

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

The Office of the Communications Authority (OFCA) today (July 9) reminded consumers to be cautious about the use of mobile data roaming service while travelling abroad during the summer holidays so as to avoid "mobile bill shock", i.e. unexpectedly high mobile data roaming charges.

"Smart phones, tablets and other mobile devices are essentials for most consumers when they travel outside Hong Kong nowadays. Irrespective of the types of mobile devices they use, consumers are reminded that when accessing mobile data service outside Hong Kong, they would incur mobile data roaming charges which are in general a lot higher than local mobile data charges. In addition, downloading of large files/video clips, video streaming, access to mobile online games or automatic update of applications (apps) may consume unexpectedly large volumes of mobile data and result in a hefty bill," a spokesman for OFCA said.

For their peace of mind when travelling abroad, OFCA advises consumers to consider adopting the following measures to avoid mobile bill shock:

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 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; and

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

"At present, some operators will proactively 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 some circumstances, such as upon arrival at the destinations, consumers may receive notifications generated by individual mobile apps, or greetings and promotional messages from the destination roaming operator or the home network operator, some of which may provide instructions that guide the consumers to select their suggested services. Consumers should be alert before responding to such instructions or click the hyperlinks provided, as mobile data connection may be activated upon such an act, and high data roaming charges may be incurred as a result," the spokesman added.

Additional consumer alerts on smart use of mobile data roaming service and data roaming day passes 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.