

Hola VPN review: Free, but with a lot of security risks

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Hola is an interesting free VPN-like service that takes a unique approach to online privacy protection.

Hola VPN basics

Unlike its competitors, Hola doesn't rely on a fixed network of servers. The company describes itself as a "P2P" VPN where browser traffic is routed through the user.

Your traffic travels through the computers of other people who have installed the service, and some of their traffic may also pass through your device.

This has several advantages. There's no fixed route or destination server, making it harder for websites to detect you're using a VPN. It also helps to reduce costs, as there is no server or bandwidth consumption, allowing the basic service to be provided for free.

The downside is that Hola only protects browser traffic, and it's not even encrypted the way you'd normally see with other VPNs. This service is great for unblocking websites, but isn't of much use for anything else.

Hola runs almost anywhere, with browser extensions available for Chrome, Firefox, Opera and Edge; Custom browsers are available on Android, iOS, Windows and Mac, as well as the ability to set up the service on many other platforms.

One potential problem is that if you install one of the applications (not browser extensions), you are allowing Hola to use some of your system and network resources, when other users access it. access the sites they need through your connection.

But the company says it only uses the devices when they're inactive and connected to a power source. Even then, the company claimed to use no more than 3MB per day from mobile devices, 100MB from desktops.

More troubling is that any Hola user can become the exit server for others. If they are spamming, hacking or doing anything else suspicious, your IP address could become the address associated with that action.

You can avoid many of these problems by upgrading to Hola Premium, which doesn't share your bandwidth with other users, works on more platforms, and allows network use of servers. own Hola. It starts at \$ 7.69 / month for the annual plan.

However, if you are okay with the Hola fundamentals, Hola's core service is free for non-commercial use.

Privacy and logging

Most VPNs route your traffic through their own servers, minimizing your chances of being able to record what you're doing. Hola's user-driven data routing model seems to be a better way to protect privacy, but it's not quite that simple.

Here's an interesting piece from Hola's 'Frequently Asked Questions' section:

"Hola VPN regularly monitors a user's network for traces of security abuse or breaches. In addition, architectural modifications allow Hola VPN to see the origin of each request, thus making it easier for the user to see it." If cybercriminals use the Hola VPN network, criminal information can be passed on to the authorities, making Hola VPN unattractive to nefarious intentions. finds both ends connected and therefore much more appealing for these uses ".

The company says it monitors what users are doing online, to some extent, and can be traced back to the source of any requests it considers 'abusive 'or' breach of security '. This is great for catching hackers, but it also involves more monitoring and logging than is common with standard VPNs.

In its privacy policy, the company also said it may collect log data, including 'browser type, the websites you visit, time spent on those pages, time spent and date month'.

Personal data Hola 'may collect and store including the user's IP address, name and email address, display name, billing and billing information or other information, from time to time. '.

The company also collects 'details about the apps installed on a user's device' that you might not expect.

As usual, if you sign up with a social media account, this will give Hola access to 'details such as full name, home address, email address, date of birth, profile photo, username, etc. friends books, personal descriptions, as well as any other information you publish publicly on that account or agree to share with Hola '.

There are many things logged here. If anonymity is your top priority and you are looking to minimize your chances of being monitored, Hola is absolutely not for you.

Picture 1 of Hola VPN review: Free, but with a lot of security risks

Application

Install Hola on Windows 10 system, you will get Hola app (custom version of Chromium browser) and prompt to install Chrome extension. The example selected for both.

When the Chrome extension is up and running, it will monitor the websites you are visiting and then show alternative countries for anything it thinks you might want to unblock.

For example, if you are visiting a US streaming site from the UK, you might be asked if you want to connect as usual (without Hola), use Hola with US IP, or use Hola with IP from another country (usually more than 150 when offered).

Picture 2 of Hola VPN review: Free, but with a lot of security risks

However, the free version only allows 1 hour per day on some of the most popular websites, including Netflix - you'll need to upgrade to a paid plan for unlimited time.

Hola doesn't always notice when you need help. For example, when an author visits a YouTube channel, only a few videos are approved for locations in the UK, not all available selections in the US.

In these situations, you can use Hola just like any other VPN: Tap on the address bar icon, choose your preferred location, the website will refresh and hopefully you can see your content. If you are not comfortable with Hola monitoring every URL you visit, you can refuse to install the extension and use only a custom browser app instead.

The downside is this will share some of your bandwidth and resources with other Hola users. The advantage is that it encourages you to use Hola only when absolutely necessary. You can open an app when you need to unlock something, and close the app when finished.

The browser opens a standard landing page with buttons for popular websites: Netflix, Hulu, Comedy Central, MTV, NBC, Amazon, etc. Click on one of these, the site opens with options. usual places of Hola and you can continue as with the browser extension.

However, you are not limited to this. The app is Chromium-based, so you can set your own homepage, add bookmarks or set it up to do whatever you need. Just keep in mind that if you want to reduce Hola tracking, you shouldn't do all the usual browsing, just use it to unblock websites.

Whichever option you choose, Hola works well and unlocks everything, on par with NordVPN and ExpressVPN. Not bad for a free product.

Picture 3 of Hola VPN review: Free, but with a lot of security risks

Efficiency

It's always been difficult to get a useful metric of VPN performance, but Hola takes this to the next level. Without a fixed server network to evaluate, your traffic path will change all the time - and your hardware, browser type, and settings can affect the results in unexpected ways. Hola works so differently that synthetic benchmarks may not give you any meaningful information about the service.

For this review, the author replaced my usual benchmarks with a simpler task: Stream 4K video from YouTube and other sites. Streams always run smoothly, without any buffering, quality issues, etc. Routing your traffic through other users' devices will bring some performance disadvantages, but from what can be seen, it doesn't make a noticeable difference to the usual browsing or streaming sites.

Conclude

Hola claims to be a 'free VPN', but it doesn't protect your traffic, offers privacy or anonymity like a regular VPN service, and also has recording concerns. diary. Hola is a great tool for unblocking websites, but don't think

about using it for anything important.

Advantages

1. Free
2. Large network of Hola nodes
3. Some websites can be easily unblocked
4. Fast enough to play 4K video

Defect

1. The free plan has a Netflix limit of 1 hour a day
2. Share some of your bandwidth and CPU
3. Noteworthy logging policy
4. Not a "real" VPN - only works with browsers

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