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TECH ADVISOR

SEPTEMBER 2025

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PRO GAMING WITHOUT THE PRO PRICE

PLUS: BEST BUDGET SMARTWATCHES

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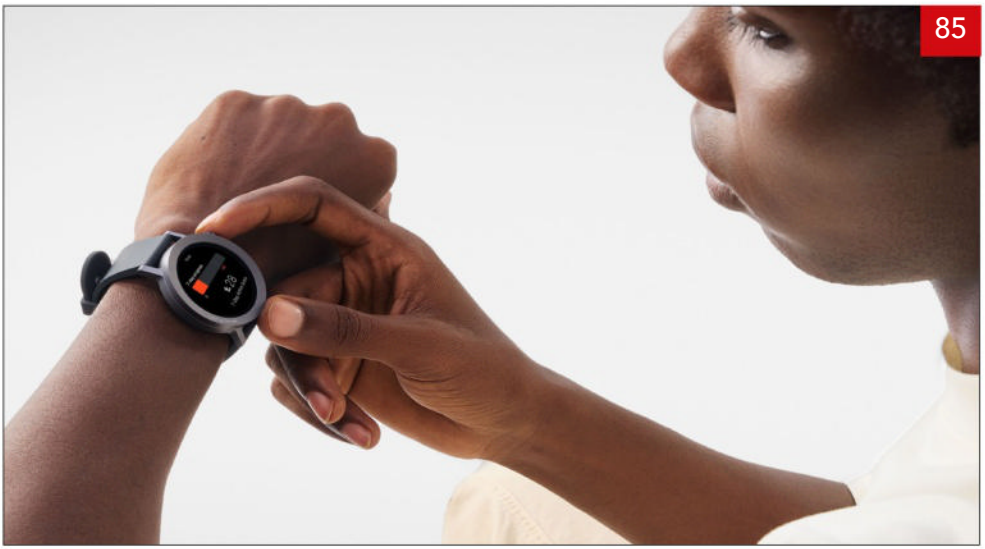

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Android and ChromeOS are merging, and it can't come soon enough

Watch out iPad. JON MUNDY reports

Google plans to combine its Android and ChromeOS software platforms, it has been confirmed.

In an interview with TechRadar, Google's President of Android Ecosystem Sameer Samat revealed the fact that company was looking to integrate its two major platforms.

After quizzing the interviewer on their use of Apple gear (MacBooks, iPhones, and Apple Watch), Samat revealed: "I asked because we're going to be combining ChromeOS and

Android into a single platform, and I am very interested in how people are using their laptops these days and what they're getting done".

That was it for any insights into Google's thinking on this matter, but it does provide the biggest indication yet that Google is looking to produce a single device-spanning platform.

GOOGLE'S UNIFIED FUTURE

Back in November we reported on the claim, seemingly from a source within Google, that the company was planning to migrate ChromeOS entirely to Android in an effort to better compete with the iPad.

Apple devices are famously well integrated, allowing you to pick from where you left off on your MacBook, iPhone, or iPad, including seamless file sharing.

Around this time last year, Google revealed that ChromeOS would start using parts of Android's technology – a clear sign that convergence lay in the future of these two distinct platforms.

As a result of this, it's claimed, future Chromebook devices will run on the Android OS. In order to facilitate this shift, Google's hitherto mobile OS will gain features previously only available in ChromeOS, such as Linux apps via a terminal.

Add in Android's improved keyboard, mouse, and external monitor support, and a unified future between Android and ChromeOS seems not only nailed on, but imminent.

Huge leak hints Meta will rival Google with new smart glasses

Tutorial, UI, and game info leaks. JON MUNDY reports

A massive leak has seemingly outlined the capabilities of the forthcoming Meta smart glasses, as well as hinting at a release in the near future.

Established leaker Luna (via Tom's Hardware) has posted images and videos of Meta's forthcoming wearable, formerly known as Hypernova, but now seemingly being referred to internally as the Meta Celeste.

