

The Traveler's Guide to Columbia Network Access

With the increased use and importance of e-mail and the Web, it has become increasingly important to be connected or have online (Web) access while traveling. Many travelers need to keep in touch with their "home base" in order to obtain the latest communication and information from peers, colleagues, co-workers, and family. They find it imperative, therefore, to be able to access these resources. If you are traveling overseas, however you will need to know some things before you can connect to the Columbia network and access your e-mail.

This document provides you with information on how to access Columbia computing services, including e-mail, when you travel. You should review this document and plan for your trip before you leave home in order to acquire any necessary equipment and information.

This document covers the following topics:

- What you need to do before you can connect to the Columbia network
- Required equipment (if you are bringing a computer) and information you need to bring with you
- Connecting to Columbia network and accessing your e-mail with or without a laptop
- Additional information resources

Note: All third party Internet Service Providers (ISPs), equipment, and services are offered for informational purposes only and are not endorsed by Columbia University.

Contact Your Host First

You should contact your host (hotel, conference management) for any advice or tips on how to connect to the Internet. Your host may also be able to provide you with electrical and power requirements, written instructions, available facilities, accessories for your laptop computer such as power cords, plugs and adapters, and any other information you may need to establish your Internet connection. Make sure you find out the type of connection available to you at your destination—whether you will need to dial up or have a direct Ethernet connection. If you will be staying in a hotel, you may be able to rent a computer.

Traveling without Your Computer

If you are not planning on bringing a computer with you on your trip, you may still be able to connect to the Columbia network and access your e-mail as long as you can find a way to access the Internet. Some establishments that might provide this service to you are other universities, Internet cafés, libraries, and some hotels.

If you are able to access a Web browser at an establishment such as a kiosk, cyber café, or your hotel, you can access your e-mail using CUBMail. While not providing advanced e-mail functions, CUBMail does offer you the opportunity to view and send e-mail messages. If you decide to use CUBMail, make sure you try it out before you leave on your trip to see if it fits your needs. To access CUBMail, go to the Web site <http://www.columbia.edu/acis/email/launch/>, and then click the CUBMail link.

Check out <http://www.cybercaptive.com> to find an Internet café in the country to which you are traveling. This site has an extensive database of thousands of establishments throughout the US and nearly every country.

Traveling with Your Computer

If you are planning on bringing a computer with you on your trip, you will need to address the following before you leave home:

- If you will be dialing up, do you know what ISP you will be calling?
- Do you have the equipment (computer, power/phone adapter) you'll need?
- Do you have the software you'll need, and is it properly configured?
- Do you have a copy of the modem manual? If not, check the manufacturer's Web site for a downloadable version.

Choosing an Internet Service Provider

You can connect to the Internet via the Columbia modem pool, but this can be costly if you are dialing long distance. You will probably want to investigate commercial ISPs that provide service in the places to which you are traveling. Check out <http://thelist.internet.com>, which allows you to search for ISPs throughout the world.

Follow the ISP's instructions for creating an account, configuring dial-up networking, and establishing a connection. If the ISP has a local access number, you should try to connect from home and resolve any questions before you leave.

Power Issues

Check the Voltage Settings. Be sure to check the voltage used in the country of your destination as well as the voltage setting of the AC adapter on your computer. Many adapters automatically accept other voltages since they have a voltage setting of 100-240 volts, but other adapters may have a switch that you use to change the voltage setting. You can also check the vendor's documentation to verify the voltages at which your computer will work.

You should also determine whether your computer or peripheral device is "dual voltage" (manufactured to accept both 110V 60 Hz and 220V 50 Hz electricity). If you are unsure, check the vendor's documentation, the back of the device, or the power supply transformer that plugs into the wall to see if it says something like 110-220V, 50-60 Hz. If it does, it is dual voltage. However, you should always check with the manufacturer. If your device is dual voltage (many are nowadays), then you should be able to use it internationally with just an adapter plug to fit the wall outlet.

Important: It is always a good idea to use a surge protector for your computer to protect the computer from any damage that could result from an electrical surge.

See <http://www.kropla.com/electric2.htm> for a list of voltage settings used in other countries.

Check the Electrical Plugs. In addition to having different electrical current, countries also have different standards for electrical plugs. Depending on the type of plug in use in the country to which you are traveling, you may need a plug adapter. An adapter will enable you to plug an appliance designed for one type of outlet into another type of outlet. Despite the fact that more than a dozen different types of plugs are in use, a typical travel adapter kit usually contains about five adapters that are capable of dealing with most types of outlets.

See <http://www.kropla.com/electric.htm> for a list of electrical systems used in other countries. You can also use this site to view illustrations of the type of electrical plugs used around the world as well as to find out the countries that use a particular plug.

