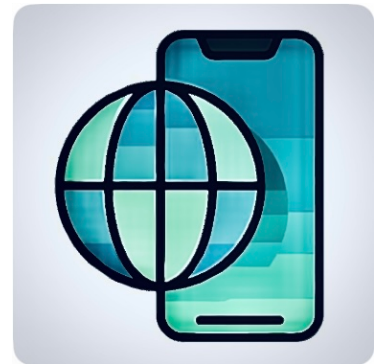


The Traveling iPhone

Preparing to Travel With Your iPhone

Intro & Contents



iPhone owners generally travel with their phones for the digital camera, messaging, maps, and sometimes even a phone call on the road. Traveling within one's own country is generally problem-free and requires very little planning.

However, when traveling outside of our usual areas, including most foreign countries, there can be surprises, such as arriving to find that you can't make or receive phone calls or even use text messages. In some places, nothing on your phone works as expected, if any of it works at all.

This checklist will help avoid such surprises while making your iPhone a valuable tool and assistant for your trip. We've broken this into sections:

1. Cellular Service & eSIMs
2. Wi-Fi
3. Messages
4. Travel Documents & ID
5. Translation
6. iPhone Precautions
7. Travel Skills & Caveats
8. More Power

Each section can be used on its own, but you should read the entire document for points you might otherwise fail to consider until you are on your way, and it's too late to correct.

— STEPHEN HUSTON
AUG 18 2026 rev.

1. Cellular Service & eSIMs

If you travel outside your carrier service area, especially internationally, your phone might become little more than a camera. Cell planning can avoid that. You have several cell choices when traveling outside the US with an iPhone:

A. Use your existing US-based cell plan “as is” and hope for the best.

Odds are your cellular connection will not work at all once you leave the USA — no phone calls or text messages in or out on the phone number.

Caution: even cell plans which include calls *to* foreign countries don't include any cell service *while you are traveling within those countries*.

B. Get a foreign service plan from your current cellular provider.

A useful option, if available, because *your cellular service will seem uninterrupted*. However, few US carriers offer foreign cell service, and most which do also charge dearly for it. *Check with your carrier.*

C. Buy a travel eSIM for your trip's duration.

This is less expensive than to a foreign plan from most US carriers, though it may give you phone a different number while traveling. Among the most recommended travel eSim apps on Apple's App Store are:

Saily, GigSky, and My Truphone. Each lets you pick where you will travel, when to start the service, and for how long you need it. You will want to *start service by the day you begin your trip to avoid no service on arrival.*

D. Use Wi-Fi Calling, if your carrier supports it. (Some do, some don't.)

Wi-Fi Calling from outside of the US can be a boon or a terrible trap.

Wi-Fi Calling requires both an active cell plan which supports the function and a working Wi-Fi connection to reach your plan's cell towers back in the US. The call is then made from that US cell tower to the number you dialed. If you are careful to use this only when phoning numbers in the US, it registers as a domestic call between US numbers. However, if you use it to call to a non-US number, such as a restaurant near your hotel, the call will be billed as one made from the US to the non-US number.

This can incur daily foreign-access fees on top of the long-distance charge every time you use it to phone a non-US number.

All Wi-Fi calls from on US cell plan are billed as though made in the US.

E. **The Bargain Combo**

Get a provider plan covering calls from the US to your destination countries, then use Wi-Fi Calling to make the calls while traveling! The main limitations of this plan are that you won't be able to make calls when away from a Wi-Fi signal, and you won't receive any cell calls using Wi-Fi.

F. **FaceTime**

Use Apple's FaceTime in place of the Phone app. FaceTime can be great for calling an iPhone user back home in the US from your hotel room, but it may be useless for communications while out and about if you have no other cell service. FaceTime only works between iPhone users and requires a working internet connection — either Cell or Wi-Fi.

Several of the Cellular options can be used together, especially as described above, but don't rule out other options. Figure out which are most likely to work together for you, and learn to use the most reliable or least costly option when it's time to make each call during your travels.

