



Trip Planning Tips
Phones and
the UK:
Know Your
Options

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A Novel Holiday Travel Tips

Telephones and the UK: Know Your Options

Cell Phones—aka Mobile Phones—and the UK

Pronunciation Pointer: Mobile phone = “MO-bile” — *not* “mo-bull.”

UK natives will know what you mean if you say, “cell phone.” But, *when in Rome!*

Many US **cell phones** use a **CDMA** network and are not compatible with the **GSM** (*Global System for Mobile Communication*) or **Three** networks used by **mobile phones** in the UK.

AT&T and T-Mobile phones *do* use GSM and ought to be functional in the UK. Specialized Verizon or Sprint phones also should work in the UK.

However, if your **home phone service provider** *doesn't have* UK coverage, and isn't able to offer you a **UK roaming phone service plan**, it will cost you *beaucoup bucks* to use your UK-compatible phone while on holiday. Your unsupported US phone will roam to a UK phone service host and you'll be *double*-charged for each call: your home service provider's fees, plus the UK host's service charges. Every time you make a call, the UK host operator will send their billing information to your home service provider. Those costs will show up on your next US phone service bill.

Please Note: You'll also be double-charged for *receiving* calls when using a UK-compatible phone in areas where your home service provider doesn't have coverage. In fact, you may be charged for incoming calls even when you don't answer them—even if your phone is turned OFF when they're sent!

*** Do not use a UK-compatible US phone while in Great Britain unless your home service provider has UK coverage *and* you've activated an international service plan.**

From Most-to-Least Convenient, Here are Your UK Mobile Phone Options:

- Take your own phone—*if* it will work in the UK, *and* you've activated a UK phone coverage plan during your trip.
- Rent a UK phone from your home service provider. (If your provider doesn't have UK coverage, it likely won't offer UK rental phones.)
- Buy a cheap UK Pay-As-You-Go phone.
- Rent a UK phone from a phone rental company.

We Recommend Using Your Own Phone or Renting a UK Phone from Your Home Service Provider

Using your own phone (with UK-coverage-activated by your home service provider) is more convenient because you keep your regular phone number and contact lists. Furthermore, friends and family simply dial your number as they normally would to reach you.

If your own phone won't work in the UK, renting one from your home service is more convenient because your regular phone number and contact lists usually can be transferred to the rental phone. Again, friends and family simply dial your number as they normally would.

Step One: Peruse Your Home Service Provider's Website

Check to see if your phone's model is capable of working in the UK.

Read about the international phone coverage programs offered by your provider.

If your phone *won't* work in the UK, what rental options are offered by your home service provider?

Step Two: Call Your Home Service Provider

Whether activating an international phone program, or renting an international phone, it's safer and wiser to do so with the assistance of a **live person** who can advise you of special deals.

Tips for Travelers who are Verizon Customers

No, we are not Verizon stock-holders. But, because we're Verizon customers, that's the company we're familiar with.

Several of Verizon's phones are compatible with the UK's GSM or Three networks, and Verizon has coverage throughout all of the United Kingdom. Verizon offers a variety of Global Service plans that can be activated for your phone during your holiday, including a special program for short term UK trips (less than 21 days). Once a program is activated, because Verizon *is* your roaming host in the UK, you'll not suffer any additional roaming host fees.

If your phone isn't GSM or Three network compatible, Verizon will loan you a UK phone—free of charge! All you'll need to pay is a single shipping fee of \$19.99. Your Verizon UK phone will arrive with a pre-paid return shipping label. Your regular phone number, voice mail number, and contact lists can easily be transferred to this phone. Additionally, whether using your own phone with an activated Global Service plan or a Verizon-loaned UK phone, your phone will automatically add the + sign and country code when calling a US number from your contact list.

Verizon also offers something called a **Global Value** program. For a small monthly fee (\$4.99 in 2012), the Verizon UK roaming cost drops from the standard rate of \$1.29 per minute to *99 cents* per minute. **This fee can be prorated for short term trips.** If you'll be traveling in the UK for only 10 days, for instance, the 2012 Global Value program fee was only \$1.66. **This discounted rate program will save you money no matter how long you'll be traveling—buy it!**

Please Note: The Global Value fee prorated option info was not found on the Verizon website in January of 2012. We learned about it during a phone conversation with one of Verizon's Global Activation Specialists. This is a perfect example of why you should **call your service provider** when ready to activate an international phone program or rent an international phone.

