

# To roam or not to roam: keeping in touch while working abroad

South African businesses are wary about employees roaming while working abroad, with data costing up to R500 per MB. There are ways, however, businesses travellers can stay connected without breaking the bank.



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“It is completely understandable that companies are wary of employees running up bills of tens of thousands of rands for data roaming. Even with special data roaming packages, it remains the most expensive way to stay connected while you travel. While many businesses would most likely prefer just to ban roaming for their employees, they know it’s just not viable. Fortunately, there are lots of ways to stay connected while you are travelling abroad for business without running up exorbitant data expense claims,” says Michelle Jolley, marketing manager for Corporate Traveller.

Jolley says one of the most important things that business travellers need to remember is that they need to activate international roaming at least seven days before leaving South Africa. “So the decision as to whether to roam or not is not something that can be made at the last minute; travellers need to make a decision about data usage and roaming well in advance so as to figure out the best roaming package for their destination. Even just opting to use SMS roaming requires you to activate it before departing from South Africa,” she points out.

## Using a local SIM

Jolley says business travellers who want to use a local SIM need to ensure their phone isn’t locked, meaning their network provider allows the use of their phone on other networks. “Buying a SIM card is uncomplicated in most major destinations. Simply pick your package from the airport vending machine or kiosk, and you’re good to go. You should also test the card before you leave the kiosk so that the vendor can assist you if necessary,” she says.

Jolley adds that while companies can buy global SIM cards online from specialist service providers in South Africa, this is more expensive than buying a SIM card in their destination country. The downside to a local SIM is that you’ll have a new number, and you may need to buy a new SIM every time you cross a border. The advantage is that you’ll be paying local rates for your calls and data bundles.

## Free Wi-Fi, the obvious alternative

Jolley says the best way to keep cellphone bills and data expense claims low while travelling abroad is to use free Wi-Fi.

Free Wi-Fi is the obvious alternative to roaming, and with most hotels, restaurants and conference venues offering free Wi-Fi these days, there's no reason not to stay in touch. Skype, Google voice, Whatsapp, and Facetime are great alternatives to voice calls. It's not free, but the rates are low and the quality is excellent.

Jolley warns though that people need to be aware of the dangers of using public Wi-Fi, especially when it comes to confidential business matters. "Don't do anything sensitive or confidential on a public Wi-Fi network like those provided at restaurants or airports that do not require a passphrase. Use a virtual private network if you have to do business when using an unsecured connection, like a hotspot, or use SSL connections by enabling the 'Always Use HTTPS' option on websites that you visit frequently," she says.

### **Corporate Traveller's top tips for staying in touch without breaking the bank are:**

- Download the apps and maps you need before you leave. After video and audio streaming, maps eats up the biggest chunk of your data.
- Don't stream video or music while roaming internationally.
- Make sure that your travel apps are available offline.
- Set your mail settings to 'fetch' rather than 'push' mails to you.
- Reset your cellular data stats so that you can accurately track your data usage.
- Disable automatic updates and downloads.
- Beware of accidental roaming when you're close to a border and your phone picks up a network in another country.
- Skype, Google voice, Whatsapp, and Facetime are great alternatives to voice calls
- SMS sent from overseas are not free and can cost anything from R1 - R7.50 per SMS so rather Whatsapp or if you have Wi-fi available
- Disable voicemail or register for services that allow you to access voicemail over the internet

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