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Handheld Satellite Phone Solutions for Travellers



The aim of this article is to provide a simple overview of the current satphone environment in Australia - assisting recreational, outback travellers make informed decisions when considering the purchase (or hire) of a handheld satellite phone for use on their next trip.

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Determining your Needs

There are vast gaps in the mobile network coverage here in Australia. In fact, you don't have to travel far from a town or city to drop out of mobile service range.

For this reason, there is a genuine requirement for some travellers to look at satellite phones for use on trips and especially to know it can be used in emergencies when no other methods of communication are available.

Making sense of all the options available to you to determine what network, what handset, and what plan to choose is the hardest part. Ever-present of course, is the advancing technology and consequent changes in network offerings and pricing plans.

Essentially, there are a range of solutions and some are better catered for different user groups. Certainly, you may find yourself in need of using a satphone for both recreation and business, and perhaps overseas too. Identifying your needs for satphone use will be the determining factor in what option you choose, as your needs will invariably differ to the next person. It would therefore be impossible for us to provide a simple, comprehensive article to be of use to all satphone users, so for the purposes of this article, we will only concentrate on handheld satellite phone usage in outback Australia, by recreational vehicle travellers. This will of course, simplify the nature of this article as it will eliminate some of the other satellite phone options

Top 5 Considerations

There are always threads on the Forum asking "which is the best network provider?", "which is the best handset?", "which is the cheapest plan?" but these aren't actually the questions that will help you move forward in your quest for your best satellite phone solution. In fact, when reviewing Forum threads in preparation for writing this article, we came across 5 key scenarios when you'll want to use your satellite phone.

1. [Dialling 1800/13/1300 numbers](#):- some satphones/providers do not offer the ability to dial these type of numbers. Consider the numbers you use when making bill payments, contacting your insurance company, making warranty claims, etc. Most of your breakdown resolutions may require contacting one of these companies via their call centres, and often times it is time consuming/difficult to find an alternative contact number. Having the ability to dial these type of numbers was voted by ExplorOzers one of the top buying considerations, however all companies

using a 1800/1300 numbers will also have a standard number so it is possible to get around this problem simply by gathering your important numbers before your trip.

2. **Dialling the Australian Emergency Call Centre 000/112:-** in response to a mandate from the Australian Communications and Media Authority earlier this year, any satellite phone providers that could not offer Australian users the ability to call 000/112 were made to implement such a service. Prior to July 2013, this has been a problem area for some satellite phone users but it is our understanding that this issue has now been fully resolved across all carriers but you are urged to check this for yourself before signing any agreements.

3. **Inbound Calls/Text:-** some satellite phone plans/networks are exceptionally costly for the caller to reach you. Don't forget that carrying a satellite phone for "emergency use" is often a two-way requirement, ie. family members back home need a simple/cost effective way to contact you urgently (kids in trouble, parents fall ill, you are required back home urgently etc). The best solution to this scenario as voted by ExplorOzers is considered a plan that offers an Australian calling number (cheaper), and/or the provision of using a website to type a short message that is sent to your phone (free of charge to the sender).

4. **Prepaid Plans:-** particularly relevant to ExplorOzers who may only require a satphone for a few weeks a year is the option to use a pre-paid plan. These enable you to avoid the commitment to fixed monthly service charges over a long period that you don't require. You simply select the plan with the amount of included airtime you anticipate you need for a fixed time and a fixed cost. If you find you have underestimated your usage, you can simply "top up" your card and/or extend your plan through your service provider. Some providers will not offer prepaid plans, but will offer casual plans, which may be equally reasonable – depending on your particular needs.

5. **Government Subsidy Scheme:-** originally intended to expire end June 2013, the Gillard Government extended the Satellite Phone Subsidy Scheme until 30 June 2014 so there is a great opportunity here to save up to 50% of the cost of a handset if you qualify. How it works is that if you do qualify, you will be able to buy a satellite mobile phone from a registered dealer for the retail price less the amount of the subsidy. On the surface, eligibility appears to be only available to those "living" outside of a cellular mobile service range, however if you can prove that you will spend more than 180 days in a 2 year period in out of service areas (such as remote area travelling, or many short trips to black-hole areas), you might still qualify.

Furthermore, the Pivotal representative I spoke to in doing this article even mentioned a 4WD Club who qualified for the subsidy for a phone they loaned out to its Members. There are many options so take a good look.

Note:- If you are eligible for the subsidy you must get approval before the handset is purchased. For all details, and an application form, go to the Australian Government, Dept of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy website.

Given the change of Government there is comment in the industry that the Subsidy Scheme could yet be cut by the Abbott Government, so if you qualify don't miss the boat.

Obviously, this list is not definitive and you might certainly have other requirements to take into consideration.

The 4 Satellite Networks

In Australia, we have access to 4 satellite networks, being Iridium, Inmarsat, Thuraya, and Globalstar Australia.

Of the 4 satellite networks available in Australia, we have 2 Geostationary (GEO) systems, and 2 Low-Earth Orbiting (LEO) systems.