Accompanying these compact smart glasses will be the Ceres wristbands, which will enable you to interact

with the augmented reality depicted in the glasses.

Also depicted is a UI element towards the bottom right that will surface information such as apps, notifications, and any images taken on the Celeste's built-in camera.

META SMART GLASSES CONTROL OPTIONS

The leaker also scraped some text from a related tutorial video, which offer instruction on how to control the display with your hands. "When your band detects a gesture, you'll feel a buzz on your wrist," it says. "Let's start by selecting something. Quickly tap your index finger to your thumb and release."

One leaked tutorial video shows the gesture recognition system in operation.

While these Ceres bands may still ship as part of the Meta Celeste package, it seems you'll also be able to control the glasses directly using a touch sensitive area on the right arm near the temple – something that's shown in another leaked video.

Another part of this sizeable info-dump is a new Meta AR game known as Hypertrail, which utilises the user's location and appears to have been inspired by the arcade classic Galaga.

META SMART GLASSES RELEASE SCHEDULE

Given the sheer wealth of materials in this leak, it seems to suggest that a full launch of Meta's ambitious AR glasses project could be almost ready to roll. Reports suggest that we'll be seeing them before the year is out.

Google's Android XR is also tipped to launch this year, with a similarly ambitious range of AR capabilities crammed into a similarly compact set of glasses.

We've previously gone hands-on with some other promising AR projects, including the TCL RayNeo Air 3S, the Oppo Air Glass 3. But in terms of fully fledged AR experiences that might one day replace your phone, it's Meta and Google (with the help of Samsung) that appear to be leading the way.

This latest leak would suggest that Meta might have stolen a march on its rival when it comes to launch timing, though it may just be that Google has managed to play its AR cards closer to its virtual chest.

The ROG Xbox Ally is Microsoft's big swing for PC gaming handhelds

Asus made heavy revisions to the Ally for its new Xbox-branded model, though it's still running Windows 11 underneath. MICHAEL CRIDER reports

We've seen it teased, we've seen it leaked, but the first 'portable Xbox' (those quotes are doing a lot of work, yes) was revealed last night during Microsoft's latest Xbox gaming showcase. As expected, it's a co-op play with Asus, who essentially rebranded the ROG Ally with some Xbox flair. But make no mistake: despite the marketing that proclaims "This is an Xbox," the ROG Xbox Ally is a handheld PC.

I appreciate that the line between console and PC is blurry, perhaps intentionally so thanks to Microsoft. But the ROG Xbox Ally and the more

powerful, upgraded ROG Xbox Ally X are essentially third-generation Asus handheld PC designs. And just like the two previous versions, they're running Windows 11 out of the box, offering a sharp distinction to competition like the SteamOS-powered Lenovo Legion Go S. But with both Microsoft and Asus cognizant of the issues handheld PCs have had around Windows, it's not without some serious tweaks.

According to the promotional page, this version of Windows 11 has a "smoother, more intuitive interface" with a Steam Deck-style handheld UI set to launch by default upon booting up. That includes a refreshed Xbox Game Bar. Microsoft is also leaning into the work it's done with Xbox Game Pass, highlighting the availability of plenty of Xbox-only games via streaming and its huge library of games available on both Xbox and PC with seamless progress via the Xbox Play Anywhere system.

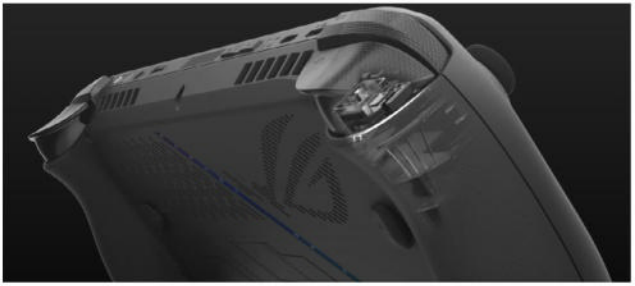
"I don't have to think about Windows, all I have to think about is my game," says Anshul Rawat of Microsoft in a promo video. Of course, since it is running Windows underneath, the new design still has access to basically any local PC game – a notable weakness of SteamOS and the Steam Deck. Microsoft is also leaning on options for streaming, both via Game Pass and remote play to other PCs and Xbox consoles.

