour. But if Wi-Fi Calling will not switch on, if you are not sure which app your family uses, or if you would simply rather have someone sit beside you and walk through it before a big trip, that is exactly what I am here for. I have more than 30 years of helping folks with their technology, and I serve families all over Portage County.

GOOD TO KNOW

I can get your phone trip-ready in one visit, turning on Wi-Fi Calling, setting up your family's app, and doing a practice call together, so you leave for your trip knowing you can reach home for free. Call Bill's Home Tech at (330) 200-8042, or ask Sophie, our phone helper. The first in-home visit is a flat \$99, and remote screen-share help is \$49.

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Keep this page handy for your trip. It is the short answer to calling and texting home without a shock bill.

- Before you go: turn ON Wi-Fi Calling, turn OFF Data Roaming
- Connect to hotel, cafe, or airport Wi-Fi, then call as you do at home
- Calls to US numbers over Wi-Fi Calling are free; dial the area code and number
- Free apps: WhatsApp (any phone), FaceTime (Apple), Messenger, Google Meet
- Text through an app or blue-bubble iMessage over Wi-Fi, never a green roaming text
- Add a home clock and note the time difference so you call at a kind hour
- Check voicemail only while on Wi-Fi, through Visual Voicemail
- Keep Data Roaming off on cruise ships; use the ship's Wi-Fi or free Wi-Fi in port
- Carry a paper card with key numbers in case the phone dies
- Get help: call Bill at (330) 200-8042

AT A GLANCE

A Picture to Follow Along

Which Way to Call Home?

Pick the route that matches who you are calling.

US Numbers

Use Wi-Fi
Calling
Dial like at
home
Free over Wi-Fi

Apple Family

Use FaceTime
Built into
iPhone
Free over Wi-Fi

Mixed Phones

Use WhatsApp
Works on any
phone
Free over Wi-Fi

Whole Group

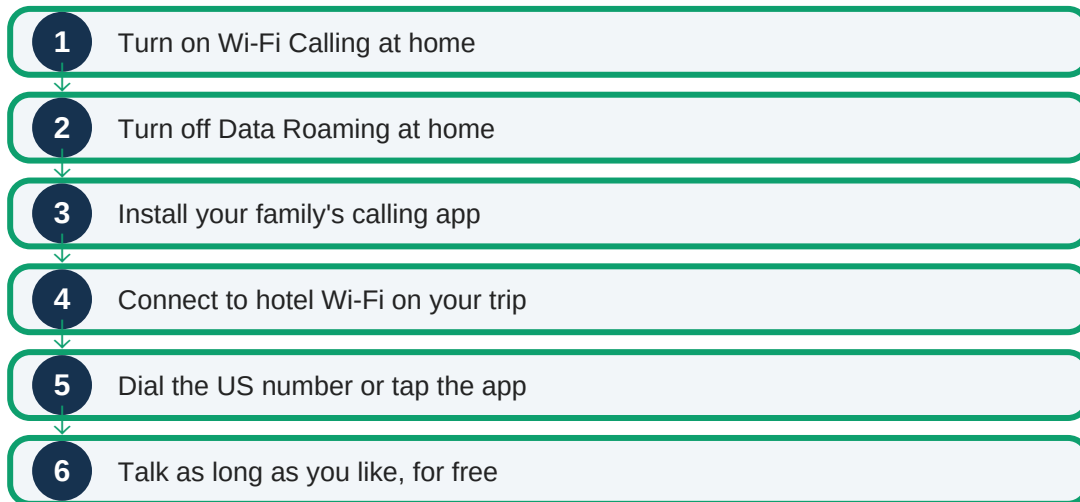
Use Google Meet
Join by a link
Free over Wi-Fi

AT A GLANCE

A Second Look

From Home Setup to First Call

Do the first steps at home, the last one at the hotel.



BEFORE YOU GO

A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill. I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that results.



HOW I CAN HELP

Your Visit — and My Promise

In-home visit — \$99 flat for your first visit. No contracts and no surprise charges, and a 30-day follow-up is included.

Remote Support — \$49 for a screen-share session. I only connect with your permission, you watch the whole time, and you can end anytime. If I can't fix it over the screen-share, I refund the \$49 — and if it turns out you need me in person, that \$49 goes toward your visit. It's included free for Support Plan members (\$39/mo).

GOOD TO KNOW

My promise — If you're not 100% satisfied with your visit, I'll come back at no charge, or refund the full \$99. No questions, no awkwardness. That's how I'd want to be treated.

Call or text **(330) 200-8042** · Book a visit: **billshometech.com/book** · **bill@billshometech.com**

This free guide is for general information only — not professional advice, and no substitute for your device's own manual. Any prices or outside products mentioned can change; please confirm current details before you buy. Please use your own good judgment and follow it at your own risk — for anything involving electricity, gas, water, or heights, stop and call a licensed professional. Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that results. © 2026 Bill's Home Tech, LLC.