Satellites in GEO systems are said to be in a "fixed" position in the sky. In actual fact, they move with the earth at the same speed, therefore completing one full revolution per day. The distance to the repeater means the transmitter (handset) needs a good aerial, which is why satphones on these networks use a directional antenna. Thuraya, and Inmarsat are the two GEO systems in Australia.

Satellites in LEO systems orbit very fast and low to the earth's surface (completing an orbit every 100 minutes). LEO orbiting satellites generally consist of a constellation of many satellites working together. Because of the number of repeaters (satellites) in sight at any one time, antenna direction is not an issue, hence satphones on the LEO networks use omnidirectional antennas. Iridium and Globalstar are the two LEO systems in Australia.



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Iridium

The Iridium network operates a LEO constellation (satellites orbit around the earth). From a usage perspective, one of the pros of a LEO constellation is that they enable satellite phones to be designed with omni-directional antennas. To use this network you will need an Iridium handset.

Until recently, Iridium was the favoured network provider by seasoned outback Australia travellers (ExplorOzers). It offers great coverage even in hilly areas, and up until recently it was the only network whose phones enabled 000/112 direct dialling. This feature is now available for all callers using satellite phones within Australia, so this point of difference is no longer a factor that favours Iridium over Inmarsat or another network for that matter. Iridium also offers users calling within Australia the ability to dial 1800/13/1300 numbers.

Iridium can provide the best coverage of the two LEO systems available in Australia (ie. compared to Globalstar) but due to the lack of Australian gateways in the Iridium network, users will notice voice delays. A call to an Iridium satellite in Australia is relayed via neighbouring satellites to the nearest ground station, located in another country. A small latency (delay) is introduced, which users notice.

Iridium has also just announced its future plan for Iridium NEXT to commence rollout during early 2015 with full deployment anticipated by the end of 2017. In short, NEXT is promising a new generation of satellite phone technology. Unfortunately, we were unable to find specific details on the plan to include in this article.

Get Connected

In Australia, Iridium is provided by Telstra, Pivotal and other independent service providers (ClientSat, Landwide, TC Communications etc).

Costs/Plans/Handsets

Iridium supports pre-paid options starting with 1 month plans, up to 2 year plans and post-paid plans of course. Plan costs and airtime charges vary across the different plans and providers so do your homework.

The basic Iridium 9555 handset has proven to be one of the most popular choices selected by travel users and comes complete with a full accessories kit (hands free, external antenna, data cable, car & wall chargers etc) and does the job at a good price.

Alternatively, there is also a little loophole using Global Roaming that enables Telstra cellular mobile phone users to use their Telstra Next G SIM card (not prepaid) in the current model Iridium 9555 or 9575 handsets (or in the older 9505a and 9505 models). Whilst call charges will be high, and charged for both incoming and outgoing calls, this can be an effective backup for people that simply want the peace of mind knowing they have a satphone handy, without having to pay for a separate satellite phone plan, and giving you the option to pick up an older model second hand handset or to even borrow one.



Inmarsat

Inmarsat operates GEO (Geosynchronous) constellations (satellites do not orbit around the earth, instead they are in a fixed position relative in the sky to an Earth-based observer).

The Inmarsat network has 2 active satellites covering Australia, one of them services the West and Centre, whilst the East is covered by the other one. Inmarsat is not a truly global service as it does not service the poles, however this is not a consideration for the user group of this article. In any case, to use the phone you will need to position your antenna at the satellite, so some knowledge of how to use the phone is required to establish a network connection and make a call. You will also need a clear line of sight to that position in the sky i.e. clear of buildings, mountains, tree foliage etc Whilst these functions may seem problematic to some users, you are unlikely to have connection troubles in the wide open deserts of Australia's outback.

Prior to July 2013, Inmarsat users could not dial 000 or 112 to contact the regular Australian emergency call centre, however this feature has now been enabled and with the release of the new IsatPhone Pro handset there has been a sudden switch of popularity amongst the Australian outback travellers to look at some of the very competitive pricing plans and options available from Inmarsat.

The release of the new IsatPhone Pro handset has set the cat amongst the pigeons, so to speak. IsatPhone Pro is much more akin to the smartphones we have become accustomed to using. The spec sheets promote its exceptional voice clarity, the longest battery life of any handset on the market, SMS text messaging and email, Bluetooth support and an intuitive GSM-style interface with high-viz colour screen, large keypad for easy dialling (even with gloves), this handset also enables you to view your GPS location data, and sent it as a text/email. There are other inbuilt features that you take for granted in your smartphone like calendar, alarm, calculator, and would you believe it – Twitter!. These are features that are missing from all other satellite handsets. The phone also has contact synchronisation with Microsoft Outlook 2007 (PC) and is compatible with Windows XP Pro, SP3 and Windows Vista SP1, plus comes complete with all the necessary accessories (battery chargers, handsfree headset etc).

Get Connected

In Australia, Inmarsat is not provided by any of the 4 registered Australian telecommunications providers (Telstra, Optus, Pivotal, Vodafone), which means you cannot obtain an Australian calling number and to call out (even to Australian numbers) you need to include the international country code. Airtime on Inmarsat is provided by independent providers including TC Communications (recently acquired by Inmarsat), and ClientSat.

