

Roaming and Travel Passes

THE QUICK VERSION

- 1 You keep your own phone number — no new SIM, no new setup inside the phone.
- 2 You pay a daily fee only on the days you actually use the phone abroad.
- 3 Your normal talk, text, and data allowances travel with you, within limits.
- 4 It's the simplest option — little to set up, nothing new to learn.

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International Roaming and Travel Passes — Before You Fly

Use your phone abroad without a shocking bill: day passes, travel eSIMs, Wi-Fi apps, and a checklist.

————— **An Extended Guide · No. 1710 · TRAVEL** —————

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1. Before You Fly — Why This Matters

The surprise bill is avoidable, but only beforehand.

The horror stories are real. A couple takes a once-in-a-lifetime trip, uses their phones the way they always do — a few calls, some maps, photos to the grandchildren — and comes home to a bill hundreds of dollars higher than usual. Nobody did anything reckless. They simply used their phones abroad without setting anything up first, and the charges added up quietly in the background the whole trip.

Here is the reassuring truth: this is one of the most avoidable problems in all of technology. The tools to prevent it are simple, and most of them are things you arrange at your own kitchen table before you ever get on the plane. The single most important idea in this whole guide is right here in the title — before you fly. Once you have landed, your options narrow and the meter may already be running. A few minutes of preparation at home is worth more than any amount of fiddling at the gate.

This guide gives you the whole picture. We will look at the carrier travel passes from Verizon, AT&T, and T-Mobile, which are the easiest option. We will look at travel eSIMs, which are usually much cheaper for data. We will look at the free ways to call and message family back home over Wi-Fi. And we will finish with a clear before-you-fly checklist you can work through, or bring to me, so you leave with confidence instead of worry.

GOOD TO KNOW

Prices for all of these change often, so this guide keeps the dollar figures general on purpose. The how-it-works part is stable; the exact rates you should confirm on your carrier's site, or let me confirm for you, close to your trip.

2. How a Surprise Bill Actually Happens

The quiet charges that run while you sightsee.

To avoid the surprise, it helps to understand exactly how it happens. When your phone is in another country and you have not set up any travel option, it tries to connect to a local network anyway — that is called roaming. Without a travel pass or plan that covers it, the carrier charges steep pay-as-you-go rates for every call, every text, and especially every bit of data.

Data is the real danger, because so much of it happens without you touching the phone. Apps check for email in the background. Photos try to back themselves up to the cloud. Maps download the streets around you. Weather, news, and social apps refresh on their own. All of this is normal and invisible at home, where it rides your Wi-Fi for free. Abroad, with no plan, each of those quiet actions can be billed at punishing rates. You can run up a large charge having never once opened an app on purpose.

That is why simply 'being careful' is not a plan. You cannot watch every app every minute, and the charges that hurt most are the ones you never see. The answer is to decide before the trip how your phone will get data abroad — a pass, an eSIM, or Wi-Fi only — and to switch off the expensive default until your chosen option is in place. Everything else in this guide is just the details of doing that well.

WATCH OUT

The costliest charges are from background data you never see — apps refreshing on their own. This is why turning off cellular roaming until your travel option is ready matters more than any other single step.

3. The Big-Three Travel Passes — The Easy Option

How the carrier day passes work, in general.

The simplest way to use your phone abroad is a travel pass from your own carrier. All three big carriers — Verizon, AT&T, and T-Mobile — offer a version of the same idea: for a daily fee, you get to use your regular plan's talk, text, and data in another country, keeping your own phone number. You do not change anything about how you use the phone. You just pay by the day for the days you use it.

The great appeal of these passes is that they are the least fuss. Your phone number stays the same, so family can reach you exactly as always. Your usual apps work. There is nothing new to install. For someone who wants their phone to simply behave abroad the way it does at home, and who is not counting every dollar, a carrier day pass is the easy, worry-free choice.

- You keep your own phone number — no new SIM, no new setup inside the phone.
- You pay a daily fee only on the days you actually use the phone abroad.
- Your normal talk, text, and data allowances travel with you, within limits.
- It's the simplest option — little to set up, nothing new to learn.

