

# What is Roaming?

## Roaming (Using your mobile data whilst travelling abroad)

Whether it's exploring a new city with the help of map applications, sending emails, or sharing photos over the Internet, people's lives are increasingly dependent on Internet access and mobile phone users now expect these services to also be available when travelling to a foreign destination. Data usage is increasingly becoming the most desired of the traditional mobile services, but it is also the most likely to incur **significant charges**, especially when travelling abroad. Therefore, this guidance leaflet will highlight the most important things you should be aware of when using data abroad.



## What is international Roaming?

International roaming is a service offered by mobile operators that allows you to use your current mobile service with your local operator when abroad. Since your mobile operator does not run a mobile network outside of Gibraltar, it has agreements in place with foreign operators, allowing you to make and receive voice calls, send and receive SMSs, and use data services, whilst you are travelling abroad. These agreements, allow roaming networks to accurately bill for charges incurred while roaming on their networks.

## **What should I do before travelling?**

Before travelling it is very important that you contact your mobile operator and check:

- how much you will be charged when using your phone in the destination country, including voice calls, SMS's and data usage rates for internet access.
- which foreign operator network best fits your needs and offers the cheapest roaming rates, and how to manually choose your preferred foreign operator network when travelling outside of Gibraltar.

## **What happens when I am roaming in the UK / EU country?**

You should be charged the same as if you were using your mobile phone at home, often referred to as “roam like at home” (RLAH). Essentially, when roaming within the EU or in the UK, your domestic rates should apply.

However, with Gibraltar's departure from the EU, surcharge-free roaming for customers of Gibraltar mobile network providers is no longer guaranteed. Some operators are now applying additional surcharges for roaming and therefore you should contact your mobile service provider and check the applicable rates before you travel.



## Will I be informed on how much calls, SMS's and data will cost whilst roaming in the UK/EU?

Yes. When you first arrive in the UK/EU, you will automatically receive a welcome notification (*usually by SMS*) which includes basic information on roaming charges that apply when making and receiving calls, sending of SMS's and using mobile data. This is because all European mobile network operators are required by law to send their customers an automatic message containing the applicable tariffs of the network they have registered on. The purpose of this message is ultimately to provide you, the roaming customer, with sufficient information to make an informed decision on whether to remain on the selected network or switch to another. If you decide to switch to another available roaming network, this operator is once again obliged to warn you of the applicable tariffs, so that you may make the same assessment. If you deem the applicable roaming tariffs to be excessive, you should disable data roaming all together.



## What happens when I am roaming outside the EU?

The RLAH measures do not apply in countries outside the EU and roaming customers are subject to unregulated tariffs meaning therefore that international roaming costs in some countries can be **extremely expensive** especially in relation to mobile data usage.





## Are there any safeguards in place whilst roaming to avoid receiving a large bill?

Local mobile operators will send you usage alerts when you are near the end of your data allowance. In addition to this, data will temporarily be suspended if you are on a Pay Monthly package - after reaching a default limit of **£42 per month**.

### Taking control of your spending

Having a financial limit set by default is a perfectly functional safeguard and effectively protects customers from significant financial risk.



You can also request to change the default limit to a value of your choice if you'd rather spend more or less. However, customers may find that due to the significantly higher tariffs they are being charged, they could be reaching this financial limit far quicker than they had anticipated and as a result will find that their mobile service is soon barred.

*Hypothetically, a customer may mistakenly roam onto a foreign network which charges **£20 for every MB of data** instead of any of the other available networks which may charge just **17p per MB**. On the first mobile network, customers would reach their limit after consuming just over 2MB of data and on any of the other 17p per MB networks, the same customer could have consumed over **100 times more data** before reaching their financial limit.*