The providers do offer mechanisms for getting around the international dialling issues, such as a two-stage dialling service which routes calls through a local number, and the use of web-based message service to your handset (free).

Costs/Plans/Handsets

The Inmarsat IsatPhone Pro has the lowest handset price (at the time of writing), pre-paid plans are usually competitive and the phone is easy to use. The handset can also send its latitude/longitude as an SMS message, so in an emergency this SMS can be sent to a family member who is pre-briefed to alert emergency authorities if such a message is received.

Just as with Iridium, your friends/family can send a free SMS from web to your satphone (IsatPhone Pro) too. However beware of much higher call charges for people calling you on the Inmarsat plan (due to your international phone number). If you choose to go with Inmarsat then you should encourage your callers to only contact you via the free SMS option.

Inmarsat users calling within Australia need to ensure their handsets are running the latest version of the firmware (v5.3) to be able to dial the Australian emergency call centre on 000/112. However, at this stage, dialling 1800/13/1300 numbers through the Inmarsat network is not possible.

Inmarsat recently changed their expiry periods on prepaid cards and some providers who still hold stock of the older cards can offer good deals such as 100 minute pre-paid cards that are valid through to December 2014. Apparently, new Inmarsat Prepaid cards have maximum 6 month periods so it pays to shop around if these features are important to you.



Thuraya

The Thuraya satellite that services Australia is located in a GEO (geosynchronous) orbit. This satellite is fixed approximately over Singapore, giving travellers in northern and outback Australia the opportunity for exceptional service, however it could have limitations in southern extremities. Despite some coverage limitations, many Australian recreational outback travellers report good coverage for the majority of the outback tourism regions. Given there is currently some very new technology being launched right now, Thuraya has some good offerings worth considering.

Thuraya has been offered through Optus and AST for some time to Australians however using the network has previously been via an international Thuraya SIM, which has meant higher call charges.

Pivotel Australia however is currently in the final stages of commissioning Thuraya on their local network, which means Pivotel Thuraya customers will have Australian SIMs. The network is apparently only 1-2 weeks away from completion.

At this stage, Thuraya users cannot direct dial the 1800/1300 numbers but this service will be functional once the Pivotel Thuraya network is fully operational (1-2 months after start-up).

In terms of innovation, Thuraya has something unique that no other satellite network does – the SatSleeve. This is a satellite adapter which turns an ordinary iPhone into a combination of a GSM and satellite phone whilst also providing extended battery life and a dedicated emergency button for instant communications in remote locations. For people with a compatible phone, this could represent a significant saving by negating the need to purchase a handset.

Get Connected

Thuraya (International) airtime is provided in Australia by Optus and AST Australia. Thuraya Australia is offered by Pivotel.

Costs/Plans/Handsets

Thuraya users are offered 2 handsets, the XT (satellite-only phone which includes GPS navigation/tracking), and the XT Dual (a dual mode phone that works in either GSM mode or in satellite mode). Plus, the new SatSleeve – currently compatible with iPhone4 & 5 (and S models), but will be released for Android next year (although only for the Samsung Galaxy S4).

Pivotel Thuraya do not plan to offer pre-paid satellite phone plans, however they are releasing casual plans starting from \$15.



Pivotel Satellite Pty Ltd

Sponsor Message



Pivotel is a leading telecommunications company specializing in Satellite technology. Pivotel's product range includes services using the Iridium & Globalstar Satellite networks as well as Tracertrak.
www.pivotel.com.au

Globalstar Australia

You can forget all the bad publicity you've read about Globalstar. The aging satellites that plagued service in recent years have been decommissioned and the new satellites are up (the constellation consists of 32 satellites). The new Globalstar system will be robust and despite not being fully complete yet, it is already reporting 85-90% coverage.

Globalstar Australia is a LEO system that uses Australian gateways. Globalstar is different to Iridium in this respect in that signals from Globalstar satellites reach the ground via local ground stations (gateways) of which there are several. This results in no latency (delay) in the signal. A handset calls the satellite, which repeats the signal directly back to the earth. Users of the Globalstar network will notice exceptionally clear calls with no voice delay as a result.

As the new Globalstar system approaches 100% coverage and more satellites are in view at any time it is becoming increasingly tolerant of hilly and forested areas, however Globalstar Pivotel are currently advising that if travelling in the tropics of WA, Qld and NT, that the coverage would be weaker than if travelling in SA, and Vic.

Globalstar provides users with an Australian mobile phone number, meaning that inbound calls to the satphone are charged to the caller at standard mobile rates and at no charge to the receiver. This makes it very easy and economical for family and friends to stay in touch when you're out in the bush. As with other satellite and mobile phone systems, Globalstar Australia supports the 000 and 112 emergency services and 1800/13/1300 dialling.

Get Connected

Globalstar airtime is provided in Australia exclusively by Pivotal (who also provide Iridium and therefore offer airtime on both the LEO systems).

Costs/Plans/Handsets

Pivotal does not offer Pre-paid Globalstar plans but has a \$22 casual plan for those that are looking for a low-cost commitment. There is only one handset available, the GSP 1600. It supports voicemail and short incoming text messages, but not sending text messages. However it has an inbuilt data modem so it can be used with a laptop computer for simple, on-line text-based tasks such as sending and receiving text only emails through an email client. You will need an optional data cable to use this facility.