The trade-off is cost. A daily fee across a two-week trip adds up, and it is usually the most expensive way to stay connected compared with a travel eSIM. For a short trip, or for someone who values simplicity over saving, that is a fair price for peace of mind. For a longer trip, or a budget-minded traveler, the eSIM we cover later is often far cheaper. The rest of this section covers each carrier's pass in turn.

TIP

Carrier passes are billed per day, usually counted when you first use the phone each day abroad. If you can get by on Wi-Fi some days and only switch on the pass on days you truly need it, you pay for fewer days.

4. Verizon TravelPass

Your Verizon plan, by the day, around the world.

Verizon's travel pass is called TravelPass. The idea is straightforward: for a daily fee, you take your existing Verizon plan abroad and use your talk, text, and data in a long list of countries — well over a hundred of them. You are charged the daily fee only on the days you actually use your phone in a covered country, so a day spent entirely on hotel Wi-Fi need not cost you a TravelPass day.

There are two nice details worth knowing. First, Canada and Mexico are usually charged at a lower daily rate than the rest of the world — roughly half — which matters a great deal for Portage County folks visiting family or taking a cross-border trip. Second, Verizon caps how many days it will charge you in a single billing month; after you hit that cap, additional travel days in the month are not charged. So a long trip does not bill you endlessly, day after day.

- Covers a very large list of countries; you keep your Verizon number.
- A flat daily fee, charged only on days you use the phone abroad.
- Canada and Mexico are usually cheaper per day than the rest of the world.
- The number of charged days in a month is capped, so long trips don't bill without end.
- Some top-tier Verizon plans include a number of TravelPass days built in.

GOOD TO KNOW

If you are on one of Verizon's premium unlimited plans, you may already have a batch of TravelPass days included each month. Before you buy anything, ask Verizon plainly whether your plan already covers the trip.

5. AT&T International Day Pass

The same by-the-day idea, AT&T's version.

AT&T's version is called the International Day Pass. It works on the same principle as Verizon's: a daily fee lets you use your regular AT&T plan's talk, text, and data in a long list of destinations — again well over a hundred — while keeping your own number. You are charged for a day only when you actually use the phone abroad, so Wi-Fi-only days need not count.

AT&T adds a couple of its own wrinkles. If more than one line on your account is traveling, each additional line is usually charged a lower daily fee on the same day, which softens the cost for couples traveling together. And like Verizon, AT&T caps the number of charged days per billing cycle — after you reach that cap, further travel days in the cycle are not billed. There is also good news close to home: AT&T's unlimited plans often include Canada and Mexico with no separate day-pass charge at all.

- A flat daily fee, charged only on days you use the phone abroad; you keep your AT&T number.
- Extra traveling lines on your account are usually charged a reduced daily fee.
- The number of charged days per billing cycle is capped.
- Many AT&T unlimited plans include Canada and Mexico without a day-pass charge.
- Covers a very large list of worldwide destinations.

GOOD TO KNOW

If your trip is to Canada or Mexico and you are on an AT&T unlimited plan, you may need no pass at all — the coverage may already be built in. Confirm with AT&T before you pay for anything.

6. T-Mobile — Passes and Built-In Roaming

A different approach, with roaming often included.

T-Mobile takes a somewhat different path. Many T-Mobile plans include some international roaming built right in — typically unlimited texting and a slower, basic level of data in a long list of countries at no extra charge, with faster speeds available by buying a pass. This means a T-Mobile traveler can often land and send texts and check a map at slow speed without paying anything extra, which is a genuine advantage for staying in touch cheaply.

When that included slow data is not enough, T-Mobile sells International Passes that add a chunk of high-speed data and calling for a set number of days. The structure of these passes changes from time to time — the number of days and the amount of data in each tier has shifted — so this is exactly the kind of detail to confirm on T-Mobile's site close to your trip rather than relying on last year's figures. T-Mobile's top-tier plans also tend to include the most generous roaming.

- Many T-Mobile plans include unlimited texting and basic-speed data abroad at no extra charge.
- That included data is slow — fine for texts and simple maps, not for video or heavy use.
- International Passes add high-speed data and calling for a set number of days when you need more.
- Pass tiers and data amounts change, so confirm current details before the trip.
- Top-tier T-Mobile plans tend to include the most roaming.

