

66% of Mobile Phone Users Risk High Overseas Charges Just by Switching Their Phone On



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uSwitch.com is urging mobile phone users to wise up on overseas charges, after research revealed that over four in ten Brits (43%) have been shocked by an expensive phone bill when they've returned from a holiday abroad. And it's not just the chatterboxes who have to worry - 66% of people risk running up overseas charges just by switching their phone on:

- Liable for overseas charges: 33% keep their phone switched on most of the time while abroad even though they don't intend to use it, while 26% switch on occasionally to check messages
- Wasting money: 8% switch their phone on when they land just to check it's working - their phone will automatically be liable for overseas charges
- Caught out: 42% are unaware that they can be charged for someone leaving them a voicemail while they're abroad - one in ten (10%) don't know they can be charged for picking up voicemail messages when abroad
- In the dark: 85% of mobile phone users aren't sure what they are being charged for calls and texts while abroad despite new EU pricing guidelines coming into effect from 1st July 2009
- 50% have never asked their provider about a roaming package for cheaper calls abroad and 75% have never used an international SIM card.

Consumers risk running up large mobile phone bills while abroad, because they are in the dark about overseas charges, according to new research from uSwitch.com, the independent price comparison and switching service. Even though 91% of people take their [mobile phones](#) with them abroad on holiday, 85% aren't sure what they are being charged. And, despite best efforts to limit the impact of overseas charges, many are falling into little known, but avoidable, traps. As a result, over four in ten people (43%) have been shocked by an expensive phone bill when they have got home from holiday.

Most consumers are aware that making calls on their mobile while abroad can cost a small fortune so 80% try to keep it to the bare minimum. To limit the impact, over a quarter of people (27%) take their phone for emergency use only, while 18% pick up calls and texts but won't make any calls themselves. As a result, 46% of people only make one or two calls while away.

They may think they are being careful, but in fact 66% of mobile phone users are unwittingly opening themselves up to higher overseas charges - just by switching their phone on. This is because the minute you switch on abroad and your phone registers onto a local network you will be billed at overseas rates - you will have to pay to receive calls, for someone leaving you a voicemail message and to pick up voicemail messages. You are liable for overseas charges even if you don't actually make any calls yourself - bad news for the third (33%) of people who keep their phone switched on most of the time, even though they don't intend to use it.

As a result, cash conscious consumers are getting caught out. Those who turn their phone on sporadically to check messages (26%) are at risk of clocking up unexpected overseas charges even if they switch their mobile straight back off again. More worryingly, people who turn their phone on just to use the camera or alarm clock (6%) or to simply check that it is working after getting off the plane (8%) are also making themselves liable.

The biggest sting in the tale is for those who get voicemail messages while their phone is registered as being overseas. Not only are they charged at overseas rates for the message being left, but they are then charged again at overseas rates for picking the message up.

People who make calls while overseas don't fare any better. New EU guidelines effective from 1st July 2009 state that the maximum a mobile phone provider can charge for services in Europe is:

- 37p per minute to make phone calls
- 16p per minute to receive phone calls
- 9p to send a standard text message.

However, only 15% of people can correctly identify the maximum that can be charged for making a call while abroad, with 34% underestimating the charges. Moreover, 61% of people believe that they are charged for receiving text messages while abroad when this is actually free.

Steve Weller, communications expert at uSwitch.com, says: "When it comes to taking a [mobile phone abroad](#) on holiday, consumers have to 'know before they go' if they don't want to be hit with unexpected charges. As soon as your phone is switched on abroad the damage is done – it is registered to a local network and starts to incur overseas charges, even if you switch it straight back off again. This means that you pay to receive calls, make calls, for people to leave you a message and to pick up that message – all at higher overseas rates.

"If you are one of the 27% of people who only take their phone with them in case of an emergency, you are better off switching your phone off in the UK and leaving it switched off until you need it. This way any voicemail messages are being charged at UK rates. Failing that you should always tell friends and family to only send texts – which are free for you to receive - or you could ask your mobile phone company to switch off your voicemail service while you are away.

"But for those who prefer to chat, ask your mobile phone provider about a separate roaming package for calls before you travel, or buy an international SIM card that lets you make cheaper calls abroad. This is a very easy step to take but half of us (50%) have never asked about roaming packages and 75% have never used an international SIM card."

Mobile Brits abroad:

- 76% make mobile phone calls
- 73% receive mobile phone calls
- 39% pick up voicemail messages
- 86% send text messages
- 87% receive text messages
- 69% use the camera or alarm clock
- 8% surf the internet

- 6% download emails.

Top tips to save on your mobile phone bill while abroad:

- Tell friends and family to text you rather than call while you are away
- Speak to your mobile phone provider about overseas charges – is there a better roaming package available
- Ask your supplier to switch off voicemail and data services for the duration of your break – this will protect you from running up costly bills especially for downloading
- If taking your phone for emergencies only, switch it off in the UK and only switch on **if** needed while away
- While away text rather than call – it's far cheaper
- If you are a PAYG customer make sure you have topped up enough before you travel
- If you know you will be making calls while away, look into buying an international PAYG SIM
- If travelling with a partner/family consider taking just the one mobile between you.

[See the full version of this press release.](#)

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About uSwitch: uSwitch.com is a free, impartial online and telephone-based comparison and switching service, helping consumers compare prices on gas, electricity, water, heating cover, home telephone, broadband, digital television, mobile phones, personal finance products and car insurance.

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