



Holiday download dangers

Using the internet on your mobile is easy – but do it abroad, and you may be hit with a huge bill

Using the latest mobile phones you can surf the web, check your email, watch online TV or buy music on the move. But do this abroad – known as data roaming – and you could find yourself a victim of ‘bill shock’, facing an unexpected bill for many hundreds of pounds.

Just downloading a 10-minute video clip and five full music tracks during your holiday could cost as much £200.

Data roaming

When Which? investigated data roaming, we found high charges and confusing pricing structures that could stop consumers making use of their mobile phone’s internet capabilities abroad. More than a third of Which? members

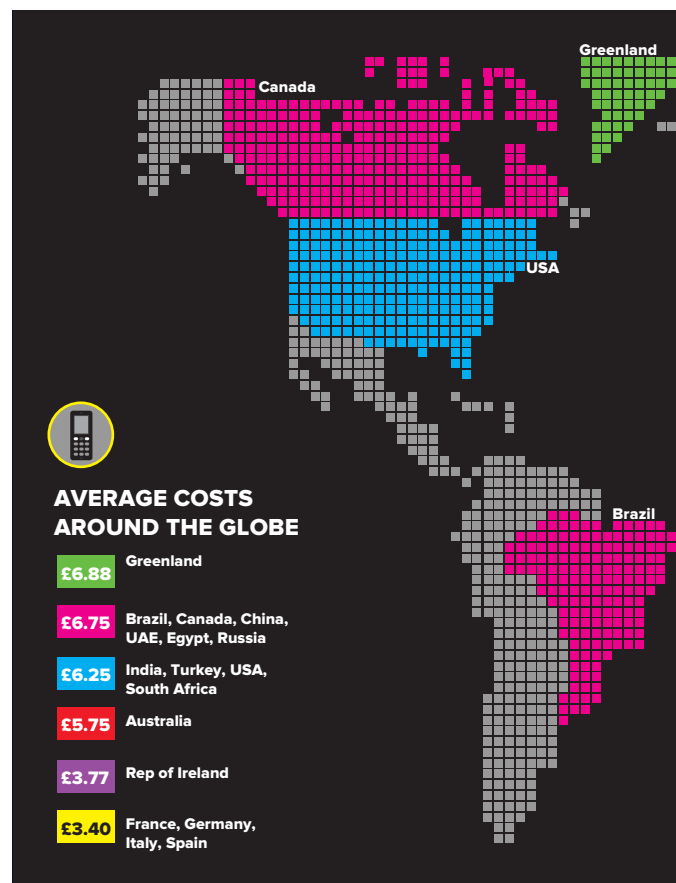
who had used data roaming on their phones said costs were higher than they expected.

Mobile phone companies charge for internet access per megabyte (MB) of data downloaded. A MB is equivalent to watching a one-minute mobile-sized video or reading and responding to 10 emails.

EU price reduction

The EU is clamping down on the rates operators can charge each other for roaming services. We hope these savings will be passed on to consumers.

But these new regulations will only affect costs within the EU – use your mobile to access the internet while further afield and you could still rack up huge bills for just a few minutes of internet use.



Our research

We asked the big six mobile operators – 3, O2, Orange, T-Mobile, Virgin Mobile and Vodafone – for details of their data roaming prices, any data allowances or bundles and their policies for helping customers who rack up unexpectedly high bills.

We also surveyed 1,876 Which? online panel members in March 2009 about their data roaming experiences.

WHICH.CO.UK

Find out how to keep costs down, and what to do if you get ‘bill shock’

www.which.co.uk/mobilesabroad

THE COST OF DATA ROAMING



Price £3/MB or £6/MB, depending on location.

Bundles or allowances UK data allowance can be used in seven foreign countries

with a 3 network. Standard UK rates are payable after allowances are used up.

Warnings Pay-monthly customers have an agreed credit limit on their account. Once 90% of the limit is reached, an SMS alert is sent. Browsing is blocked if limit is reached.

Bill shock policy 3 says customers should not encounter unexpectedly high bills because of the agreed credit limit.



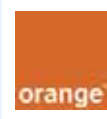
Price £2.94/MB (pay monthly) and £3/MB (pay-as-you-go) or £6/MB, depending on location.

Bundles or allowances Data

Abroad bundle costs £19.56 a month for 10MB, or £48.90 a month for 50MB.

Warnings O2 does ‘all it can’ to make users aware of costs, and monitors accounts for unusual usage. It can’t guarantee customers will be notified of high usage.

Bill shock policy O2 says if customers aren’t prepared to pay for unexpectedly high bills, it will review them on a case-by-case basis.