How do mountains affect satphone signals?

Let's look at the two different satellite systems separately:-

First, a person on the ground trying to use a satphone on a GEO system (ie Inmarsat or Thuraya) needs to have a clear line of sight to the satellite (which is at least 36,000 km away). Where you are on the ground relative to the position of the satellite is a factor here because the closer your position (lat/long) to the satellite, the closer you get to near vertical signal direction. If the satellite is 60 degrees away, then the signal is reaching upwards at 30 degrees from the horizontal so only obstructions that are high enough to interrupt that signal will disrupt communications.

But reaching the satellites is also an issue for a person on the ground trying to use a satphone on a LEO system (ie Globalstar or Iridium). The altitude of these LEO constellations and the number of satellites in each (Iridium 66 satellites at 800 km, Globalstar 48 satellites at 1400 km) are designed to ensure that the user can see more than one satellite at any time, but if you are in a gully there is every chance that the view of all close LEO satellites is fully or partially obstructed. Furthermore, the LEO system depends on the uplinked signal reaching a "moving" satellite, so even if you can make contact, the call is highly likely to drop out as the particular satellite being accessed passes out of the window of view from the gully, before another satellite has come into view through that window.

LEO satellites (Globalstar & Iridium) actually work best when the user is closer to a pole because the satellites are more closely aligned in that plane. Conversely, because they are furthest apart from each other at the equator, accessing a LEO satellite is more difficult in mountainous terrain as you get closer to the equator. In Australia, that could cause potentially cause communication problems in Kakadu or the Kimberley.

Why some satphones have international numbers?

Due to the deregulation of the telecommunications industry, independent airtime providers can offer you service on any of the 4 Satellite Networks but beware of one simple fact – only the 4 Australian licensed mobile telecommunications companies – namely Telstra, Optus, Pivotal, and Vodafone, can provide you with an Australian call number and Australian direct dial services. If you choose to purchase airtime from independent airtimes providers, you will be given an international phone number and when you make calls you'll be using the international prefixes. There are some exceptions, where the independent provider has setup a call routing system to allow you to use a local number and many also provide excellent web-based messaging systems that are free and easy for your friends/family to contact you. It's just worth noting these things before you sign up.

Smartphone to Satellite Communicators

Whilst the SatSleeve is indeed an innovative first in smartphone to satellite voice communications, it is not the first

device that has offered a smartphone-to-satellite communication solution.

Here's a quick summary of other non-voice smart-phone to satellite devices:

SPOT Connect

the Spot Connect, is a small device that you connect via bluetooth to your smartphone when needed. At a little over \$200, it's a robust value-for-money solution that is much cheaper than buying a handset, however it will not provide voice call service. Vehicle tracking can also be activated through this device (compatible with EOTrackMe). Whilst the SPOT Connect only provides you with basic data button functions that access the satellite network to send custom email and text messages via satellites to your contacts or the AMSA and is a "send only" device, it is nevertheless an effective one-way satellite communicator with some nifty features to suit remote area travellers. Of course, as with all satellite devices, you will also need a subscription plan for your satellite service (purchased direct from Spot, which in Australia is operated by Pivotel).

inReach Satellite Communicator

the inReach has the ability to deliver 2 way messaging and once paired with a compatible smartphone or tablet, becomes a 2 way communication device which can be utilised anywhere on earth. Using the Pivotel Iridium satellite network it offers complete global coverage. ExplorOz is an authorised distributor of the inReach device, however to activate your service you will need to go via the Delorme inReach website to subscribe to a plan). InReach plans have a minimum 12 month term and start from \$19.95 per month.

Recommended Shop Items



SPOT Connect

Brand: Spot

BONUS- Free Membership (EOTrackMe) for non-members, PLUS all member orders shipped free via Overnight Air Courier (AAE). No Mobile Coverage? No Problem!...

Your Price \$229.00



inReach Satellite Communicator

Brand: Delorme

The Delorme inReach Satellite Communicator has the ability to deliver 2 way messaging and once paired with a compatible iPhone or Android Smartphone or tablet,...

Your Price \$349.00

Final Comments

The difference between the 4 satellite networks is really in the coverage and service you can expect for the area in which you'll be using it. None are stand outs in all circumstances, but perhaps this article has helped you understand how to determine what system will be more optimal in particular conditions.

For wide open spaces in central Australia you can really go with any of the networks as neither GEO or LEO systems will limit your use in any specific way. Your choice of provider essentially comes down to other personal factors and pricing options for your volume of use.

As with all ExplorOz articles, we have taken no payment from any provider or network in preparing this article to ensure the information we provide is as impartial as possible. However, we recommend going direct to the providers' websites for further detailed information, especially on pricing and other options and variations that aren't covered by this article.

Special mention and thanks to Colin, Bruce, Phil, & Frank for their technical critique and proof reading of the final draft.

ARTICLE FEEDBACK

Note – Reviews will be sent to the content administrator and will appear on this page, but Discussions will be copied to our Forum to allow other people to respond.