Notes for Travel eSIMs

Call Forwarding: If call forwarding service is available from your carrier for your original iPhone number, check if your carrier will forward it to your travel eSIM number. This will reduce missed calls on your US number.

iMessaging: If you turn off SMS, MMS, RCS in **Settings** ⇒ **Messages** for your iPhone's US number, only Apple's iMessages will go to that number if it remains logged in to your Apple Account via any network connection. This will restrict texts to only Apple iMessages (blue bubble texts) on that number.

Turn ON *all messaging options* for any travel eSim you install to reduce missed texts.

Be aware that your various reservations, airlines, etc. will need your eSIM details — any new number assigned to the eSIM — to be able to communicate with you more quickly than email.

...

2. Wi-Fi

While traveling, you will want to connect to the rest of the world for messages, phone calls, email, and to use Apps which require an internet connection. Wi-Fi can handle most of those (with a few limitations).

You can safely connect to any *encrypted* Wi-Fi network anywhere one is available.

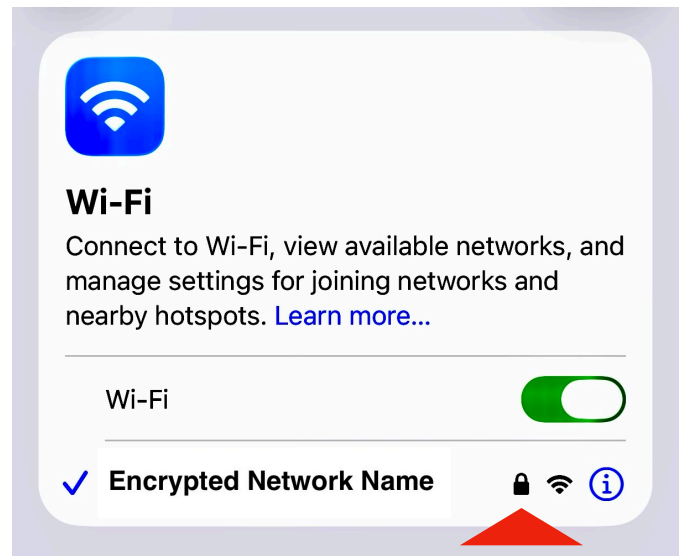
Encrypted Wi-Fi connections always display a small black Lock between a network's name and its signal strength symbol in Settings.

Never connect to an unencrypted Wi-Fi anywhere (unless you absolutely must in an emergency.) Unencrypted Wi-Fi is neither safe nor private anywhere on earth.

Wi-Fi gives you access to:

- iMessaging among Apple users via the Messages App (see section 3)
Go to **Settings** ⇒ **Messages** ⇒ **Send & Receive** — enable all available cellular numbers and all email addresses for receiving messages
- Email using the Mail App
- FaceTime can connect via both voice and video with other Apple users.
- Safari and any other Internet-based apps (airline & bank apps, etc.)
- Your iCloud storage and all of the files you keep there
- Photo library in iCloud depending on Wi-Fi reliability and your unused iCloud storage space.

View your iCloud storage availability in Settings at your Apple Account (the topmost setting with your Name). Then click on iCloud, then Storage for information on your iCloud Storage space broken down by how much is Used and what's still currently Available.



3. Messages

iPhones support both Apple messaging (iMessages) and Cellular Text Messaging via the Messages App, depending on your network connection.

(For information on other apps for messaging, see those apps' support info.)

Apple's Messages App uses Apple's own world-wide network to connect Apple users who are signed in to their Apple Accounts. If all senders and recipients on a message thread are on their Apple Accounts, Apple handles the message, and all participants see *Blue Bubbles* or *Blue Send Arrows*.

However, if one or more of the senders or recipients on a Message Thread is not on an active Apple Account on their phone (Android users generally aren't), Apple's network drops out of that messaging connection entirely, and participants' cell carriers will handle that message for all participants. Non-Apple text bubbles and send arrows will be Green for everyone on the thread.

If you are writing a message on an iPhone and your Send button is blue, then Apple recognizes all of the recipients as Apple users. If it's Green, only the Cell Carriers' systems will be used for delivery of that message because Apple's network cannot reach everyone involved.