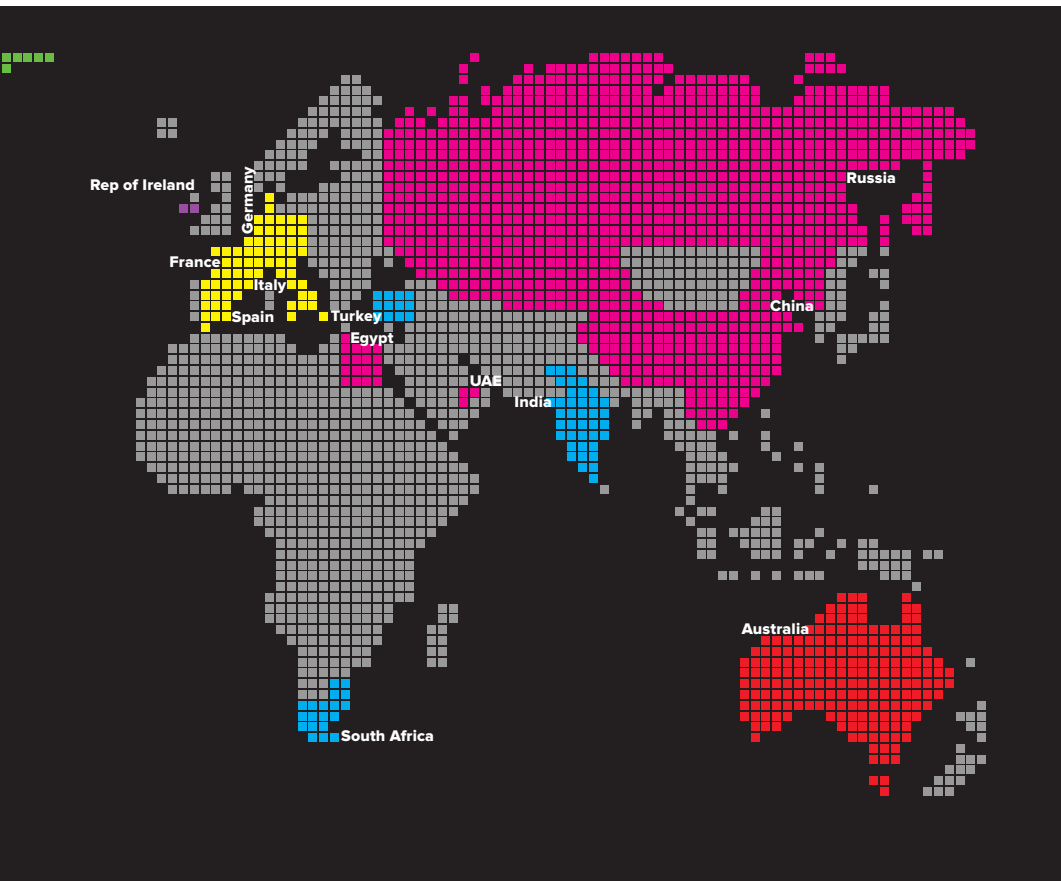
Price £2.94/MB (pay monthly) and £4/MB (PAYG) or £8/MB, depending on location.

Bundles or allowances

Pay-monthly users can add bundles of 3MB, 5MB, 10MB and 100MB, priced from £4.89 to £138.

Warnings When they first access the web abroad, users are notified that costs will be higher. Pay-monthly users are warned again once they’ve used 5MB and 10MB data.

Bill shock policy Orange says it will assess the details of ‘extreme cases’ and advise the customer of any options available.



▲ USING THE GRAPHIC

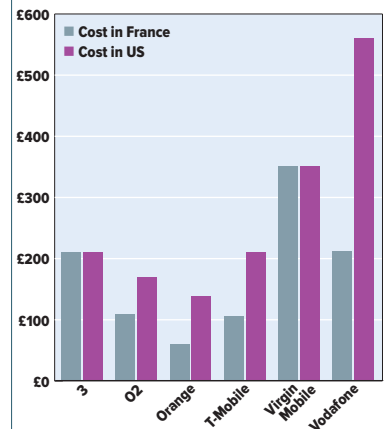
The price pay-monthly users pay to use the internet on their mobile phones varies depending on where they are. The graphic above shows the average cost of 1MB data use for pay-monthly customers of the six major UK operators (3, O2, Orange, T-Mobile, Virgin Mobile and Vodafone) once any

data bundles or allowances have been used up.

We calculated an average cost per MB based on the charges of all the UK operators providing services in each country. EU countries are typically cheaper than further-flung destinations, but even in the EU costs can mount up, as charges can exceed £3/MB.

The graphic is designed to give you an idea of average costs only – it does not indicate the exact charges of any single network. For more information on the costs for individual operators, see the panel below. You may also have to roam using certain foreign networks to get the best price from your operator.

COSTS BY OPERATOR



This shows the cost of downloading 70MB of data in France and USA on six major UK operators. Costs take into account data bundles, allowances or preferred partner networks that lower the cost of data roaming and are based on downloading 70MB over two days. Costs may be lower if downloads are made over a longer period.

70MB of data use is the equivalent of using your mobile to do the following:

- View 30 web pages;
- View 25 mobile-friendly web pages;
- Read 25 emails (no attachments);
- Download 35 minutes of mobile-sized video;
- Download 10 music tracks; and
- Download five photos.



Price £1.50/MB in the EU. Rest of world costs £7.50/MB or £3/MB using T-Mobile US.

Bundles or allowances BlackBerry users can purchase a bundle which gives unlimited usage for £15/month, and they have roaming costs capped at £4/day.

Warnings Customers are advised of charges by SMS when they connect abroad.

Bill shock policy T-Mobile says each incidence is considered on its own merit. Where appropriate, it will waive a portion of the bill as a gesture of goodwill.



Price £5/MB
Bundles or allowances None
Warnings Virgin

Mobile pay-monthly customers need to contact Virgin Mobile before they travel in order to access data services and receive cost information. PAYG direct debit customers can set a credit limit.

Bill shock policy Virgin Mobile treats each case on its own merit, and says it will look to see if a customer has used data abroad previously and what type of usage is on the account while roaming.



Price £5/day for up to 15MB then

£5/MB in Vodafone Passport countries. Rest of the world costs £8/MB.

Bundles or allowances Download up to 15MB/day for £5/day in Passport countries.

Warnings When user connects abroad, SMS explaining charges is sent. If usage is high, Vodafone rings to check the user's aware of costs, and the handset hasn't been stolen.

Bill shock policy Vodafone says if a user gets an inadvertently high bill, it will come to an arrangement or waive the bill.