



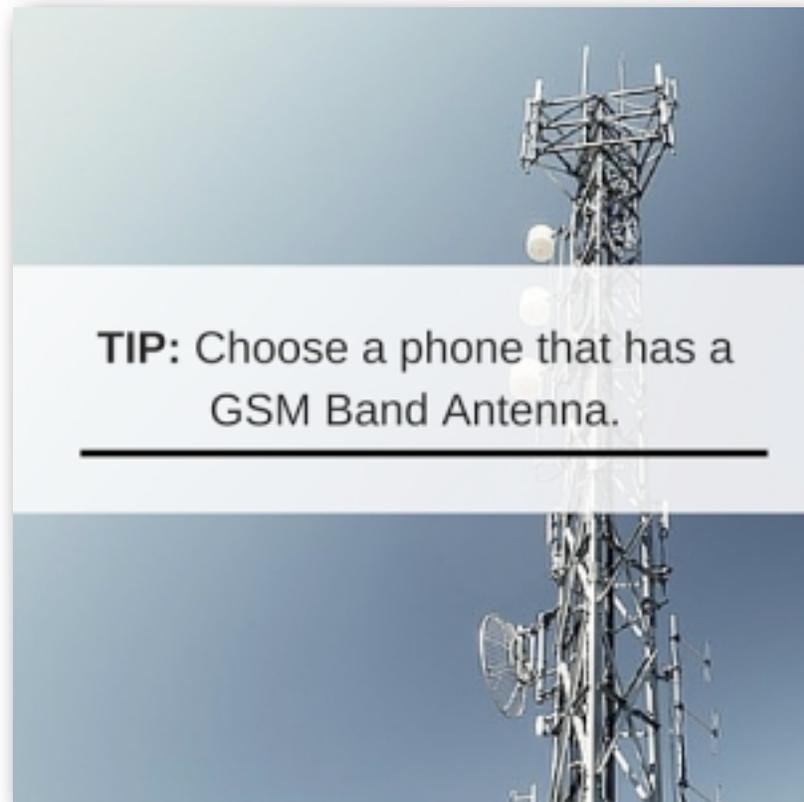
## How to Choose a Phone for International Travel

There are no two ways about it – traveling internationally costs money. Outside of typical costs like airfare, hotel, and food, there is a potentially devastating bill lurking in the shadows: Your smartphone.

Despite what the cheeky 20-somethings working at your mobile service provider sales counter may say, simply buying an unlocked or international phone isn't enough to guarantee your wallet's safety. Imagine the look of horror on your face upon returning home to discover you've accumulated \$1,000 in additional fees (or more) for international talk, text, and data on your so-called "unlimited" plan!

What's really going to save you big bucks on satisfying your compulsion for mobile games, social media, and [GPS navigation](#) overseas is a little bit of research. In this article, we will show you how to determine if your current smartphone or mobile device is ready to talk internationally, and what tricks you can use to ensure you're paying what the locals pay for service.

## GSM – The World’s Most Popular Standard for Mobile Phones



In the United States of America, phones are often marketed as being 3G or 4G-compatible, with several flavors of 4G-level service such as:

- LTE (Verizon / AT&T)
- WiMAX (Formerly Sprint)
- HSPA+ (Formerly T-Mobile)

Very little mention (if any) is given to a phone’s band, or “antenna” if you prefer. Many carriers, such as Verizon, will package a device with the CDMA Band built-in, enabling it to be used all over the USA without needing to juggle a SIM card.

However, this is more of a compromise than convenience. Unless the phone also contains GSM Band antennas, it is almost certainly guaranteed **NOT** to work when you are traveling to another country.

Conversely, the [GSM Band](#) is actively being used in the United States and pretty much the rest of the world. On our side of the planet, we rely on GSM 850 / 1900

MHz to do our mobile dirty work whereas the rest of the world utilizes GSM 900 / 1800 MHz.

**Check Your Phone:** Do a little research on your smartphone model. Does it feature GSM Band technology, and specifically, which frequencies? If it does, you can use WorldTimeZone.com's [GSM Band Map](#) to determine where in the world your phone will function.

## The SIM Card Shuffle – Pay What the Locals Pay



Once you have confirmed your phone is capable of communicating on overseas cellular networks, or if you have purchased an unlocked phone (non-carrier-locked mobile phone with a compatible GSM Band antenna), it's time to see which carriers operate at your destination!

Take Dubai, UAE for example. [Etisalat](#) is one of the most popular service providers in that country, and retailers for the brand can be readily located on the street or in the airport terminal of your arrival. Such wireless service providers offer SIM cards of all sizes to fit all devices. Once your phone has been registered (temporarily) to their networks, you are able to purchase prepaid monthly and daily unlimited talk, text, and data plans at an affordable rate.

**Here's a tip:** To save even more money and get the most out of your prepaid international smartphone plans, go for a data-only plan and capitalize on free Wi-Fi hotspots wherever possible. Wi-Fi enabled services like [Skype](#), [WhatsApp](#), and many others allow you to place calls and coordinate your routes around town practically for free. Plus, your mobile data plan will ensure that you can continue using these apps on the street.

## Buying a Phone for International Travel – What Features Really Matter?

**Budget:** If your current phone won't work in the country you are visiting, a simple "call and text" brick device can be purchased for your travels online or a local retail store for around \$25. From there, it's simply a question of acquiring a local SIM card and a prepaid service plan.

**Recommendation:** Unlocked GSM Basic Phone ([Amazon's selection](#))

**In-Between:** Having a data plan and access to Tripcase and other apps to ease your travel isn't out of reach. Budget Android-powered devices are abundant starting at the \$100-\$200 price point and offer surprising features found in more expensive models such as:



- 3G / 4G / Wi-Fi / Service on all GSM Bands around the world
- large capacitive touch screens
- Dual-Core or Quad-Core CPU Configurations with 756MB – 2GB of RAM
- The newest version of Android OS with Google Play Store
- Rear and Front-Facing Camera (though, don't expect to dump your DSLR)
- GPS Enabled
- Industry standard Micro USB Port / Bluetooth / Headphone Jack
- Budget performance = Longer battery life (in most cases).

**Recommendation:** Unlocked GSM Smartphone ([Amazon's selection](#))

**High End:** If uncompromising performance is more your speed, or you want to replace your current phone, spectacular smartphones with beefier options can be had for \$300 and above. Premium features like HD displays, HDMI-out, cameras that can shoot full high definition video, snappier processors and deeper pools of system memory are all available for power users willing to shell out the cash.

**Recommendation:** Unlocked GSM Smartphone with ([Amazon's selection](#))

Traveling abroad can be a fun, sometimes profitable experience. Follow the steps above to ensure that your smartphone bill won't eat you alive! And don't forget to check Tripcase's essential [travel phone accessories](#) before your trip.

Original article:

<http://travel.tripcase.com/blog/international-travel-phones/>