GOOD TO KNOW

The included slow data on T-Mobile is a real gift for keeping in touch — enough to send a message or glance at a map. If you want it to feel like home-speed internet, that's when a pass or a travel eSIM earns its keep.

7. Canada and Mexico — The Close-to-Home Exception

Often cheaper, and sometimes free, right next door.

For a lot of folks in Portage County, 'traveling abroad' means Canada or Mexico — a trip to see family, a cruise, or a winter escape. The good news is that these two neighbors are treated more kindly by every carrier than the rest of the world, so your phone abroad can be much cheaper, and sometimes free, without doing anything exotic.

On Verizon, the TravelPass daily fee for Canada and Mexico is usually about half the worldwide rate. On AT&T, many unlimited plans include Canada and Mexico with no day-pass charge at all — your phone simply works as if at home, within limits. T-Mobile likewise builds Canada and Mexico into many of its plans. So before you buy any pass for a trip just across the border, the first step is always the same: ask your carrier what your specific plan already includes for Canada and Mexico.

- Verizon: Canada and Mexico TravelPass days are usually about half the worldwide daily rate.
- AT&T: many unlimited plans include Canada and Mexico with no day-pass charge.

- T-Mobile: Canada and Mexico roaming is built into many plans.
- Always confirm what YOUR plan already includes before buying anything extra.

GOOD TO KNOW

For a trip to Canada or Mexico, call your carrier and ask one simple question: 'Is Canada and Mexico included on my plan, and if not, what will it cost per day?' That one call often settles the whole matter with no purchase at all.

8. The Charged-Day Cap — Your Built-In Protection

Why a long trip won't bill you without end.

One worry people have about day passes is the picture of being charged a fee every single day of a month-long trip, piling up into something frightening. The carriers have actually built in a protection against exactly that, and it is worth understanding because it turns the passes from scary into predictable.

Both Verizon and AT&T cap the number of days they will charge you in a single billing cycle — commonly around ten days. Once you hit that cap, any additional travel days in that billing cycle are not charged. In effect, after you have paid for that set number of days, the rest of the month's travel is free. So the most a day pass can cost you in a month is the daily fee times that capped number — a figure you can know in advance, not an open-ended meter.

This changes the math for longer trips. For a trip of a week or so, you pay roughly per day. For a trip of several weeks, you pay only up to the cap and then ride free for the remaining days of the cycle. It does mean a trip that straddles two billing cycles could see the cap apply in each cycle, so very long trips are where a travel eSIM starts to look especially attractive by comparison.

GOOD TO KNOW

Knowing the cap lets you work out your worst-case cost before you leave: the daily fee times the capped number of days, per billing cycle. If that figure is comfortable, a day pass is a safe, simple choice.

9. Travel eSIMs — The Cheaper Data Option

A second phone number's worth of data, for much less.

Now for the option that saves the most money, especially on longer trips: a travel eSIM. An eSIM is a SIM card built into modern phones — nothing physical to insert. A travel eSIM is a prepaid data plan from a company like Airalo or Holafly that you load onto your phone as a second line, just for the trip. It connects you to a local network in your destination, and you pay the travel company's much lower prices instead of your carrier's roaming rates.

The two best-known providers work a little differently. Airalo mostly sells a set amount of data for a set number of days — good for lighter users who want to pay only for what they need. Holafly leans toward unlimited-data plans — better for heavier users who do not want to watch a data meter, though 'unlimited' comes with fair-use limits and its hotspot sharing is capped. Both are usually far cheaper for data than a carrier day pass over a trip of any length.

- A prepaid data plan you load onto your phone as a second line, just for the trip.
- Connects to a local network; you pay the travel company's low rates, not carrier roaming.
- Airalo: pay for a set amount of data — good for light users.
- Holafly: mostly unlimited data — good for heavy users, with fair-use limits.
- Usually much cheaper for data than a carrier pass, especially on longer trips.

WATCH OUT

Most travel eSIMs are data-only — no phone number, no regular calls or texts. That is fine if you call and message family through apps like WhatsApp or FaceTime over the data. If you must receive a regular call on your own number, pair the eSIM with keeping your home line reachable, or use a carrier pass instead.

10. How a Travel eSIM Works on Your Phone

Two lines at once, and you choose what each does.

