

Tips for Travellers – Communicating Back Home

Keeping touch with your loved ones back in Australia is important when you are overseas. Australian mobile phones can be used in Italy as long as you have your carrier enable world-wide roaming. Generally, this is an expensive option, because you are responsible for the cost of the Australia to Italy component of every call you receive whilst overseas.

Recently, some of the major phone companies have special deals for global roaming, so check with your carrier to see what they have to offer. Be very careful to read the fine print, to ensure that it covers the countries that you want to go to, and whether it covers both landlines and mobiles. Recently I had a friend who thought that he was covered in North America, but in fact it was only the USA and not Canada, and he racked up of \$1,000 worth of calls.

SIM cards can be purchased in Italy and these provide a cheap way of calling home and using the internet. Until recently, it was difficult for non-Italian residents to purchase a SIM card, but as long as you have your passport with you at the time of purchase, then it is quite straight-forward. An Italian SIM is particularly useful if you want to call others with mobile phones in Italy or other numbers in Italy, but take care of using it to call Australian as they can still be an expensive way of calling back to Australia.

Calling cards can be purchased in Australia that make calling to and from Italy much cheaper. Cards can be purchased from most service stations and from Australia Post or over the internet. A good website is www.cardcall.com.au. This site lists about 12 different cards and the different rates and conditions for each card. For example, with the “Daybreak” card the cost of calls to a landline to Italy is 4.9¢ per minute. The card essentially works by dialling a local access number in Australia, entering the PIN number on the card and then dialling the overseas number. The cards can also be used to call Australia from Italy, but costs are significantly higher than calling to Italy. For example, with the Daybreak card, there is a 59¢ connection fee and it is 39¢ per minute. Cards come in multiple denominations, the cheapest being \$10. Cards can be “topped up” by transferring funds over the internet or via an operator.

Similar cards can be purchased in Italy; one popular one is called the “Happiness” card. It works similar to the Daybreak card and the rates are reasonable. Therefore, in summary, it is cheapest to have one card to have your family/friends make calls to you in Italy and another one for you to make calls from Italy.

Another option is to use a Telstra PhoneCard that is linked to your home phone account. This works well, but calling rates are higher than using one of the other cards.

If you have access to the internet, then using Skype makes calling home very easy and it is free. Details of how to use Skype are found on their site at : <http://www.skype.com/intl/en/>. The way that it works is that you need to open an account with Skype, which is free, and you choose an account name and password. You need to download the Skype software to your computer (or an app for your mobile or tablet) and this is easy to do. You log on to Skype and enter your account name and password and talk using a microphone or headset through the computer to other Skype users who are on line. Hence, you will need an account for yourself and another one for whoever

you are calling. When you log on there is a list of your favourites so you can easily see if they are on line, and if so, you just click on the icon next to their name and call them. The quality of calls is excellent and is as good as a dedicated phone line. If you have a built in video camera, then video-calling is the same process. This is certainly the cheapest option of calling Australia, as it is free.

You can also pay money into your Skype account and this allows you to call normal land-lines or mobile phone lines anywhere in the world. The cost to land-lines is very low, for example 2.1¢ per minute but the cost to mobiles is similar to the normal mobile to mobile call costs. If you have Wi-Fi access in your apartment or hotel then you can use your laptop with built in microphone and speakers to call your family and friends back in Australia for free. Free Wi-Fi is becoming more common in Italy. Sometimes cafes will give free Wi-Fi if you buy a coffee. Look for the signs in shop windows or check the site: <http://www.hotspot-locations.com/> before you go to see which places in the area that you are going to have free Wi-Fi.

Another similar system to Skype is Google Hangouts. If you regularly use Gmail, then this is probably the easiest if the person you are wanting to call also used Gmail.

There are other apps that you can get on your mobile phone or tablet which are similar to Skype. One that is becoming popular is Viber. It works similar to Skype in that both you and the person that you are wanting to contact must have Viber installed. As well as voice calls, Viber can be easily used to send SMS type messages via the internet for free. You can also attach photos and send them back home this way.

Just remember to work out the time difference between Australia and Italy so that you aren't waking up your loved ones at some unearthly hour!