Telephony Issues

If you are doing a dial-up connection, here are some issues you will want to address:

Check the Phone Plug. The American standard for telephone connectors is US RJ11. Although many countries use US RJ11, many other countries use different types of phone plugs. Therefore, you may need a phone plug adapter, which will enable you to connect the phone plug from your modem into the wall jack at your destination. On the Web site <http://www.kropla.com/phones2.htm>, you can find out the type of phone plug used by the country to which you will be traveling. It is also possible that the phone may be hard-wired with no phone jack. In this case, it is essential to get help from your host.

Verify the Type of Phone System at Your Destination. Some hotels and conference centers have digital phone systems that will not work with a modem. Modems are analog, and can use only an analog line. If you plug your modem into a digital line and try to use it, you could possibly destroy your modem. Speak to your host for help and advice.

Resolve Tax Impulse Problems. Some countries (Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Germany, Spain, and Switzerland) use what are called *tax impulses* on their phone lines to monitor the length of telephone calls for billing purposes. Invented before modems, tax impulses (or metering pulses) can interfere with your data connection, and can cause data errors or even disconnects. They can also prevent you from making a successful hookup.

To avoid problems with tax impulses, you can use a tax impulse filter, a small device that plugs into the phone line between the wall and your modem designed to filter tax impulse phone signals. Your host may be able to provide you with further information.

Note: Check the billing practices of the hotel. Some hotels charge reasonable rates for a local call, but others charge outrageously. If you have to make a long distance call in order to get online, expect a huge bill.

Check for Dialing Codes. There may be special numbers that you need to dial in order to call your ISP. On some phone systems, for example, you may need to dial **9** and wait a few seconds to dial a phone number. You can make your modem dial this by configuring it to dial using a prefix of **9**. You can also create a new Dial-Up Networking icon. If you create a new icon, the dial-up settings for the new connection will be separate from the dial-up settings of your other connections. Refer to the instructions provided by your ISP to create a new Dial-Up Networking icon (Windows) or Remote Access configuration (Macintosh).

Resolve Dial Tone Problems. If the modem is not reading (recognizing) the dial tone, and says "no dial tone present", perform the following troubleshooting steps:

- Make sure the cable connecting the modem to the phone jack is plugged in correctly.
- If possible, verify that the line is active by testing it with the telephone.

If the phone connection is OK and the line is active, you can change your modem settings to bypass the dial tone. See your modem manual on how to change these settings.

For more information about dial tones, see <http://www.kropla.com/phones.htm> or consult your modem's documentation.

Helpful Hints/Tips

Printing on the Road

As an alternate method to printing on the road, use your fax modem to fax the document—addressed to you—to the hotel fax machine. The hotel usually doesn't charge for incoming faxes and will deliver the fax to your room.

Otherwise, you can go to the business center (at your hotel or a neighboring hotel) where they provide use of a printer for a fee. You can also request that your hosts at a university or conference center make a printer available.

Additional Resources

You can go to <http://www.walkabouttravelgear.com/digital.htm>, where you can submit tips to share with fellow travelers.

Helpful Items to Bring with You

You may want to bring the following items with you on your trip:

- Twenty-foot telephone cord, which can be very helpful if the desk in your hotel room is located on the opposite side of the room from the telephone. Make sure that the phone plug matches the local phone system.
- Digital line tester, so that you can verify whether the phone system at your destination is analog or digital.
- Spare battery for your laptop computer.

You may be able to purchase these items at one of the following:

- Electronics stores (such as Radio Shack and Tandy)
- Hardware stores
- Some airport shops (especially in big cities)
- Some drug stores or grocery stores

These places could either be located where you live, at your destination, or enroute.

Getting Help

You can get additional help from the following resources:

AcIS Helpdesk

You can contact AcIS directly by either calling the Helpdesk at (212) 854-1919 or sending e-mail to consultant@columbia.edu.

Web Resources

- MIT's Web site for traveling with a laptop (<http://web.mit.edu/is/help/travel/>). Provides links to other Web sites that contain information on such topics as what to do before you leave, tips on how to connect remotely, and resources for international travel.
- Steve Kropla's Help for World Travelers (www.kropla.com). This site provides comprehensive listings of worldwide electrical and telephone information.

- Road News (www.roadnews.com). This site provides information to help you determine what hardware you will need, the various telephone and power adapters you will need in each country, and where to find a local ISP. It also has a discussion group for sharing road stories.
- New York Times Archives (www.nytimes.com/library/tech/reference/indextravel-log.html). *The New York Times* has a section called Cyber Times, which includes a column on taking information technology on the road. This site contains an archive of the column.