The idea of two phone lines in one phone sounds complicated, but modern phones handle it gracefully, and once set up it is nearly invisible. Your phone keeps your normal line — your home number — AND the travel eSIM at the same time. You simply tell the phone to use the travel eSIM for internet data, while your home line stays available for the occasional important text.

The setup happens before you leave, over your home Wi-Fi. You buy the plan in the provider's app or website, and they send you a QR code — a square barcode. You scan it with your phone's camera through the phone's settings, and the travel line installs itself. You can do this days before the trip; the data plan usually does not start counting down until you arrive and actually use it, or until a start date you choose. Then, when you land, you flip one setting to use the travel eSIM for data, and you are connected.

- 1 Before the trip, on home Wi-Fi, buy the eSIM in the provider's app and get your QR code.
- 2 On iPhone: Settings, Cellular, Add eSIM, then scan the code. On Android: Settings, Network, then Add a SIM or eSIM.
- 3 Label the new line something like 'Travel' so you can tell it apart from your home line.
- 4 Leave your home line's data roaming OFF, and set the phone to use the travel eSIM for data when you arrive.

TIP

Install the travel eSIM at home, days early, while you have reliable Wi-Fi and me on the phone if you want a hand. Scanning a QR code in a foreign airport with jet lag is the hard way. Done at the kitchen table, it takes five minutes.

11. Travel eSIM vs. Carrier Pass — Which to Pick

Simplicity versus savings — honestly compared.

So which should you choose? There is no single right answer — it comes down to how you weigh simplicity against savings, and how long and how data-heavy your trip is. Here is how I help folks decide at the kitchen table.

Choose the carrier day pass if you value simplicity above all, your trip is short, you need to keep receiving calls and texts on your own number, or the trip is to Canada or Mexico where your plan may already cover it. You do nothing new; your phone just works; you pay a bit more for that ease. Choose the travel eSIM if you want to save real money, your trip is longer, you use a fair amount of data, and you are comfortable calling family through apps instead of your regular number. The savings on a two-week trip can be substantial.

- Short trip, want zero fuss, keep your number working: carrier day pass.
- Trip to Canada or Mexico: check your plan first — a pass may be cheap or already included.
- Longer trip, want to save money, happy to use apps for calls: travel eSIM.
- Heavy data user who hates watching a meter: an unlimited-style travel eSIM.

- Want both safety and savings: a travel eSIM for data, home line kept for the rare important text.

GOOD TO KNOW

Many seasoned travelers use a hybrid: a travel eSIM for cheap data, their home line left on for receiving texts but with data roaming OFF, and messaging apps for talking to family. You get the savings and keep your number reachable.

12. Calling Home for Free Over Wi-Fi

Messaging apps are your cheapest line to family.

Whatever else you choose, this layer costs nothing and works everywhere there is Wi-Fi, which abroad means your hotel, cafes, and many public spaces. Messaging and calling apps let you talk to family back home, with voice or even video, over an internet connection — no roaming charges, no day pass, no eSIM data used if you are on Wi-Fi.

The common ones: FaceTime for calling between Apple devices, which many families already use. WhatsApp, which is enormously popular worldwide and handles texts, voice calls, and video calls. And the regular texting and calling built into Facebook Messenger or Google's apps. As long as both you and the person at home have the same app, you can see and hear each other across the ocean for free, over Wi-Fi.

- 1 Before the trip, pick one app the whole family will use — FaceTime or WhatsApp are easiest for most.
- 2 Install it and make a practice call to a family member while you are both at home.
- 3 Make sure the folks back home have the same app and know to expect your calls on it.
- 4 Abroad, connect to Wi-Fi, open the app, and call or video-chat exactly as you practiced.

TIP

Set this up and practice it before you leave, with the family member you'll call most. A trial run at home means that when you want to show the grandkids the Eiffel Tower, it just works — no fumbling in a foreign hotel room.

13. Turning Off Data to Avoid Surprise Charges

The one switch that prevents the nightmare bill.

This is the single most important safety step in the whole guide, and it is one switch. Before you leave the country — or the moment you land, if you forgot — you turn off Data Roaming on your home line. This stops your regular carrier line from quietly using expensive foreign data in the background. With it off, your phone cannot run up roaming data charges, full stop.