Tips for AT&T Travelers

In addition to exploring AT&T's website, visit the link below: a Traveling-to-England AT&T forum that has several suggestions for using apps like Skype and Text4Free, including a link to a company that rents MiFi phones for the UK.

<http://forums.att.com/t5/International-Service/Travelling-to-England-am-I-covered/td-p/2633137>

Texting and Data Files Sending/Receiving

While *receiving* text messages usually isn't that costly, it is strangely expensive to *send* them from your UK-activated phone.

When using a US service provider to send or receive **Data Files** while in the UK, connecting to the **Internet** in *any* way—via a Global-activated Smart Phone, Mobile Broadband Internet device, or

the like—is *outrageously expensive*. Opening an Email with a medium-sized attachment, for instance, takes about 1 MB of data usage. Based on an international roaming data rate of 2 cents per KB, the cost to receive this single Email would be **over \$20!**

Verizon suggests:

“Turn off Data, Data Roaming and Background Data options on your device. All devices will automatically search for updates. If that happens while you’re out of the country, you’ll incur international data roaming charges. So, be sure to turn off ALL data services. Some devices allow you to turn data off only when in a roaming state; consult your device manual for instructions.”

Alternately, see the **About.com How to Avoid Data Roaming Charges** article:

<http://mobileoffice.about.com/od/businesstravelersadvice/ht/avoid-data-roaming-charges.htm>

“Put your phone in Airplane Mode if you just want Wi-Fi access. Airplane Mode turns off the cellular and data radio, but on most devices you can leave Wi-Fi on. So, if you’ll have wireless Internet access (e.g., in your hotel or perhaps a free Wi-Fi hotspot like a coffee shop), you can still go online with your device and avoid the data roaming charges.”

See the **Potterite UK Internet Access Travel Supplementum** to learn about other less expensive alternatives for using the Internet during your UK holiday.

<http://HarryPotterPlaces.com/tips/UKInternetAccess.pdf>

Buy a Cheap UK Phone

If you anticipate making a lot of calls *within* the UK during your holiday, this may be the thing to do, even though you’ll have to populate your contact list anew. Additionally, some cheap UK phones offer international rates (for calling home) that are half the cost of US service provider roaming charges.

Loads of cheap UK phones are available for online purchase—some starting as low as £4.90 (\$7.50) for a *refurbished Pay-As-You-Go* phone.

<http://www.onestopphoneshop.co.uk/>

BTW: Pay-As-You-Go (PAYG) phones are what most UK visitors use in order to avoid having to pay large service deposits when purchasing a phone. In fact, if you don’t have a credit record in the UK, you may not be eligible for anything *but* a PAYG phone account.

If you get a PAYG UK phone, ask how to program it so that funds from your **US** bank account or credit card can be used to reload your account *before* you buy it! You’ll not have to periodically stop at a UK stand to add more minutes.

Read **About.com’s Pay-As-You-Go** article:

<http://golondon.about.com/od/planningyourtrip/a/cellphones.htm>

The One Stop Phone Shop link above is only one of several online companies that offer cheap UK phones. **Google “Buy a cheap UK cell phone”**—or the like. Shop around. Call the seller and learn more about what you’re buying before you purchase a cheap UK phone.

Please Note: If buying online from a UK-based company, it likely will be cheaper to have the phone mailed to your **first UK place of lodging** rather than having it sent to the US. Contact your host and let them know that a package will be arriving ahead of you.

Please Also Note: You can wait until reaching the UK and buy a cheap phone at a phone store or kiosk, but there’s no guarantee that you’ll find one as cheap as those found online.

Lastly: It will typically cost friends and family far more than they expect to call your UK-purchased mobile phone—something we’ll address in the **How to Contact Me** section.