How much this will improve the experience overall, we can't say yet. Windows 11 still has a lot of stuff going on under the hood that can bog things down for the efficient APU hardware of handhelds.

And speaking of which, the ROG Xbox Ally is packing a lot of revised hardware compared to the Ally X of 2024. The base model (in white) gets a next-gen AMD Ryzen Z2 A processor, 16GB of LPDDRX-6400 RAM, and a 512GB SSD. The ROG Xbox Ally X in black (which is an upgraded SKU, not a fully separate design like the 2024 version) gets a Ryzen AI Z2 Extreme processor with an NPU, 24GB of RAM, and a 1TB drive.

Both get two USB-C ports (one of which is Thunderbolt 4-compatible for external graphics) and a microSD card slot. The base model has a 60 watt-hour battery while the Xbox Ally X gets 80 watt-hours – an odd choice since they appear to have identical shells. Note the RGB rings around the thumbsticks and the stripe on the back, both inherited from the original ROG Ally design.

Both are rocking a 7-inch IPS display with 1080p resolution and 120Hz refresh, just like the original Ally. But the shape and look of the device has



The ROG Xbox Ally X has haptic triggers, which the base model lacks.

seen some big revisions, most notably the distinct, chunky controller handles. There's also a new face button with an Xbox logo, dedicated to the Xbox Game Bar. The Ally X, in addition to its beefed-up internals and black colour scheme, gets haptic feedback on the controller triggers.

Both systems should land at retailers later this year with a general 'Holiday 2025' arrival. How much will they cost? No idea. For context, the ROG Ally X from 2024 is currently £799. Based on the hardware, I'd expect the new ROG Xbox Ally to be in the same ballpark… a heavy contrast to the Steam Deck, which starts at £349 and tops out at £569 with an OLED screen.

First look: Samsung Galaxy Z Fold7

Thinner design, bigger displays and better cameras. CHRIS MARTIN AND LUKE BAKER report

Samsung's second big Unpacked event of the year took place in New York and heralded the arrival of many new Galaxy devices. Arguably, the star of the show is the Galaxy Z Fold7. The 2025 flagship book-style foldable arrives with a thinner design as well as various upgrades, including the screens and cameras. It could be the best foldable of the year.

Confusingly, Samsung teased a lot of 'Ultra' related things in the lead up to Unpacked, but it doesn't get the Ultra branding in the model name, nor was there a separate Z Fold Ultra of any kind.

The other devices announced at the event included the Galaxy Z Flip7 and Galaxy Watch8 series. You can read all about these devices on pages 17 and 23 respectively.

RELEASE DATE

The Fold7 is available to buy now.

PRICE

The pricing for the Galaxy Z Fold7 is roughly as we predicted. In the UK, the price is the same as its predecessor and you can opt for three different SKUs.