Here is where to find it. On an iPhone, open Settings, then Cellular, then Cellular Data Options, and turn Data Roaming off. On a Samsung Galaxy or other Android, open Settings, then Connections, then Mobile networks, and turn Data roaming off. On a Google Pixel, it is Settings, then Network and internet, then the SIM, then Roaming. If you are using a travel eSIM for data, you leave your home line's roaming off and let the travel eSIM carry the internet instead.

- iPhone: Settings, Cellular, Cellular Data Options, Data Roaming — off.
- Samsung Galaxy: Settings, Connections, Mobile networks, Data roaming — off.
- Google Pixel: Settings, Network and internet, your SIM, Roaming — off.
- With a carrier day pass, the pass turns the right roaming on for you — follow the carrier's instructions.
- With a travel eSIM, keep the home line's roaming off and let the eSIM carry data.

WATCH OUT

Airplane mode alone is NOT enough once you want to use the phone — the moment you turn it off to get online, roaming can kick back in. The reliable protection is turning Data Roaming itself off on your home line, and leaving it off until your chosen travel option is carrying the data.

14. Calls and Texts Abroad — What Still Costs

The difference between data, texts, and voice calls.

It helps to keep the three kinds of phone use separate in your mind, because they are charged differently abroad and the rules surprise people. The three are data, which is internet use; text messages, the regular kind; and voice calls, dialing a phone number the ordinary way.

Data is where the big surprise charges live, which is why we spend so much time on turning roaming off and using a pass or eSIM. Regular text messages are usually inexpensive even without a pass, and are often included in roaming or passes. Regular voice calls — dialing a number the old-fashioned way while abroad — can be surprisingly expensive without a pass, and that includes a call home to the United States. A carrier day pass typically covers calls within your plan's terms; without one, dialing a number abroad is where unexpected per-minute charges appear.

- Data (internet): the main source of surprise charges — guard it with roaming off plus a pass or eSIM.
- Regular texts: usually cheap, often included — the least to worry about.
- Regular voice calls: can be costly without a pass, including calls back to the U.S.
- App calls (FaceTime, WhatsApp) over Wi-Fi or eSIM data: effectively free — the smart way to talk to family.

GOOD TO KNOW

The simplest rule for staying cheap: use app calls over Wi-Fi or your eSIM data for talking to family, and reserve regular dialed calls for emergencies or a local number you must reach. That keeps voice costs near zero.

15. Your Before-You-Fly Checklist

Work through this a week before the trip.

Here is the whole guide boiled down to a list you can work through at the kitchen table about a week before you leave — enough time to fix anything that needs a phone call to the carrier. Tear this page out, or bring it to me and we will do it together.

- 1 Call your carrier and ask: does my plan include roaming where I'm going, and what will it cost per day?
- 2 Decide your approach: carrier day pass, travel eSIM, or Wi-Fi only — based on trip length and budget.
- 3 If a day pass: confirm how to turn it on, and note the daily fee and the charged-day cap.
- 4 If a travel eSIM: buy it and install it now, over home Wi-Fi, and label the new line 'Travel.'
- 5 Pick a messaging app (FaceTime or WhatsApp), install it, and make a practice call to family.
- 6 Make sure folks back home have the same app and know how you'll reach them.
- 7 Turn Data Roaming OFF on your home line now, so nothing can surprise you in transit.
- 8 Back up your photos and contacts before you go, in case the phone is lost or stolen.

- 9 Note your carrier's international support number and keep it somewhere other than the phone.
- 10 Make sure your phone will charge abroad — you may need a plug adapter for the outlets.

TIP

Do this a week out, not the night before. If the carrier needs to enable something on your account, or your phone needs a settings change, you want time to sort it calmly — not at the airport with your shoes off.

16. Setting It Up Step by Step

Putting the plan into action before departure.

Let us put the checklist into motion with the actual steps, whichever path you chose. The theme throughout is the same: do the work at home, on Wi-Fi, with time to spare.

If you chose a carrier day pass, the main work is a phone call or a few taps in the carrier's app to add the pass or confirm your plan covers the trip. Many passes switch themselves on automatically the first day you use the phone abroad — you simply use the phone and the daily fee applies. Confirm with the carrier whether yours is automatic or needs turning on, and note the cost. If you chose a travel eSIM, install it now following the steps from the earlier chapter, and confirm the data does not start counting until you arrive. If you chose Wi-Fi only, make sure Data Roaming is off and your messaging app is tested.