Check with your fellow travelers in advance to know if Apple Messages or Cell Carrier text systems will be handling communications among those traveling together. If it will be the Cellular Carrier network, then all message participants will need a working cellular network to send or receive messages, and text messaging will use Cell Numbers for each participant.

It's also important to have cell service for messages from airlines, hotels, and other travel agencies. If they can't reach you because the cell number or email they have for you doesn't connect, important info can be lost.

Also, Apps which send notifications (including airline apps & credit card notifications) need the contact numbers you'll be using during your trip, or those messages won't arrive.

Consider what cellular and/or Wi-Fi connectivity you will have, and with who you will be messaging — back home to the US, among fellow travelers, with airlines, hotels and others you may need to reach during your travels.

4. Travel Documents & ID

Apple Wallet

Your iPhone's Apple Wallet can include your digital US Passport if you set it up in advance. It can also handle your California Drivers License (along with numerous other states, though not all). Many airlines also provide Boarding Passes you can load into your Apple Wallet.

Printed Documents & Physical IDs

However, the items in your Apple Wallet are a convenience. While they may be accepted by TSA in the US, they might not be accepted at every US checkpoint, and they won't take the place of your physical Passport and photo IDs when entering a foreign country.

You will need to present your original physical IDs and documents if requested, both in the US and in other countries.

Digital check-in with Airline Security usually accepts airlines' digital boarding passes, but they also may require printed documents anywhere!

Redundancy & Digital Backups

In addition to having both your Apple Wallet documents, and printed copies in your pocket or carry-ons (not just in your checked luggage!), *Redundancy is recommended*. Save digital copies of your documents in Notes and/or iCloud Files in case your stuff is lost or stolen while traveling.

iCloud file folders can be shared with another traveler & a non-traveling friend. That can be important if you lost your iPhone and have no access to iCloud files. Traveling companions can share File folders with each other in advance to help if any one of the group needs to verify their documents.

You can keep images of your various IDs, travel documents, even your credit cards on iCloud as well as local copies in **Files** ⇒ **On My Phone**. Each of these options can provide quick access to copies if your stuff is lost or stolen.

For instance, being able to print out the main pages of a lost or stolen US Passport can speed up replacement at a consulate office by hours or days.

It's also important to promptly report lost or stolen credit card details, both to stop unauthorized use and to get replacements ASAP.

5. Translation

Apple's **Translate app** now offers iPhone users more options to communicate with foreign language speakers than ever before. Live Translation makes this nearly instantaneous with just a single iPhone in the middle of a conversation. Your iPhone can handle most translation needs.

However, the Translate app must be prepared and tested in advance, well before the trip starts.

The Translate app and Live Translation need *any-and-all* language dictionaries which might be used — *including English* — downloaded into the app in advance! This requires a good internet connection and can take several minutes. Do it before the trip starts so it's all ready when needed.

Languages: open the Translate App, and tap the More Button (⋮) in the top right corner of the Translate screen/tab. A list will show which languages have already been downloaded for offline use, followed by all of the other available languages. Download *every language* you may encounter on your trip, *including those you will speak!*

The option to download languages can also be reached in the Settings App: **Settings ⇒ Apps ⇒ Translate ⇒ Languages...**

You should also enable the **On Device Mode** toggle so that you won't need an internet connection when you need to translate a conversation.

Translate supports 21 languages (August 2026). The list of available languages is the same whether viewed in the Translate app or in Settings.

Be sure to download the language you speak or the Translate app can't use it for translating both ways! There is no default language; don't assume anything.

Become familiar with the translation process before trying to use it among native speakers so you don't end up looking like *the ugly American* who can't communicate even when using their own translation tools.

Check out the Translation app's Conversation panel for the simplest experience — just hold the iPhone between the people talking.

6. iPhone Precautions

Your iPhone is a valuable device which connects to your entire digital life. Using it in public in a foreign place justifies that a few precautions be taken. With preparation and normal care, you can enjoy it without having to worry.