Reviews & Discussions

27 Sep 13 mellons

We go fishing a few times a year up north and we all have fitted in car Westinghouse or NEC S2 fixed units with mast or dome antennas , they are a bit big but u can get them on eBay for around \$500 or less , we only get them turned on for the trips at a cost of \$45 a month . With the big antennas reception is never a problem wile driving or in camp so that may be another option .

Replies: **1** FollowUps: **0** Read Responses

03 Sep 13 Mike F7

Looking for some info about what's available in the mobile satellite Internet market, prices , plans and past experiences, thanks for

any thoughts.

Replies: 5 FollowUps: 2 Read Responses

19 Aug 13 Skulldug

After a fair bit of research I just purchased an Iridium Extreme on a Pivotal Classic Casual plan and am very happy so far. I'll do a quick write up for anyone who is interested. I have no affiliations etc. Just a consumer. We are caravaners who sometimes travel to remote areas and do side trips with our tent. Sometimes I go on my own beach fishing (Coorong or Robe area) or looking for more difficult 4x4 tracks in the Victorian High Country or Flinders Ranges etc. Thus, we need some ability to let our family know where we are, or when I am broken down, hopelessly bogged or in serious trouble. I may also take up shooting again so a device that can come with me is a consideration. As a yachtie, I am familiar with EPIRBs and Personal Locator Beacons and decided they were good for life threatening emergencies but not the less serious incidents like a breakdown. I also considered the Spot system which gets good reviews in Australia but attracts some scathing comments from users in the US. The inReach system looked good to me but when I saw the unit itself, I didn't like the size, shape and plastic feel of them. I had previously looked at sat phones, but was put off by the price of the hand sets (I'm not eligible for the government subsidy) and in particular, the cost of calls. Here's what I finally decided. The Iridium Extreme seems to get good reviews and is ruggedised (supposedly mil spec). It still feels a little "plastic" but is the sturdiest hand set I have seen. I managed to pick one up for the old price (\$1,499). They now seem to fetch \$1,699. I went for the Pivotal Classic Casual plan. This gets me a normal Australian mobile number and it can make sat phone calls within Aus without having to add the international prefixes. Emergency 000 also works just like it does from a normal mobile. It can send SMS messages and although call costs are expensive, in-coming calls are at normal mobile rates to the caller and free to me. This means that if I want to call home, I just sent send my wife an SMS asking her to call me and it cost the same as calling my mobile. The hand set has an SOS button just like an EPIRB. What you do is remove a rubber cap on the top of the phone and press a little red button. It gives you 30 seconds to cancel it before going into emergency mode. I have mine registered with Geos Alliance and programmed to call them and at the same time, send a SMS to a short list of family and friends. Both the phone call and text message contains my lat, long, alt, age of fix, number of satellites and how much battery the hand set has. It doesn't cost anything to register with Geos Alliance and they pass on your details to the Emergency response centre in Canberra, so its just like activating an EPIRB (I will be corrected on this if others have actual experience). I have requested an actual test so I will post an update if I have anything wrong. The SOS button is also programmable. You can set it to call 000 or home or simply to send a SMS with your location. When my short listed friends receive a text with my location, there is also a hyperlink that when pressed, shows my location on a map. Here are the costs of the plan. Monthly payment \$22. One-off connection fee \$110. Calls included \$0. Flagfall \$0. Calls to Australian numbers, inc' mobiles, 13/1300, 1800 and voicemail \$3.30 per 30 seconds. SMS messages \$0.55. Calls to other satellite services are even more expensive ranging from \$4.40 per 30 sec (Thuraya) to \$19.80 per 30 sec (BGAN). Calls to 000/112 are free. The reason this suites me is that I don't need to make sat phone calls to anyone. In a real emergency if one arose, I don't really care what the call rates are. So, once the initial costs are paid, it only costs me \$22 per month and \$0.55 for SMSs. The rest is at normal mobile rates if you accept my "text and phone me back" approach. Set-up out of the box was easy and the phone registered itself with the Iridium sat system while standing on my back porch. Just be aware that the instructions that came in the box contained one wrong number (set up number for SMS) and I had to ring Pivotal to get the right one. I have heard that some mobile carriers do charge more to call sat phones. I have only tested this with Telstra and the charges are exactly as Pivotal said they were. I'm in a 12 month plan so if forumites know any better ones, I'm stuck for now. Also no criticism is intended at other systems. This is just what seems to suite me. Skulldug

Replies: 5 FollowUps: 15 Read Responses

28 Jul 13 Pelikan

Does anyone have experience of using the Globalstar network? The phones for this network seem to be advertised second hand at very low prices compared with Iridium Peter H