- 1 Carrier pass: add it or confirm coverage with the carrier; learn whether it's automatic or manual.
- 2 Travel eSIM: install it over home Wi-Fi and verify it won't start billing until you arrive.
- 3 All paths: turn Data Roaming off on your home line as your safety net.
- 4 Test your messaging app with a practice call to family.
- 5 Write down which option you chose and how to switch it on when you land.

GOOD TO KNOW

Whichever path you choose, there is no harm in keeping your home line's Data Roaming off as a backstop. A carrier pass turns on the specific roaming it needs; an eSIM carries its own data. Roaming-off protects you from everything else.

17. When You Land — First Things to Check

A calm two-minute routine at the gate.

You have arrived. Before you start using the phone freely, take two minutes to confirm everything is behaving the way you set it up. This quick check at the airport, while you wait for your bags, saves you from either a surprise charge or the frustration of a phone that will not connect.

- 1 Turn off Airplane mode if you had it on for the flight.
- 2 If using a travel eSIM: check that the phone is set to use the travel line for data, and that you see its network name.
- 3 If using a carrier pass: look for a welcome text from your carrier confirming the pass and the rate.
- 4 Open a web page or a map to confirm data is working on your chosen option.
- 5 Connect to the airport or hotel Wi-Fi when available, and make a quick app call home to say you landed safely.

If data is not working, do not start fiddling with lots of settings at random — that is how people accidentally turn on expensive roaming. Restart the phone first; that fixes most connection hiccups. If it still will not connect, you have your carrier's international support number written down from the checklist, and you have me a text away. A phone that is not connecting costs you nothing while you sort it out calmly.

TIP

A simple restart, all the way off and back on, solves the large majority of 'it won't connect' moments after you land. Try that before anything else — it is the fix that works most often.

18. Common Mistakes

Traps travelers fall into — all avoidable.

After helping plenty of folks get ready for trips, the same mistakes come up again and again. Every one of them is avoidable with a little preparation, and knowing them is most of the battle.

- Doing nothing and 'being careful.' Background data runs up charges you never see. Careful is not a plan.
- Leaving Data Roaming on with no pass or eSIM. This is the classic cause of the shocking bill.

- Waiting until you land to set up a travel eSIM. Install it at home on Wi-Fi, with time to spare.
- Buying a day pass for Canada or Mexico when your plan already included it. Always check first.
- Making regular dialed calls home instead of app calls. Use FaceTime or WhatsApp over Wi-Fi for free.
- Not telling family which app you'll use, so they can't reach you. Agree on one and practice.
- Forgetting a plug adapter, so the phone dies and none of your planning matters.
- Not backing up photos and contacts before a trip where the phone could be lost or stolen.

WATCH OUT

The biggest mistake by far is simply not preparing. Everything expensive that happens abroad happens because the phone was left on its home default with no plan. Ten minutes beforehand prevents nearly all of it.

19. Questions People Ask

Straight answers to common travel worries.

Q: Will my phone even work in another country?

A: Almost certainly yes — modern phones work on networks around the world. The question is not whether it works but how it gets data, and at what price. That is what a pass or an eSIM settles.

Q: Can I keep my own phone number abroad?

A: With a carrier day pass, yes — your number works as at home. With a travel eSIM, the eSIM is data-only, but you can keep your home line active to receive texts while using the eSIM for internet, and call family through apps.

Q: Is a travel eSIM hard to set up?

A: It is easier than it sounds. You scan a QR code once, at home, over Wi-Fi. If that still feels daunting, it is exactly the kind of thing I set up with folks in a few minutes before a trip.

Q: How do I avoid the nightmare bill?

A: Turn Data Roaming off on your home line before you fly, and use a pass, a travel eSIM, or Wi-Fi for your data instead. That one habit prevents the overwhelming majority of

surprise charges.

Q: What's the cheapest way to stay in touch with family back home?

A: Messaging apps like FaceTime or WhatsApp over Wi-Fi. They are free wherever there is Wi-Fi, carry voice and video, and are the smart traveler's main line home.

20. Cruising — Why the Ship Is Its Own Trap

The one place your travel pass may not cover you.