Rent a Phone to Take to the UK

Renting a UK phone from a US rental company is more expensive than any of the previous options. But, you’ll have the phone before you leave on holiday, thus you can notify friends and family of your UK phone number, and populate your contact list, while still at home. **Google “Rent a US phone to take to the UK”**—or the like. Shop around. Call the company and learn more about what you’re renting before you book the phone.

CD Miller cautions:

“When I rented a UK mobile phone from a US company in 2008 (**Vodafone**, now defunct), I went with the least expensive plan—one that limited the phone call minutes included in my base rental fee to **50**, or something like that. **I thought this was plenty of minutes because I had no intention of making phone calls while in the UK.** I rented a UK mobile phone only to have one in case of emergency.

Surprise, I got lonely! I ended up making several calls to the US while Pottering around the UK, and went way over the minutes included in my phone rental’s base fee. That act was *Très Expensive!* I strongly suggest that you purchase at least *twice* the number of base fee minutes when you can do so cheaply: when initially renting the phone.”

Hotel Phones in the UK

Check the charges! Before using a hotel phone to make *any* kind call, find out what calls are free. Do not assume that all charges are described on the phone or in the room’s brochure. Call the hotel operator and ask specific questions.

- Can I call locally for free? If so, is there a daily limit for free local calls?
- Can I dial a toll-free number (such as an international phone card number) for free?

NEVER use a hotel phone to place long-distance or international calls. Rick Steves describes the extra long-distance or international fees commonly charged by hotels as being “**an almost-criminal rip-off.**”

Happily, you’ll *not* be charged for receiving calls at your hotel. Especially if your cell phone plan charges the recipient (you) as well as the dialer for each phone call—or if you’re using a cheap mobile phone purchased in the UK—having friends and family call you **at the hotel** is far cheaper for everyone.

Include all of your hotel phone numbers on the itinerary you give to everyone, then notify folks by Email when you’re in for the night. [Itinerary sharing info can be found in the **Pre-Trip Potter Preparation Supplementum.**]

<http://HarryPotterPlaces.com/tips/PreTripPrep.pdf>

Payphones in the UK

Oddly enough, UK payphones can seem tricky to US and Canadian travelers.

For instance, you can't just plunk in the equivalent of a couple quarters and expect to enjoy a local call that lasts as long as you wish to chat. Whether calling locally, long-distance, or internationally, you are **charged per minute** for each pay phone call you make—*after* paying a connection charge that varies depending on the payphone's service provider. Also, UK payphones will return **unused small denomination coins**, but **do not give change** if you've inserted large denomination coins.

If you have credit remaining at the end of any UK payphone call, however, do not hang up! Push the "**follow-on call**" button and then dial your next call. The credit from the previous call will be forwarded to your next call.

For more info, read About.com's Payphones in London article:

http://golondon.about.com/od/planningyourtrip/ss/telephones_3.htm

While on that page, click on the link to "**Find out the costs to use a BT payphone.**"

Be sure to perform all possible phone-related research long before your UK holiday so that you have time to obtain your phone. After you've embarked on holiday, relax! If you encounter something confusing, you're sure to find **helpful natives** nearby who will be happy to assist you.

* How to Contact Me

Do not leave home without sharing your travel contact info with family and friends. But, be sure to warn them about the expenses and limitations associated with the phone you're using, and provide alternatives for contacting you.

Examples:

- I'm charged only 5 cents to receive a text message, but it costs me 50 cents to send one. Please don't worry when I don't reply to a non-emergency text message. I'll Email you as soon as I get to a place where free Wi-Fi is available.
- Calling my cheap UK cell phone will cost you more than calling a UK land line. Call my hotel and leave a message instead. I'll Email you after I'm in for the night.
- My UK phone plan charges me for incoming calls, even if I don't answer them—even if my phone is off! **Please only call my cell phone in an emergency.**
- Please do not send me any Emails with attachments. Data roaming charges are very, very expensive for me while I'm in the UK. Text Message me if you have something to send. I'll Email you when I have a free Wi-Fi connection and you can send me the attachment then.

Additional options for Internet communication are provided in the **Potterite UK Internet Access Travel Supplementum.**

<http://HarryPotterPlaces.com/tips/UKinternetAccess.pdf>