

Staying Connected While Traveling in Italy

Hubby and I are both going to Italy for a meeting in March. We are on iPhones on Verizon. What are our options for international travel to have access to email and data? Can't entirely unplug for a week, as much as we would like to. Hotel in Venice will have Wi-Fi.

I figure someone on this list has solved this problem already. Thanks in advance for your advice.

I was in Amsterdam, Netherlands for a week in Nov, turned off data, used Wi-Fi only and limited texting, no phone calls. Texting still incurs charges at \$0.50 per msg sent and \$0.05 per msg received (I think,,,,). So I incurred about \$30 worth of texts. All of the phone calls were with Wi-Fi and skype. You will need to get a "skype credits" card if you choose to use skype to call phones and not other skype users. Skype call quality was pretty good but not outstanding.

My buddy bought a local burner type of phone for his use that week and it was about 30EU.

You can get a local SIM card for your phone if it's an int'l version of phone and thereby get local access, data, calls & local phone number. I did not choose this option.

Verizon does have an int'l plan but it's a monthly charge and pretty expensive per call on top of that.

I called Verizon customer service before I left to get the low down. One

out of two of the reps I spoke with was helpful, YMMV.

Best...

Ronald R Kilponen, Michigan

Look into buying a SIM card for your phone in Italy that will give you a voice and data plan there.

Miriam Jacobson, Pennsylvania

I'm just returning from a two week trip through Africa during which my cellular data and roaming have been off to avoid charges. When you have access to Wi-Fi, you'll have full access to e-mail. iMessages are also delivered via Wi-Fi (as opposed to SMS text messages delivered on a cellular network), so iMessage texts from iPhone to iPhone are also free when you're connected to Wi-Fi. I was told by another traveler that FaceTime calls are also made via Wi-Fi, so those should be free as well. I recommend the newer Skype-like apps, such as WhatsApp and Viber, which allow you to place voice calls and send texts for free between fellow users and at a low charge to non-users or landlines. If you ask family and friends to download the apps, you should only end up paying for business calls to non-iPhones should the need arise (though I certainly hope it won't!). Between all of these services I believe I successfully stayed connected free of charge. I'll let you know if my bill says otherwise!

Gillian Fishman, Law Student, Georgia

Go with some kind of SIM card and have it done here in the US. We were in Italy over the summer and two Italian tech places could not figure out how to place and activate a SIM card in my phone. I relied

heavily in Wi-Fi, viber and Skype but if Wi-Fi is spotty (as it was in Italy) those will be too. The best solution is to avoid if possible having to be in a long call during the trip. I unavoidably had a 2 hour hearing at the court and a large bill because Wi-Fi didn't work and I had to use phone minutes

Carolyn Elefant, District of Columbia

Went on a Mediterranean cruise this past summer. Before leaving, I went to my provider, T-Mobile, and talked to a Rep. - - She put me on a different program that allowed voice calls in much of the Mediterranean area. No roaming charge and price was low on a per-minute basis, less expensive than typical overseas charges. I had coverage in Spain, all along the coast of Italy, and in Rome.

Curtis Drew, Arizona

We went on a Mediterranean cruise in summer of 2013. We were in Germany, Italy, Croatia, and Greece. Talked to Verizon rep before we left --- was the best customer service I have ever had from Verizon, and at conclusion of call, rep offered to email me an info page summarizing what I'd been told. We did change to a more expensive plan for the month... but increase in cost was not significant. Between being careful, and using ship Wi-Fi when available, we incurred no additional costs of the one month increase in our plan, and both hubby and I were checking/sending emails, and also calling back to the states. Fortunately, our entire trip was within one billing cycle.

Laurie Axinn Gienapp, Massachusetts

Our 21 year old just looked into this as he is going to be in Italy for 5 months. He was told that in the airport (Rome) there is a kiosk for "Voda phone" where he can purchase a pre-paid SIM card and replace it in the iPhone. He was told he can purchase about 30 Euro segments at a time for both phone and data. He's leaving later this week, I can update you on his experience, assuming he is able to get in touch with me, lol.

Deborah Kaminetzky, New York

If you have a Verizon iPhone, it is already unlocked, meaning that you can put most any SIM card into it and it will work. You can easily purchase a SIM card for at any European airport for the country where you just landed and put some money on it for relatively little money. I've done this in Belgium, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, and Ukraine.

Alternatively, sign up for a cheap (\$30/month) T-Mobile data-only plan here in the states. Those plans offer international data and texting for free.

I've had no problem using my T-Mobile SIM in Mexico, England, the Netherlands, France, Canada, etc.

Samuel Saunders, New York

1. No plan. Use Wi-Fi only and keep the data and cell service turned off.
2. Existing carrier plan. Buy in advance what you need at a discount from ala carte pricing.
3. Change the SIM card in your phone (here or in Italy). You will have a new number.
4. Use a pay-as-you-go plan (here or in Italy) that is configured to your needs.

For varied reasons I know people that have done all of these. Research, planning and understanding choices before you go is preferred to unexpected charges or results. For some that live on their phone it is a life-changing occurrence to travel outside the U.S. and they quickly realize how addicted they are to their phones.

Darrell G. Stewart, Texas