A cruise is where more surprise bills come from than almost any trip abroad, and it catches careful people who thought they had done everything right. Here is why. Out on the open water, there are no cell towers. Instead, the ship carries its own little cellular antenna on board, and that antenna talks to a satellite far overhead. That shipboard network has names like Cellular at Sea or Wireless Maritime, and the moment your ship is far enough from shore, your phone quietly hops onto it.

The catch is that this ship-and-satellite network is treated as its own separate thing, and your regular carrier travel pass usually does NOT cover it. So a traveler who bought a day pass for the ports, thinking they were protected, can still rack up steep charges for every call, text, and bit of data used while the ship is at sea. The rates on the maritime network are far higher than ordinary roaming — calls and data at sea are among the most expensive phone use there is, and data especially can mount up frighteningly fast through background app activity you never see.

The carriers do sell special cruise or at-sea day passes that are separate from their regular international passes. If you truly need your phone working while sailing, that is what to ask for by name — a cruise pass, not just a travel pass. But for most folks, the ship's own Wi-Fi plus airplane mode is the calmer, cheaper way, and we will cover that next.

WATCH OUT

Your ordinary carrier day pass usually does NOT cover the ship's at-sea network. If you plan to use your phone while actually sailing, call your carrier and ask specifically for a cruise pass or at-sea pass — do not assume your regular travel pass carries over onto the boat.

21. Staying Connected on a Cruise — The Safe Way

Airplane mode, ship Wi-Fi, and shore stops.

The reassuring news is that there is a simple, inexpensive way to stay in touch on a cruise, and it is the one most seasoned cruisers use. The whole trick is to keep your phone off the ship's expensive cellular network and let it ride the ship's Wi-Fi instead, exactly the way it rides your Wi-Fi at home for free.

The moment you board, put your phone in Airplane mode and leave it there for the whole voyage. Airplane mode shuts off the cellular connection — which is what reaches for that costly satellite network — while still letting you turn Wi-Fi back on by itself. Then connect to the ship's Wi-Fi package, which the cruise line sells by the day or for the whole trip, and use your messaging apps over it to call and text family. One honest warning: simply buying the ship's Wi-Fi does NOT turn off your phone's cellular, so you must set Airplane mode yourself, or the phone may still quietly use the pricey network underneath.

- 1 As you board, turn Airplane mode ON and leave it on the entire cruise.
- 2 Turn Wi-Fi back on by itself, and connect to the ship's Wi-Fi package you purchased.
- 3 Call and message family through apps like FaceTime or WhatsApp over that Wi-Fi.
- 4 In port, you can connect to free Wi-Fi at cafes, or use your regular carrier day pass once you're on land in that country.
- 5 Back aboard, confirm Airplane mode is still on before the ship leaves the dock.

GOOD TO KNOW

When the ship docks in a port, you are on dry land in that country, and your normal carrier day pass works there as it would anywhere. So you can enjoy free Wi-Fi apps at sea and switch to your day pass only on shore days — paying for the fewest days of all.

22. Your Watch and Medical Devices Abroad

The small connected things that need their own thought.

Phones are not the only things in our pockets that connect to a cell network anymore. A cellular Apple Watch, and some medical alert devices and connected health monitors, have their own link to the carrier — and travel abroad throws them a curveball worth knowing about before you fly.

Start with the Apple Watch, because it surprises people. A cellular Apple Watch can roam internationally on the newer models, but only if your carrier supports it, and it is not

automatic. You generally have to call your carrier and ask them to add the watch to your iPhone's international roaming plan, then switch on data roaming in the watch's own settings. Many carriers do not offer watch roaming at all. The good news is simpler than all that: as long as your watch stays within about thirty feet of your iPhone, and your iPhone is set up for roaming, the watch just works through the phone. For most travelers, keeping the two together is the whole answer — you rarely need the watch to roam on its own.

Medical alert devices deserve a direct call to the company that provides them. A home medical alert that works over the cellular network may not function in another country at all, and a mobile one may need a travel arrangement. This is not something to guess at, because it is exactly the device you most want working if you have a fall or a scare far from home. Ask the provider plainly: will this work where I am going, and if not, what should I carry instead?