256GB: £1,799
512GB: £1,899
1TB: £2,149

SPECIFICATIONS

- 8-inch (2,184x1,968; 368ppi) foldable Dynamic LTPO AMOLED 2X, 120Hz, HDR10+, 2600 nits (peak). 6.5-inch (2,520x1,080; 422ppi) Dynamic LTPO AMOLED 2X, 120Hz, Corning Gorilla Glass Ceramic 2
- Android 16, up to 7 major Android upgrades, One UI 8
- Qualcomm SM8750-AC Snapdragon 8 Elite (3nm) processor
- Octa-core (2x4.47 GHz Oryon V2 Phoenix L + 6x3.53 GHz Oryon V2 Phoenix M) CPU
- Adreno 830 (1,200MHz) GPU
- No card slot
- 12GB/16GB RAM
- 256GB/512GB/1TB storage
- Three rear-facing cameras: 200Mp, f/1.7, 24mm (wide), 1/1.3-inch, 0.6µm, multi-directional PDAF, OIS; 10Mp, f/2.4, 67mm (telephoto), 1.0µm, PDAF, OIS, 3x optical zoom; 12Mp, f/2.2, 120-degree (ultrawide), 1.4µm, dual pixel PDAF
- Selfie camera: 10Mp, f/2.2, 18mm (ultrawide), 1.12µm
- Cover camera: 10Mp, f/2.2, 24mm (wide), 1.12µm
- Stereo speakers
- No 3.5mm audio jack
- Wi-Fi 802.11 a/b/g/n/ac/6e/7, tri-band, Wi-Fi Direct
- Bluetooth 5.4, A2DP, LE, aptX HD
- NFC
- GPS, GALILEO, GLONASS, BDS, QZSS
- USB Type-C 3.2, OTG
- Fingerprint sensor (side-mounted)
- Non-removable 7,050mAh battery
- Unfolded: 158.4x143.2x4.2mm. Folded: 158.4x72.8x8.9mm
- 215g

DESIGN

The big change with the Galaxy Z Fold7 is how slim it is. It's only 8.9mm when folded down and 4.2mm unfolded. This makes it one of the slimmest folding

The ArmorFlex hinge has been engineered to reduce stress on the display.

phones ever made. On paper, it's 0.1mm thicker than the Honor Magic V5, but considering these measurements don't account for the camera bump, it could be argued that Samsung's latest is actually the world's slimmest foldable.

It's also extremely lightweight, now weighing only 215g. For reference, that's lighter than Samsung's own Galaxy S25 Ultra, and it's a couple of grams lighter than Honor's latest, too.

A new ArmorFlex hinge has been engineered to reduce stress on the panel, and its water droplet design makes the crease much less noticeable than before. The folding screen has a new titanium lattice underneath, and a combination of thicker glass and new adhesives makes it more robust than ever. There's Corning Gorilla Glass Ceramic 2 on the cover screen and Victus 2 on the rear. The side rails are made with Samsung's Advanced Armor Aluminium – supposedly it's toughest to date.

The Galaxy Z Fold7 is available in Blue Shadow, Jet Black and Silver Shadow colour options. If you order from Samsung's website, you can get your hands on a special Mint colour – which is certainly the most eye-catching of the bunch.

DISPLAYS

A big change this year is that the outer screen has adopted a more traditional aspect ratio. It's now a 21:9 panel, so it feels a lot more like a typical smartphone. The inner screen is now larger, too. It measures 8 inches

The folding screen is a 120Hz LTPO AMOLED panel.

diagonally, matching the likes of the Google Pixel 9 Pro Fold, and in hot contention for the largest book-style foldable.

The folding screen is a 120Hz LTPO AMOLED panel with a 2,184x1,968 resolution and a density of 368ppi. The cover screen is a 6.5-inch 120Hz LTPO AMOLED screen with a 2,520x1,080 resolution and a density of 422ppi. At the time of writing, Samsung has not confirmed the brightness of these panels, which likely means they match the Z Fold6, with a peak output of 2,600 nits on either screen.

The phone is powered by the Snapdragon 8 Elite chip

S PEN

Fans of the S Pen will be disappointed to learn that the folding display no longer supports input from the brand's popular stylus. Since the device is so much thinner, we were told there simply isn't room for the display layer that interfaces with the S Pen, so Samsung chose slimness over pen support. If you love using a stylus, the Z Fold 6 remains the best option, for now.

PERFORMANCE

The Samsung Galaxy Z Fold7 is powered by the Snapdragon 8 Elite chip, and as with all recent Samsung flagships, it's a special 'For Galaxy' version with a slight overclock. The Snapdragon 8 Elite is widely regarded as the best mobile chip for gaming and demanding computational workloads, and we're hoping for performance similar to the Galaxy S25 Ultra.

