Stay Connected

[**International Cell Phones: The Good, The Bad and The Cheap**](http://www.studyabroad.com/pages/sitecontent/marketplace_communications.aspx) by Ken Grunski

**International Cell Phone Usage**

If you have Cingular or T-Mobile cell phone service, then your cell phone will already work overseas, in most countries. Call your provider to make sure it works in the specific country to which your child is headed, and while you have them on the phone, make sure the phone is set up for international usage. You can either pay a slight fee (between $1 and 2) per minute used, or upgrade your service to have a slightly higher monthly fee ($5-10 more per month) that allows for free international roaming.

If you use Verizon, Sprint, Boost or some other service, you will need to rent a phone. When renting a phone, make sure it is GSM, which is the international signal, and be prepared for expensive fees: with weekly charges between $29 and $59 per week, and with per-minute charges of $1.50 to $5, depending on where the country is. A more cost-effective way to use a phone is to buy a GSM phone and a prepaid SIM card. SIM cards determine your cell phone number and other services like voicemail, and can be purchased in advance with a certain number of minutes.

GSM cell phone usage rates are usually around 25 cents per minute, and all incoming calls are free. You can add airtime to the phone by purchasing an airtime voucher. GSM cell phones with SIM cards are prepaid, so there are no bills or contract fees to pay.

Depending on the length of time you will be abroad, you might want to purchase or rent a phone from the destination country. You will certainly want to communicate with friends met while abroad, and a mobile phone for cost-effective local communication in addition to periodic calls home might be a worthwhile option.

**International Phone Cards**

An international phone card is beneficial because you do not have to be concerned with the bad reception or lack of signal inherent in many cell phones. The cards can be recharged and can be purchased in the United States or abroad. In some cases, they can actually cost less when bought abroad.

Many payphones these days do not accept cash. Instead, the phone cards can be swiped at the pay phone to make a call. And the cards can be used at regular landlines as well.

Additionally, your current long distance provider may be able to give you discounted rates for international calls. A monthly fee will apply, and your phone company can send you an international calling card with a special access number. However, you will be billed the usual United States long distance rates.

**International Wireless Service**

**ISIConnect Cards**

The ISIConnect card is a prepaid, rechargeable phone card offered by the International Student Travel Confederation (ISTC). ISTC also provides the [International Student Identity Card](http://www.isic.org/) (ISIC) which is used by 4.5 million students each year. You can get a card and save up to 70 percent on calls in more than 150 countries. It can be recharged over the Internet or by phone, and the voicemail it provides costs family and friends nothing to leave a message.

The ISIConnect card features faxmail, auto-login, speed dial and 24/7 multilingual customer service. You can also listen to your e-mail and access your account history. Receipts for use are sent via e-mail.

The ISTC also offers a mobile phone option for international calls that allows you to use your local mobile carrier and cell phone. You can save 30 percent in 200 countries, but you would be wise to check out the roaming charges before choosing this option for communication.

Other features include text messaging, and you can control the mobile settings as well as receive free travel alerts.

**Satellite Phones**

Satellite phones are a more expensive option for studying abroad, but are vital if you will be in a less modern country, as they offer full service anywhere in the world, with no need for a cell phone tower. It can cost between $350 and $1,000 to buy a satellite phone, and you will be required to pay a $50 activation fee as well as a potential monthly access charge of $30 to $40. Voicemail typically costs about $35 per month, but can be free for rentals.

Outgoing calls on a satellite phone range from 99 cents to $1.50 per minute of use. You may opt to buy a satellite phone.  Rental costs can range from $200 to $400 per month, depending upon the carrier and quality of the phone. When you rent a satellite phone, outgoing calls cost between $1.39 and $1.75 per minute, while incoming calls are free. Length of stay may play a huge factor in which option is more cost effective. Renting may be more appropriate for short study terms while those planning to stay longer may choose to buy.

**Internet Usage Abroad**

The most cost-effective way to communicate overseas is to use the Internet. While not as personal by far, Internet use can be a great supplement to you between phone calls. You can e-mail and share news as well as pictures, or can maintain a blog that is open to all friends and family, and allows you all to interact.

**VoIP (Voice-over-Internet protocal)**

[Skype](http://www.skype.com/) is another option. You can download a program that turns your computer into a phone. You simply speak into a microphone and your voice comes out via another computer's speakers. You will have to pay $10 to download the international version of the program, but once you have it, you can talk as much as you want, for free.

Read more: <http://www.studyabroad.com/pages/sitecontent/marketplace_staycon.aspx#ixzz3M8TkX7Ag>