Replies: 8 FollowUps: 18 Read Responses

17 Jul 13 olcoolone

Back in June we did a northern Simpson trip for three weeks, we were due to meet others in the desert, one couple we were meeting early had a Inmarsat Isatphone Pro. We had to get incontact with them on two occasions via their sat phone, we were in mobile phone range so we used the mobile phone. Yesterday we got our first monthly bill from Telstra since being back, we are on a corporate business plan so we have a very constant phone bills. When the bill got opened it was noticed the cost was about \$70.00 above norm..... had a look at the bill and found two sat phone calls we made, one for about \$58.00 and another for \$11.00. The one for \$58.00 was for just over two minutes and the \$11.00 one was for just over 30 seconds. We quired Telstra and stated we wanted to know who was profiteering..... strat away the costs got credited. Our two argument to Telstra was; the people who work for us can call our Iridium phone thats with Pivotal for the cost of a standard mobile call and this cost comes of our monthly allowance or it's free during business hours..... why is it so expensive to phone a satellite phone. The second argument was if we phoned our friends using our Iridium phone to their Inmarsat Isatphone service we would be paying around \$2.70 a minute compared to \$19.99 a minute from a Telstra mobile or landline..... plus connection fee. We got an answer back.... and it seems our friends like many others have the highest call cost per minute of any sat phone. "* Inmarsat was the world's first global mobile satellite communications service offering satellite communications services to maritime, land-mobile, aeronautical and other users. Formed as a maritime-focused inter-governmental organisation over 20 years ago Inmarsat now supports links for phone, fax and data communications at up to 64kbit/s to more than 210,000 portable terminals on ships, vehicles and aircraft. Inmarsat operates a constellation of geostationary satellites designed to extend phone, fax and data communications all over the world and these satellites are controlled from Inmarsat's headquarters in London. Inmarsat users include ship owners and managers, journalists and broadcasters, health and disaster-relief workers, land transport fleet operators, airlines, airline passengers and air traffic controllers, government workers, national emergency and civil defence agencies, and peacekeeping forces. * Access to the Inmarsat Satellite Network is provided by "Xantic" which is a joint venture between KPN of the Netherlands and Telstra. The Satellite Network provides satellite coverage via two land earth stations to over 98% of the planet's surface. What are Inmarsat calls? * From a customer perspective, Inmarsat calls are calls made from a fixed Telstra residential or business phone to a person or business with an Inmarsat (satellite) terminal. What are the Features and Benefits? The main reason people use satellite communications is so they can be reached in remote locations where there are no other means of communication Who is this for? Picture the customer Customer who may benefit most Customers who make voice/fax/data calls from a Telstra fixed phone to Inmarsat terminals are customers who wish to contact friends, family or businesses who only have access to a telephone service via an Inmarsat Satellite terminal. Typical users of Inmarsat terminals are in remote locations and include the mining, oil, shipping and fishing industries, the military, cruise ships and 4WD enthusiasts. Pricing * The cost of a call from a Telstra fixed and mobile phone to an Inmarsat terminal depends on the type of satellite terminal the customer is calling. The Inmarsat terminals which customers may be calling, range from Inmarsat

mini-m which is roughly the size of a laptop computer, to Inmarsat-A which is quite large and fixed - normally to a ship. * For pricing of calls to Inmarsat services refer to the table below or use Soroban. * When using Soroban the Inmarsat destinations are listed in the Country drop down box, beginning with INM-GAN ISDN (0011 +87) through to INMARSAT-M (0018 +87). Although 0018 access is listed, Soroban will not provide a cost, as calls to Inmarsat destinations are not possible using 0018. Soroban will display an error message when you choose a destination beginning with 0011 or 0015 - simply click OK to display the call cost. Pricing for calls to Inmarsat services Cost per minute. Calls are charged in blocks of 30 seconds or part thereof. GST incl Calls to Inmarsat Aero numbers beginning with 8705 \$10.99/minute Calls to Inmarsat B numbers beginning with 8703 \$5.99/minute Calls to Inmarsat B HSD numbers beginning with 87039 \$19.99/minute Calls to Inmarsat BGAN numbers beginning with 87077 and 87078 \$19.99 per minute Calls to Inmarsat M numbers beginning with 8706 \$3.99/minute Calls to Inmarsat Mini M numbers beginning with 87076 \$3.49/minute Calls to Inmarsat GAN ISDN numbers beginning with 87060 \$14.99/minute " So be very careful who you phone and what sat service they use or you might be in for a shock. The cost to people dialing a satellite phone was the main reason we went with Pivotal, outgoing call costs are good but it's the ability for our staff, family and friend to call us on our sat phone and not get a rude shock when they get their phone bill. My biggest gripe is why can on carrier charge an arm and a leg and another charge so little..... someone is make a good profit.

Replies: 5 FollowUps: 9 Read Responses

08 Jul 13 Member - silkwood

I recently purchased a (second hand- obviously) 9505A. I went to Telstra, organised a \$10 per month casual plan and then rang up the appropriate section to organise global roaming. Tonight I received an email stating the roaming had been actioned. However the phone switches on okay, the screen states "Registering" but then a message comes up stating "Invalid Account" Anyone know what I'm missing? Cheers, Mark

Replies: 6 FollowUps: 3 Read Responses

04 Jul 13 Chris_K

Hi Folks I seem to recall seeing a thread a little while ago that a standard prepaid SIM card would work in the Iridium 9555 sat phone - provided that global roaming was turned on. If anyone could provide the link - or perhaps enlighten me, that would be great. Cheers Chris

