

Beware of unexpected mobile data roaming charges when travelling abroad during festive holidays

The Office of the Communications Authority (OFCA) today (December 17) reminded consumers to be cautious about the use of mobile data roaming services when travelling abroad during the festive holidays so as to avoid incurring unexpectedly high mobile data roaming charges.

"Nowadays, many consumers travel with mobile devices such as smart phones and tablets. Consumers should be mindful that the charges for accessing mobile data roaming service outside Hong Kong are in general much higher than the charges for local mobile data usage. Downloading of large files/video clips, video streaming, access to mobile online games or automatic update of applications (apps) may also consume unexpectedly large volume of mobile data and result in hefty charges," a spokesman for the OFCA said.

The OFCA advised consumers that, for their peace of mind when travelling abroad, they should consider adopting the following measures to avoid unexpected mobile data roaming charges:

If mobile data roaming service is not required, consumers may:

- before leaving Hong Kong, disable both the mobile data service and data roaming service functions on their mobile devices; and
- request their operators to temporarily suspend mobile data roaming service before departure (currently, many operators can arrange suspension of roaming service for their customers, and some also allow suspension of mobile data roaming service while keeping voice roaming intact).

If mobile data roaming service is required, consumers may:

- before departure, check with their operators the availability of mobile data roaming service and roaming partners available for their choice at the destination, as well as the details of the service charges;
- consider choosing a charge-capped data roaming service plan;
- when choosing a daily-rated data roaming service plan (day pass), be mindful of how the daily rate is charged, by checking its starting and ending time, whether the same charge applies to all destinations, and whether the plan is only applicable to a designated network;
- consider hiring pocket Wi-Fi devices or purchasing pre-paid mobile data SIM cards that can be used at the destination;
- while accessing the Internet or using apps via a Wi-Fi connection, check frequently to ensure that their mobile devices are not switched to mobile data services;
- if a dual-SIM mobile phone is used, check to ensure that the SIM card

for overseas use is put in the correct card slot and the mobile setting is configured correctly; and

- to avoid accidental use of mobile data roaming service, consider (a) deactivating the auto download or auto play functions for multi-media contents in some apps, especially social media apps; and (b) deactivating the automatic update functions for emails, apps and other software.

"At present, some operators will automatically activate the data roaming service for their customers. If consumers do not need the service, they should contact their operators to deactivate it so as to avoid using the data roaming service inadvertently. In addition, upon arrival at overseas destinations, consumers may receive promotional messages from different service providers offering various services for their selection. Consumers should pay extra attention when responding to such messages or clicking the hyperlinks provided therein, as mobile data connection may be activated by such an act and data roaming charges would be incurred as a result," the spokesman added.

Additional consumer alerts on smart use of mobile data roaming service and data roaming day pass can be accessed via the following links:

- www.ofca.gov.hk/en/consumer_focus/education_corner/alerts/mds/unexpected/index.html
- www.ofca.gov.hk/en/consumer_focus/education_corner/guide/advice_roaming/smart_use/index.html