Passcode & Lock Screen settings

Your iPhone's passcode, that string of characters you use to unlock it, should not be obvious. If you use only numbers, the screen will show dots for how long your PIN is. Use a passcode containing both Number and Letters. See: **Settings ⇒ Touch ID/Face ID & Passcode ⇒ Change Passcode ⇒ Passcode Options ⇒ Custom Alphanumeric Code**. This will allow the full keyboard of characters.

Stolen Device Protection

This should be ON to allow you an hour to report and lock a stolen or lost iPhone before someone could take over your Apple Account. Turn it ON at: **Settings ⇒ Privacy and Security ⇒ Stolen Device Protection** (near the bottom).

Shutdown or Sleep

For privacy, shutdown your iPhone rather than just putting the screen to sleep for maximum privacy. This will require your Passcode to awaken it. It will also disable biometric unlocking of the phone so the person trying to use must have the passcode. A safe choice when going through Customs.

Burn After Reading — Data Cleanup

Should you clean your phone before traveling? Does it contain anything you would not want to be seen by *the authorities* anywhere on Earth? Remove that data or info before you travel. Phones can be searched at borders.

Extreme Temperatures

Keep your iPhone above freezing (32°F) and below 95°F or it may quit working. Do not lay it in direct sunlight or leave it in a vehicle. If it shows a temperature warning, to NOT to try heat or cool it. Let it adjust normally. Do not apply heat or cold. Sudden temperature change will damage the circuitry.

...

7. Misc. Travel Skills & Caveats

Document Scanning

Familiarize yourself with how to scan a document and save it as a PDF on your iPhone. The need for this process may be encountered on occasions when dealing with airlines, booking agents, hotels or B&Bs, and government offices in various countries.

You may not need it, but you'll regret not know how if you do need to do it.

Quick Pix for information

Get in the habit of taking a photo of any source of information you may want to have for later reference. Your iPhone probably has plenty of storage for photos, and photos you take of printed signs, event posters, or almost anything else of interest may hold important information for later reference. You can always delete them when you get home if they aren't still worth having, but they may be the only record you have of some information during your travels. Even ads for places to visit. Take the picture and decide later.

Attachments

Know how to add attachments to email, how to copy and paste images or even PDFs into messages. The need to exchange information quickly while traveling can be important in many situations, especially emergencies — those times you can't plan for except by already know how to do what's needed.

Foreign Currency Conversion Rates

DCC or Digital Currency Conversion is appearing as a common offering in foreign purchases. The buyer can pay in the local currency or in their home currency. The home currency option can add fees, special charges and skewed exchange rates if you fail to *choose to use the local currency*.

If you are also offered the use of a digital currency exchange, *decline that service* or similar extra fees and skewed rates may be applied to your purchase. *Let the charges hit your account in the local currency and let your credit card company handle the exchange rate*. It's almost always cheaper.

...

8. More Power

Battery packs always go in your *carry-on bags* — never in checked luggage. Airlines prohibit Lithium-Ion Batteries in the cargo holds of aircraft.

Charging Blocks & Cables

Carry spares to charge whenever it's convenient. (See *next item*)

Plugs, Connectors & Adapters

While USB-C connections have spread to most countries, the charging blocks which came with your iPhone (and other Apple gear) won't fit into the wall sockets in many foreign countries. Check out what will be needed at your destinations and be sure you have the necessary chargers, connectors, plugs, or adapters for charging each item of your gear whenever and wherever needed.

Apple offers a ***World Travel Adapter Kit*** ⇒ Of adapters and connectors for most place, as do some others. Verify that you have the right gear for each place you will travel, and maybe even enough charging capacity for any less-prepared travel companions who may need your help. However, *even Apple's travel kit doesn't handle all plugs everywhere in the world.*



Some chargers offer multiple charging cable connections to charge more than one iPhone or other gear at the same time, but only if you've managed to plug it into the wall. If you use a separate battery block, you may be able to recharge it once and then use it to charge multiple devices simultaneously or one-at-a-time, depending on the number of USB-C outputs it offers.

Expect the unexpected. It makes the world more interesting.

◆ ◆ ◆

August 18 2026 rev • Stephen Huston • iPhone Without Tears