Replies: 5 FollowUps: 13 Read Responses

23 Jun 13 Member - DesertDWLR

Not sure if this has been posted yet, sorry if it has. But just came across this on the AST Australia web site From 1 July 2013 it will be possible to access emergency calling from your IsatPhone Pro. This facility will enable an IsatPhone Pro registered on any of the 14-satellite beams covering Australia and Australian territorial waters (up to 200nm), to dial either '000' or '112' and be routed through to the local Australian emergency call centre. The user will not need to make any adjustments to their phones, the service introduction is wholly network-related. The only requisite is that the phone needs to be operating with firmware 5.3.0, which was released in February 2013. The emergency calling service is available on Inmarsat's handheld phones only, and is not extended to include non-handheld Inmarsat products such as BGAN or maritime products. Chris

Replies: 4 FollowUps: 0 Read Responses

20 Jun 13 Sigmund

Anyone had probs after the last firmware upgrade (5.2.2 IIRC)? I've attempted to call about 30 times now with 4-5 bar signal strength and good GPS fix and it's succeeded only twice. The call gets disconnected while dialling or gets a temp network error, try again. Sometimes it loses the comm sat and no amount of searching or getting another GPS fix improves that.

Replies: 4 FollowUps: 8 Read Responses

04 Apr 13 Carolyn R2

Thanks to everyone who responded regarding my earlier query about getting a Sat phone working with a post-paid Telstra sim card. There was some debate about what Telstra would and wouldn't do, so I thought I'd update with my own experience. Having bought a sat phone from ebay (with the intention to resell in a few months), I went to a Telstra shop to ask about their \$10 post-paid casual plan. Staff had no idea when I mentioned using the card in a Sat phone so after that I stuck with the line that it was for an "old Nokia" instead. I was initially told I could get global roaming simply by ringing up Telstra. However later in a different store I was told this was not possible unless I had been a post-paid customer for 6 months. I took out the plan and rang Telstra, who said they could activate the global roaming within 24 hours. Great, I thought! 36 hours later no global roaming so I rang to check and discovered they had cancelled the application for it....because I hadn't been a customer, as referred to above. Outrageous that they didn't follow through with their initial representation, but perhaps predictable based on the warnings given here. Anyway, they WOULD activate it if I paid \$300 into my account. This will be refunded if I close the account with any money unspent. Annoying to have to pay this deposit, but gets around the problem nevertheless, so may work for some people. What I don't know is how to find out how much sat phone calls will cost to make and receive (someone here mentioned \$4 each way, but where is that info held? Also, do you only pay if the sat phone is answered?) And another question - should I have data roaming activated or not? I remember someone said get everything, but is there any chance my Sat phone will start communicating data and I'll be up for huge fees? cheers Carolyn

Replies: 7 FollowUps: 7 Read Responses

26 Feb 13 adders

Hi. I've been reading alot about being able to use your standard telstra post paid phone card in the Iridium network on the motorola 9505 phones. I have an Iphone which has a smaller sim card. Can you use a card adaptor to fit into the 9505 phone? Cheers Peter

Replies: 1 FollowUps: 5 Read Responses

22 Feb 13 BrigalowO

Given that our travel plans will encompass a fair bit of outback travel this year, I wondered if it would be a good idea to take a satellite phone. We were enticed by a seller at the Newcastle Caravan Show to have theirs, and I feel the even with a govt subsidy, the phone they are offering, is overpriced. Has anyone here have a satellite phone? What brand is it? Is there a best brand to buy? Am I better off buying a new/used phone off say, E-Bay, and arranging connection myself? Many questions but need many answers Robert

Replies: 9 FollowUps: 11 Read Responses

21 Feb 13 Member - Grundle (WA)

Hi people, what is the latest model Iridium, 9555 or 9505, Thanks

Replies: 2 FollowUps: 5 Read Responses

10 Feb 13 Dennis Ellery

IsatLatest firmware version 5.3.0 released on 8 February 2013. This is a mandatory firmware upgrade. To check you have the latest version on your IsatPhone Pro, go to Menu > Settings > About > Firmware version. Download IsatPhone Pro firmware version 5.3.0 IsatPhone Pro firmware 5.3.0 release note

07 Feb 13 Member - drummy50

Good afternoon. My Thuraya satellite telephone model SG2520 is presently without a service provider as Indigo Telecom has gone into liquidation. Has anyone found an alternate service provider for Thuraya besides Optus? Also, is there a way of updating the background system on this telephone? Appears to be running Windows Vista. Cheers.

Replies: 1 FollowUps: 0 Read Responses

05 Feb 13 Member - Boobook

If you are thinking of getting a new Sat phone, get it soon. The subsidy ends in June this year. The advice is to apply now. Below is from Kondinin Group's news pages. WITH just months to claim a satellite phone subsidy of up to 85%, farmers are being urged to apply now. The federal government started the scheme in 2002 to help farmers in areas without mobile phone coverage improve the affordability of mobile communication. Federal Member for Parkes Mark Coulton said with the scheme set to wind up on June 30 Australian farmers needing a satellite phone should put their application in immediately. The scheme offers a subsidy of 85% of the retail price of a satellite phone up to a maximum of \$1000 for residents who live in areas without any terrestrial service. People who work or travel within an area that has no terrestrial service for more than 180 days over a two-year period can also apply for a 50% subsidy of the retail price of a satellite phone up to a maximum of \$700. Individuals are eligible for one handset each. Small businesses, community and not-for-profit groups, indigenous corporations, emergency services, health organisations and educational institutions are eligible for two handsets. "There are large parts of the Parkes electorate that have no mobile phone service and for many satellite phones are the only viable option," Coulton said. "However, satellite phones tend to be far more expensive than the standard mobile phone. "The scheme is scheduled to cease on June 30 this year and therefore anyone considering purchasing a satellite mobile phone should apply for this scheme." Applicants who live in areas without terrestrial mobile coverage are eligible for additional subsidies to replace handsets purchased under the scheme three or more years earlier.

