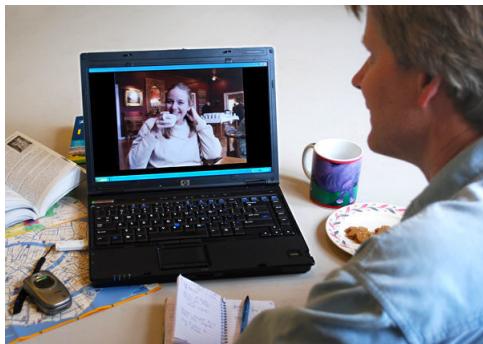




## Internet Calling and Messaging



With your device and a strong Internet connection, it's free to keep in touch with the people who miss you at home.

making a video call.

### Voice and Video Calls

[Skype](#), [Viber](#), [FaceTime](#), and [Google+ Hangouts](#) let you make both voice and video calls. Skype and Viber are available for most devices, including PCs, Macs, Apple's iOS devices, and Android and Windows phones. The Hangouts app is preloaded on Android devices, and anyone with a Google account can install it for free (as a plug-in on their computer's browser, or as an app). FaceTime, built into iOS devices, works especially well for contacting other Apple users.

The biggest hurdle travelers face with Internet calling is finding a Wi-Fi signal that's strong enough for a smooth call. With a solid signal, the sound quality is much better than a standard phone connection; but with a weak signal, the video and audio can be choppy and freeze up. If you're struggling with your connection, try turning off the video and sticking with an audio-only call.

Skype, Viber, and Hangouts also work for making calls from your computer to telephones worldwide. Most services charge just a few cents per minute (you'll have to pre-buy some credit). For example, I use Skype to call ahead from home and reserve hotels, or while I'm traveling to confirm tomorrow's reservation without paying high fees. This is also a good, affordable way for folks back home to call you at a European number (if you don't have your US phone with you or don't want to be charged for receiving a call). Just give them your hotel-room phone number (or your European mobile number), and they can call you using Skype/Viber/Hangouts for much cheaper than dialing direct from their US landline or mobile phone.

By Rick Steves

A cheap way to stay in touch while traveling is to use Internet calling/messaging apps, such as Skype, Apple's FaceTime and iMessage, or Google+ Hangouts, to make free calls online or message to your heart's content. Many travelers use a mix of these apps, based on what their friends and family are already using at home.

To use these apps for free, all you have to do is log on to a Wi-Fi network, then connect with any of your friends or family members who are also online and signed into the same service. Although it's possible to use these apps over a cellular network, doing so when traveling can burn through your data allowance, especially if you're

## Messaging

When you're in Europe, text messaging over the cellular network generally costs money, with some carriers charging per message. So if you want to send a couple of messages to check in with family and friends back home, it's smart to use an app that allows you to send text messages over Wi-Fi.

Apple's iMessage lets you send text, images, and video clips to other Apple users for free over Wi-Fi, just like at home. But if you want to use the iPhone's messaging app to send a text message via a cellular network or to contact a non-Apple user, you'll use data roaming. To avoid accidentally sending a text message when iMessage isn't available, go to Settings, then Messages, and turn off the "Send as SMS" option.

Several similar apps are available, all of which allow you to send a text message, image, or video clip to any other person using that app:

- [Google+ Hangouts](#) (free, requires Google account; available for Android, iOS, and most Web browsers)
- [What's App](#) (no account needed per se and free to download but 99 cents/year after that to keep it active; available for virtually all kinds of phones but doesn't work between computers)
- [Viber](#) (free, no account needed; available for nearly all kinds of phones as well as Windows and Mac computers)
- [Facebook Messenger](#) (free, requires Facebook account; available on most platforms)

## Resources for Staying Connected

- [Country Calling Codes](#) Dialing how-tos
- [HowtoCallAbroad.com](#) Dialing how-tos
- [This site's Tech Tips Forum](#) Tips from my readers

### Apps

- [Skype](#) Internet-based video and voice calls for most devices (and any computer it's installed on)
- [Google+ Hangouts](#) Internet-based video, voice, and messaging for Android and iOS devices (and through any computer's browser)
- [FaceTime](#) Internet-based video and voice calls between iOS devices
- [Viber](#) Video, voice, and messaging for mobile devices (and any computer it's installed on)
- [iMessage](#) Internet-based messaging between iOS devices (and Macs)
- [WhatsApp](#) Internet-based messaging between phones