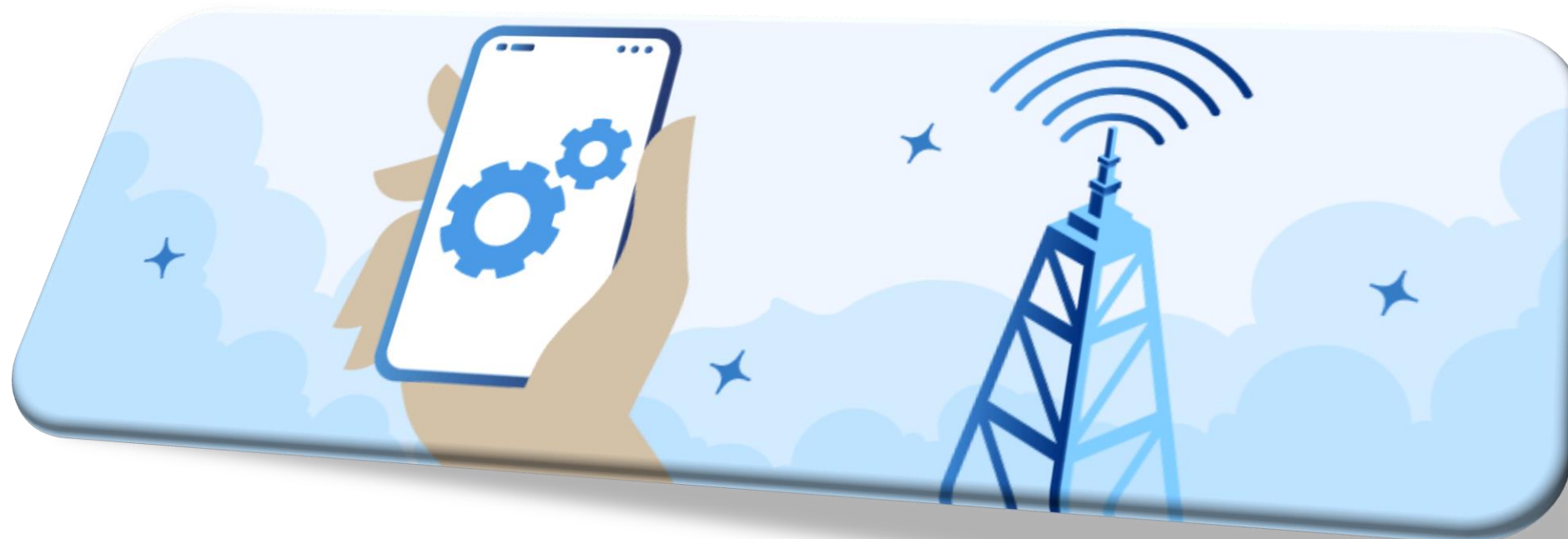
You can go even further by removing any financial limits entirely, meaning that usage is uncapped. (referred to as whitelisting by some mobile network operators). If you choose to be whitelisted, all data suspension and alerts will be disabled, **however we do not recommend this as roaming charges in certain destinations can be exorbitantly high.**

## **Network Selection – Automatic or Manual?**

Customers can decide whether to allow their mobile phones to choose a mobile network operator automatically or manually. On the automatic selection, mobile phones will choose a mobile operator's network based on the current location and may switch from one mobile network operator to another throughout the day.

In Gibraltar's context, given the close proximity to Spain and North Africa, it is possible for consumers to inadvertently roam on Spanish or Moroccan mobile networks. In the case of Moroccan mobile network operators, consumers will have to be extra vigilant given that non-EU mobile network operators usually charge much higher than their European counterparts. Customers are therefore warned that they may inadvertently access non-EU mobile networks whilst physically still being in Gibraltar.

By manually selecting a mobile network, the above can be avoided given that customers will maintain an element of control and only register on a roaming network with tariffs that they deem to be acceptable.



## Choose which mobile apps consume mobile data

Switching off apps which consume a lot of data, will save a lot of unnecessary mobile data consumption as some of these apps often continue to run in the background even when you are not actively using them. If customers need to use a particular app, they can momentarily activate it and once finished, disable it again. This may cause inconvenience but getting into this habit while roaming outside the EU **can make all the difference when trying to avoid bill shock.**



## How can I avoid bill shock?

In summary, the GRA suggests you consider doing the following things before you travel outside the EU in order to avoid potentially large bills often referred to as bill shock:

- Think about how you want to use your phone abroad. Your monthly allowance may not cover you for usage abroad (outside of the EEA or EU) so making and receiving calls, sending texts and using the Internet or other data abroad **could end up being extremely costly.**
- Check if it is **worth buying a SIM card** for the country you are visiting. It means you will have a different mobile number when you are there but will ensure you pay local prices and can be particularly worthwhile for people who frequently visit the same country.



- Alternatively, you may also benefit from buying an international SIM card from a specialised provider, which may offer lower prices when travelling in a variety of different countries.
- Outside the EEA different mobile operators in the same country may have different roaming charges that can be excessively high when compared to the EU and you should remain vigilant, especially if you have previously requested to remove any financial limits imposed by your local operator.
- **Turn data roaming or mobile data off entirely** if you do not wish to risk incurring roaming charges. You can potentially run up a big bill without even actively using your mobile phone as 4G/5G enabled smartphones or tablets automatically seek out mobile connections and use them in the background to update your apps. These devices could be downloading data throughout your stay without you even realising.
- Turn your network selection function to manual. By doing this you choose which mobile network operator to roam on and you can take control of your spending. Try and compare different mobile network operator charges before selecting the appropriate one.
- Switch off apps which consume a lot of data.
- If mobile data roaming is not required, turn off your data roaming function and only use your mobile phone on Wi-Fi, which is often free. Public Wi-Fi hotspots are now plentiful especially in airports, hotels, restaurants and bars.