Replies: 3 FollowUps: 2 Read Responses

04 Feb 13 craigandej

Am looking at buying an Iridium sat phone and am wondering has anyone tried a Telstra Next G prepaid SIM (Global roaming enabled) in one. I know that a post paid Next G SIM will work. I dont want to go on a plan (Next G or satellite) as I have a great free call pre paid deal from years ago. The sat phone will get minimal use so just swapping the SIM when needed will suit my needs. Regards Craig

Replies: 5 FollowUps: 18 Read Responses

31 Jan 13 Dennis Ellery

I think I got sucked in. I brought an Isatphone Pro 18 months ago – At the time the prepaid card for a 100 units was about \$80 with a 24 month expiry. Now I am quoted 100 units for \$139 with a 6 months expiry. I only use about 10 units a year that will work out at \$280 a year or about \$28 a minute. Anyone got a cheaper option for airtime or prepaid with an Isat Pro?

Replies: 10 FollowUps: 22 Read Responses

14 Jan 13 ozychris

Hi, we are heading back to Cape York in May. We have previously used an Iridium Sat phone but last time we got very sick of the drop outs. Can anyone with Satellite phone experience enlighten me to the best allround phone for the Cape. I am looking at Thuraya but get confused as to what is best. There seems to have been very little discussion around this topic in a long time. Thanks

Replies: 8 FollowUps: 19 Read Responses

16 Aug 12 Dave W2

What emergency numbers should be carried for emergency use with the Iridium? Thanks, Dave

Replies: 3 FollowUps: 15 Read Responses

08 Aug 12 Member - Nick T2

Hi all Just got back from a trip up the Canning Stock Route. We had a magnificent trip but it very nearly all went to shirt when we got to the first bit of terrain that required 4 wheel drive. I had had my rig (2008 79 series V8Cruiser Ute) in for a 80 000 km service (it has only done 62 000 Km) which involves repacking the wheelbearings among other things. So we came to this tricky bit of down hill rocky country about 100 km from Wiluna and I got out to put the hubs in for the first time since the service. Passenger side no dramas drivers side would only turn halfway to lock. Bugger! So after some discussion and swearing I thought OK I will call the dealer on the sat phone we had borrowed from a mate. Well the instrucion from our mate had lost something in translation and we couldn't make a phone call to anyone apart from our mate who owned the phone and he wasn't answering. So with nothing to lose we got the spanners out and took the hub off and it had been reassembled backwards so after a few trial and errors we put it back together the right way around and we were off for another 5000 km trouble free. Eventually we got hold of our mate who owned the phone and worked out how to make a call but it was lucky we did not have a real emergency before then Nick

Replies: 7 FollowUps: 2 Read Responses

07 Aug 12 Member - David T (SA)

Hi I know there has been a recent thread on this with some very useful replies. I have a slightly different question which I have not found on checking previous threads. I have an Iridium 9505A and use it with the sim from my Next G mobile and it has covered my needs especially after a breakdown on the Canning last year (big phone bill, but it did get me the help I needed). Can I call 000? Obviously I do not want to dial 000 just to find out. Thanks for any information. Cheers Dave

Replies: 1 FollowUps: 1 Read Responses

30 Jun 12 Mark O3

Hi All I just learnt the hard way with calling a satellite from a landline,our friends were doing the Canning Stock Route and we decided to give them a ring. The number started with 0011**** which is the international code and anyway we spoke for approximately 14 minutes over 3 phone calls and the Telstra bill came and it cost \$19:95 per minute and the total was \$279, I was straight on the line to the Telstra help centre and they took \$179 without to much drama. I would possible try SKYPE as an alternative to using the land line.It pays to check your charges before ringing the Satellite phone.

Replies: 7 FollowUps: 21 Read Responses

18 Jun 12 zingaro

Most helpful. Just the information I was looking for. Thank you.

Replies: 1 FollowUps: 0 Read Responses

16 Jun 12 Outnabout..

I am looking at getting a satellite phone and have no idea whatsoever. Its use would be infrequent and just as a safety measure. I was wondering if you can get something on a prepaid basis that you could just top up before a trip. Are there any preferred brands or suppliers. It is a bit hardf to get info where we live and is a 3 hour drive to maybe get someone who knows what they were talking about. Thanks in advance David

Replies: 8 FollowUps: 6 Read Responses

Tags

Satphone, Iridium, Globalstar, Inmarsat, Thuraya, Satsleeve, Satellite Communicators, Inreach, Spot Connect, Smartphone To Satellite Communicators

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