

Buying a Cell Phone

If you want to buy a cell phone in China remember to bring your passport with you. You can enjoy one-stop service by buying a cell phone from the Service Centers of China Unicom(中国联通), China Mobile (中国移动) and China Telecom (中国电信). They provide contracted cell phones with various calling plans. You can purchase well-known international brands and Chinese brands. You can also buy a “candy bar” phone (can only be used for calling or texting) for 200RMB to 500RMB (about US \$30 to \$80).



Getting a Local SIM Card

If your GSM phone is unlocked from your home country, you can use it in China with a Chinese SIM card. The pre-paid SIM card is available from the Service Centers of the three operators. Don't forget to bring your passport when you go there. You can also get a SIM card from any authorized retailer such as a newsstand or grocery store, which doesn't require registration. In China, you need to pay for national and international roaming services. If you plan to travel a lot in China, you can choose SIM cards without roaming fees, such as the China Unicom's 186 cards and China Mobile's Go Tone plans. If you text a lot, choose the plans that are cheaper for it, or add additional plans for texting. The rate of calls varies according to different plans. Representatives from China Unicom and China Telecom will be able to assist you getting a local SIM card during the Orientation Welcome Week.

A special tip for iPhone users: If you want to use your iPhone in China, you can buy China Unicom's 186 cards. These plans have no roaming fees, and the 3G networks are stable and fast. Before purchasing, be sure you know if your current cell phone is x3G or x4G, or using CDMA or GSM as the two major radio systems used in cell phones.

Adding Money to Your Cell Phone Plan

There are thousands of reliable retailers where you can purchase a card and to add money to your phone. Most local newsstands and many variety stores sell the cards, which are called “充值卡,” pronounced as “chong zhi ka,” in Putonghua (Mandarin). It should be easy to finish the procedure according to the English instruction, or simply ask help from the person who sells the card to you. You can also pay your phone card on the three telecommunication operators’ website or on Taobao.com.