

Rip-off Britain?

We compare mobile phone roaming charges round the world

Using your mobile to call home from abroad (roaming) is on average four times more expensive than national mobile calls within the EU – so current plans to cap charges are welcome.

We've compared the cost of a four-minute peak-time call for a UK resident calling home from France, Ireland, Australia, Canada and the US, compared with what someone from those countries would pay for an equivalent distance call from the UK. We looked at costs from several major networks in each country and took an average.

Roaming charges were high overall, but UK residents nearly always paid more than those from other countries we looked at. The exceptions were Australia for making calls and Canada for receiving them.

There were big differences between UK networks. Orange charges 20p a minute to receive calls when roaming in Ireland, while O2 charges 94p a minute (its 'My Europe' scheme cuts this to 35p a minute). O2 charges more in some countries for UK

residents to receive rather than make calls. In most cases, T-Mobile had the lowest standard prices: 55p a minute to make and receive calls in Canada, France and the US. It can be expensive – £1.40 and £1.30 a minute to make and receive calls respectively in Croatia. Rates are the same for pay-as-you-go (PAYG) and pay-monthly customers.

For the UK, Ireland and Australia we excluded Three, as you can use inclusive minutes with no connection fee in countries where it has a partner network.

Plans to cap roaming charges for EU residents in EU countries look almost certain to go ahead. The European Parliament's lead committee on roaming has agreed that charges should be no more than 49 euro cents (31p) a minute to make calls and no more than 24 euro cents (15p) a minute to receive them. This would make the maximum cost of our four-minute call £1.24 and 60p respectively. The maximum charge for making calls would fall from 49 to 43 cents over three years, and for receiving them from 24 to 19 cents over the same period.

Regular mobile users may find renting a foreign handset cheaper

COST OF MOBILE PHONE CALLS WHILE ABROAD

These are average costs (in £) of a four-minute peak-time call to and from the home country for a UK citizen roaming in the country shown, and for someone from the named country roaming in the UK

Ireland	Call	Receive
UK resident	2.00	2.14
Irish in UK	1.15	1.09

France	Call	Receive
UK resident	2.92	2.27
French in UK	2.51	0.94

Canada	Call	Receive
UK resident	4.57	3.39
Canadian in UK	3.39	3.39

Australia	Call	Receive
UK resident	3.24	3.45
Australian in UK	4.30	1.47

US	Call	Receive
UK resident	4.38	3.39
US in the UK	2.20	2.20

This shows standard pay-monthly tariffs and doesn't include special holiday packages or price promotions. Pay-as-you-go (PAYG) costs may be higher. It's assumed customers are roaming on the cheapest network

Exchange rates 8 May 2007

£1=€1.59, US \$2.16,
CAN\$ 2.36, AUD\$ 2.60

5 ways to save on mobile phone calls when you're abroad

1 For straightforward communication, a text message (typically 25-40p) is usually cheaper than a one-minute call. Receiving texts is free.

2 If you don't need to receive calls, set incoming calls to divert automatically to voicemail; otherwise a call will try to connect to a foreign network first, then divert to voicemail if you don't answer, and you'll pay as if you received the call. Checking voicemail counts as a roaming call. If you need to be reachable, deactivate voicemail diverts – if you don't answer you won't pay.

3 Some companies let you pay a fee to get roaming discounts or bundles of minutes/texts.

4 If you're with O2, request its 'My Europe' scheme for lower costs in EU countries. Vodafone customers can request its 'Passport' for some countries – you'll pay a 75p connection fee plus your standard network charge (or you can use your inclusive minutes) if you roam with its partner networks. You may need to manually select the network. Your handbook will tell you how. Signing up for both is free.

5 If you use a mobile regularly abroad, it may be cheaper to rent a foreign handset, or buy a foreign PAYG Sim card for your phone. You get a different number and may pay up to £20 to unlock a phone for another provider's Sim. It's usually free to receive calls and making local calls is cheaper. Calls home are at international rates.

