

How to keep in touch while studying in Canada

A comprehensive guide to saving money on broadband deals and mobile phone costs while you're studying abroad.

Researched and compiled by Ofcom accredited broadband, TV and phone comparison site www.cable.co.uk

As a student visiting Canada, a country characterised by vast wilderness areas, you could face real challenges when it comes to staying in touch with home. So how do you manage on a student budget? We'll tell you how in this handy guide.

Broadband providers in Canada

No single Canadian broadband provider covers the whole of this enormous country, so you'll need to research which ones are available in your province or territory. In addition to fixed-line broadband, mobile internet covers much of the country and often won't require you to commit to a long-term contract.

Bell, Distributel, Rogers Cable, Shaw and Telus are some of the biggest providers in Canada, but you'll generally find that home broadband is more expensive than in the UK. Deals with unlimited downloads are rare, although usage caps of up to 2TB per month are the next best thing.

Average download speeds are around 16.6 Mbps but you get fibre up to 250Mbps from Canada's fastest provider, Rogers Cable. Satellite broadband is also an option for students in more remote locations.

Mobile providers in Canada

Many of Canada's broadband providers offer 2G, 3G and 4G mobile phone services too. Most have an international or UK specific calling bolt-on, which you can add to the mobile plan you choose to avoid expensive overseas rates.

Calling cards are a useful way to keep in touch if you don't want to worry about contracts and network coverage. You can buy them online (and receive an instant code) or pick one up in most newsagents and supermarkets. They can be used for calling from mobile phones and landlines, although if you call a UK mobile the rates may vary depending on the network.

Getting a broadband or phone contract in Canada

It's possible to get both broadband and a mobile without a credit rating as long as you've got two examples of photographic ID (your passport and student card should suffice). You'll probably be asked to pay some kind of deposit until you've built up a credit rating in the country, which you can do by getting a Canadian bank account – many of which can be set up online before you've even arrived in the country.

International roaming: what you need to know

International roaming is the term for when you use your mobile on an overseas network but get billed by your UK provider. The European Union has announced plans to scrap these charges from July 2014, but there are no plans to extend this to Canada at the moment.

If you're considering sticking with your current UK provider in Canada, be sure to check the rates for contacting home, plus any international calling add-ons available.

Consumer rights in Canada

Consumers in Canada are protected by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, which regulates the broadcast and telecoms industry. Generally, you can expect the same level of consumer protection in Canada as you have in the UK.

If you have issues with a telecoms provider and can't resolve it directly with them, you can then complain to the Ministry of Consumer Services, who will impartially assess your concerns and if necessary, contact the provider in question to resolve things.

Local information

Some Canadian terms might be unfamiliar, so here's a round up of some industry jargon and information to help when shopping around.

00 44: To dial the UK from Canada, ring 00 44 followed by the rest of the number but without the first zero (to call the University of Leeds, dial 00 44 113 243 1751)

Prepaid: The Canadian equivalent of Pay As You Go

Rate plans: Pay monthly mobile phone tariffs

Wireless phone: The Canadian name for mobile phones. Also called 'mobility' by some providers.

Mobile internet: Mobile broadband. This includes Tablet SIM cards, dongles and personal Wi-Fi hotspots.

CRTC: Industry regulator, Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission

TB: Terabyte – the next measurement of data usage up from megabyte (MB) and gigabyte (GB).

Manage your data

If you'll be using your smartphone or tablet to get online, here are some useful tips to avoid racking up a huge bill.

Use Wi-Fi

Take advantage of free public Wi-Fi whenever possible, particularly when downloading files, running updates and streaming content.

Beware email attachments

While text emails are light on data, images and video attachments can quickly eat through megabytes so if your email provider automatically downloads linked files, switch off this facility.

Avoid location services

Any apps that use Location Services (such as those that tag social media status updates with GPS data or present local search results) eat through data and battery life so use these with caution.

Switch off to be sure

Switch off data roaming when you don't immediately need it to avoid your handset connecting to the network and using up data in the background.

Pre-download files you know you'll need

Any files you expect to need while in Canada, such as maps, local guides, favourite movies or songs, download in the UK before you go.

Know what it's costing you

Currency exchange rates can fluctuate during any journey and it's important that you know what you are spending. Use a reputable currency exchange service to check the latest rates. Popular exchange rate services include Oanda, Reuters, XE.

Useful Links

Reuters: <http://www.reuters.com/finance/currencies>

XE: <http://www.xe.com>

Oanda: <http://www.oanda.com/currency/converter/>

Cable.co.uk is a provider of impartial information to increase public awareness in matters of broadband, TV, landline and mobile.