WATCH OUT

Never assume a medical alert device or health monitor will work abroad the way it does at home. Call the company that provides it well before the trip and ask directly. If it won't work, ask what backup they recommend — and make sure a family member knows the plan too.

23. Working With Bill — Your Support Plan

Let's get your phone travel-ready before you go.

If reading all this makes your head swim a little, do not worry — getting a phone travel-ready is one of my favorite visits, because it sends folks off on their trip with one less thing to fret about. I am Bill Davis, and I have more than thirty years of professional technology experience. I help people across Portage County use their phones with confidence, at home and around the world.

A home visit is a flat ninety-nine dollars. Before your trip, we will call your carrier together to check your plan, decide between a pass and a travel eSIM, install and test whatever you choose, set up and practice a messaging app with your family, and turn off the settings that cause surprise bills. You will leave for the airport knowing your phone will simply work. And if anything is not right, I will come back within thirty days at no charge — my come-back-free guarantee.

The number is (330) 200-8042. Call or text any time. After hours you will be greeted by Sophie, my friendly AI helper, who answers the phone, takes your message, and texts it

straight to me so I see it right away. She is a program, not a person — she is there so your call is never missed, even when I am out on a visit.

GOOD TO KNOW

When you are home from your trip with photos to show and no surprise bill, a short review at g.page/r/CSFv0jbCfFINEAE/review helps other travelers in the county find honest, patient help. It means a great deal to me.

24. Your Notes

A page for the details of your own trip.

Every trip and every phone is a little different, so here is a place to write down the specifics for yours. Fill it in before you go, or we will fill it in together when I visit. Keep it with your travel documents.

- Where I'm going, and the dates:

- My carrier and plan: _____
- What my plan already includes there:

- My choice — day pass / travel eSIM / Wi-Fi only:

- Daily fee and charged-day cap (if a pass):

- Travel eSIM provider and plan (if used):

- Messaging app the family will use:

- Data Roaming turned off on home line?

- Carrier's international support number:

- Plug adapter packed? Photos backed up?

- Date I got everything set up: _____

Bill Davis — Bill's Home Tech — Atwater, Ohio — (330) 200-8042 —

bill@billshometech.com. Safe travels — and if anything about the phone acts up before

you go or while you're away, text me and we'll sort it out.

AT A GLANCE

A Picture to Follow Along

Three Ways to Connect

Your main choices for a trip abroad

**Most travelers mix a pass or eSIM with free Wi-Fi apps.**

Illustration — layout and details vary by model. Check your own device.

AT A GLANCE

A Second Look

Before You Fly

Four calm steps, done at home

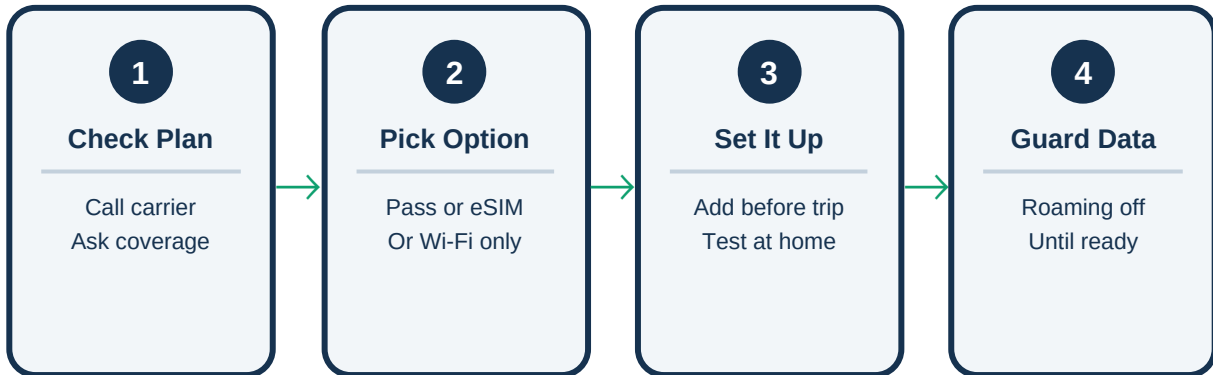
**Ten minutes before the trip saves a shocking bill after.**

Illustration — layout and details vary by model. Check your own device.

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.