

# Tips for Traveling

## October 2014

### Cell phone usage abroad

- (See <http://www.consumerreports.org/cro/2012/08/stay-in-touch-without-racking-up-big-wireless-bills/index.htm#chart>)
- You already may have discovered that cell, text, and data rates abroad can be outrageous.
  - Depending on the carrier and your location, international voice rates may range from 50¢ to \$5 per minute.
  - Text messages may cost 10¢ to 50¢.
  - Data rates may have a surcharge of about 2¢ per kilobyte. That's \$20 per megabyte, when a typical phone photo is larger than a megabyte!
- Check with your carrier about their policies.
- Some simple solutions:
  - Put your phone into airplane mode. This generally turns off cellular (voice and data), wi-fi, Bluetooth, GPS, and location services.
  - If you find a location with free wi-fi (say, your hotel or a café), you can turn on just the wi-fi if you are in airplane mode. However, be aware that wi-fi standards that apply in the USA may not apply at your destination.
  - If these do not work, communicate via short text messages. This probably will be the solution of lowest cost.
- Airplane mode also helps prevent “hidden” or unexpected charges:
  - Updating apps on your phone.
  - Incoming calls (from the time the phone starts ringing).
  - Incoming texts.
  - Apps that automatically send data. (For example, when I take a photo on my phone, the photo is uploaded to my DropBox account automatically.)

- Other possible solutions:
  - Check with your carrier to see if you can purchase a temporary, international plan that can be added to your existing plan.
  - Purchase a prepaid, disposable SIM card and install it in your phone in place of your regular SIM card. When you return to the USA, just swap the SIM cards again.
- In addition to the costs associated with operating your cell phone abroad, there is the possibility that your phone will be lost or stolen, even when traveling domestically.
  - “Find my phone” programs or websites exist for all of the “big three” phone operating systems (Apple iOS, Android, and Windows). Google “find my phone” along with the manufacturer name and phone model to learn more.
  - If you purchased phone insurance, learn whether lost/stolen phones are covered and what process you need to undertake to replace the phone.

### **Tablets**

- If your tablet has cellular data capabilities, use the same procedures one uses for cell phones.
- Most tablets are wi-fi only. Again, hotels and cafés are excellent choices for free wi-fi.

### **Laptops**

- Apple Macbook computers have a “locate my computer” feature.
- Products are available for Windows-based laptops that provide the same service.

### **Hotel wi-fi**

- If you like to use wi-fi from your hotel room:
  - Check to see if there is an additional cost for the use of wi-fi. If so, this can add \$10-\$15 to your daily expenses!
  - If hotel wi-fi in your room is *really* important to you, check the signal strength of the wi-fi right after you arrive. If it is insufficient, talk to the

manager about moving to a room that is closer to their signal router or booster.

### **Public wi-fi security**

- Good travel practices to follow:
  - Make sure your anti-virus, anti-spyware, and firewall software are up-to-date!
  - When you connect to a new network in Windows, it may ask you whether to treat the network as a home (least protective), work, or public connection (most protective). When in doubt, choose “public”.
  - When using the Web on your computer to shop, check your bank account, looking at your credit card balance, etc. while connected to a public network, make sure you see the browser’s “locked” icon or check to see that the URL (i.e., Web address) from which you are purchasing begins with “https:” (http secured) rather than just “http:”.
  - Avoid entering personal and private information such as your SSN, credit card numbers, and passwords on a public computer. Unscrupulous people may have installed “key logging” software on these computers to capture such info and email it to them.

### **Helpful travel apps**

- (See <http://travel.cnn.com/explorations/play/appy-traveler-373984>)
- The names and capabilities of these apps may differ depending on the smartphone or tablet you are using.
  - PackPoint packing list builder – build a customized packing list; take weather at destination into account.
  - Uber – Arrive in any of 100+ cities and order a car; Uber shows you a photo and the name of your driver, gives you an estimate for the time your ride will arrive, and shows you where the car is on a map. Payment is by credit card using Uber, and both driver and rider can rate each other. (Note: European Uber is for luxury rides rather than taxi rides.)

- SleepSounds HQ and Ambience – Provide a library of urban and natural background sounds to help you get to sleep or drown out noise while working. It includes such sounds as: ocean, insects, rain/storms, fireplace, public places, and household.
- Google Maps – Helps you find your location, other locations, and provides turn-by-turn (or walking) directions.
- Hotel tonight – Book a last-minute hotel stay. The app guarantees the best rates possible and offers 24/7 real-person customer support via phone or email.
- Yelp and AroundMe – Uses your current location to inform you of nearby restaurants, banks, medical facilities, and so forth. Restaurants provide ratings by other users.
  
- Postagram – Take a picture on your mobile device, upload the picture, compose a message to go along with it, and this service will print and send a physical postcard via the US Mail to the recipient of your choice.
- Skype and Google Hangouts – You can use these to call your friends and family for free, as long as free Internet is available. Audio significantly less bandwidth than video, and both of these apps support an audio-only mode.
  
- If your travel agency or airline provides a text-based “status” service, sign up for it. That way, you can learn before heading to the airport whether or not your flight is on time or canceled.
- Google translate – translate words and phrases, both typed and spoken, among more than 80 languages.

### **Electrical adapters/converters**

- What good does it do to take your mobile devices with you if you can't recharge them?
- When traveling abroad, make sure to take an appropriate electrical outlet adapter/converter.
  - Sometimes, the plug shape is different.
  - Sometimes, the voltage is different.
- Some hotel rooms or cruise ship cabins may have only one outlet.
  - Take with you a two- or three-way plug adapter so you can plug in multiple devices simultaneously.

### **Television**

- Mobile devices and laptops provide access to online video services such as Netflix, Hulu Plus, and Amazon.
  - Make sure to use wi-fi rather than a cellular connection if your cell plan has a data cap.
  - The ability to watch video and its quality is affected significantly by the quality/speed of the Internet connection that you have available and the number of other video watchers on the network.
- A Google Chromecast device is a good choice to watch Netflix, Hulu Plus, Amazon, YouTube, etc. on the HD TV in your hotel room.
  - It plugs into one of the HD connections on an HDTV, and then you can navigate through programs using your smartphone, tablet, or laptop.

### **Other tips & tricks**

- When traveling, scan your important travel documents and upload them to a cloud account.
  - That way, they will be accessible to you should something happen to the paper copies.
- If possible, back up your photos on a daily basis as your trip unfolds.
  - If you have your laptop with you, you could back up the photos there.
  - If Internet access is available, back up photos to a cloud account.

- For years, people have been able to purchase travel books for their specific destinations. Now, consider purchasing travel-specific apps, instead.
- Today's passports – and some credit cards – contain embedded RFID (Radio-Frequency ID) chips.
  - High tech thieves can “skim” (i.e., electronically read from a few feet away) the information stored on those RFID chips.
  - If you are concerned about this, you can purchase RFID blocking passport wallets, such as the Pacsafe RFID-tec line.
- If you are carrying private information on a laptop or mobile device, encrypt the information using BitLocker or a similar product.
  - This way, if your device is lost or stolen, your data cannot be accessed easily.