Samsung says the upgrade gets you a 41 percent improvement on NPU tasks, a 38 percent uplift on CPU tasks and a 26 percent increase for GPU workloads. However, with the incredibly slim chassis of the Z Fold7, thermals could pose an issue. It will be interesting to see the results when this device undergoes real-world tests.

For the most part, the storage and RAM configurations remain unchanged. However, the 1TB model gets an upgrade to 16GB of RAM, while the other two capacities stick with 12GB.

PHOTOGRAPHY

The Galaxy Z Fold7 has received a huge upgrade for its main camera. It now uses the same 200Mp 1/1.3-inch sensor as the Galaxy S25 Ultra, which has been re-engineered to keep the camera profile as slim as possible.

It now shares the same ultrawide as the S25 Ultra, too. It's still a relatively low-resolution 12Mp unit, but it has macro focusing capabilities, so you can use it for close-up shots as well as wide landscapes.

On the rear, only the 3x telephoto remains from the previous generation. It's a 10Mp unit with a fairly small sensor, but it's still a very capable camera.

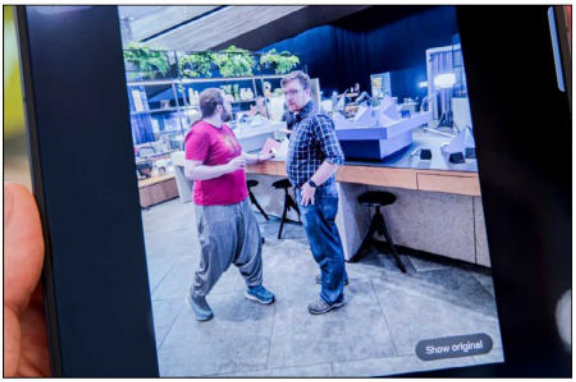
The cover screen selfie camera seems to remain unchanged, but the interior selfie camera has also been refreshed. Samsung has done away with the controversial 4Mp under-display camera, and is now using a more traditional 10Mp punch-hole design. This allows the camera to have a much wider FOV, around 100 degrees. And of course, it should result in cleaner, more detailed images, like those you get from the cover screen camera.

BATTERY LIFE

Samsung rarely leads the charge when it comes to battery tech, and sadly, we get no upgrades this year.

Just like the Z Fold 6, the Fold7 features a 4,400mAh battery with 25-watt wired charging and 15-watt wireless charging.

Samsung claims charging speeds have been further optimised, so despite using the same wattage, the new device may charge slightly faster.



The Galaxy Z Fold7 has received a huge upgrade for its main camera.

SOFTWARE

The Galaxy Z Fold7 is one of the first devices to ship running One UI 8, Samsung's skin that's based on Android 16. The updated OS brings with it plenty of new features and lots of optimisations to make use of the large format display.

Some of these new features come via the brand's partnership with Google. For instance, you

This is one of the first devices to ship running One UI 8, Samsung's skin that's based on Android 16.

can now share your screen with Gemini Live to add contextual information to your chats.

Circle to Search also now works while you're playing a game. So, for example, if you can't figure out how to beat a boss in Genshin Impact, you can circle the boss to get some tips.

A new Photo Assist feature can helpfully suggest which objects to erase from your photos, and the Audio Eraser feature has been enhanced, too. Rather than requiring you to manually dial in the volume of specific elements, a new 1-tap auto button will work its magic to make distracting sounds disappear.

Another helpful feature is the ability to drag and drop AI results from one app to another. It's a great way to make use of the bigger screen and the ability to display apps side by side.

As expected, Samsung is continuing to offer class-leading seven years of operating system and security updates on its flagship devices, including the Z Fold7.

First look: Samsung Galaxy Z Flip7

A Motorola Razr-rivalling line-up. ANYRON COPEMAN reports

When it comes to flip-style folding phones, the first company most people think of is Samsung. And with good reason: the company's Galaxy Z Flip line helped propel modern flip phones into the mainstream, even if most of the best phones are still traditional clamshell devices.

However, as far as we are concerned, Samsung doesn't hold the title of best flip phone right now. That award goes to Motorola's Razr 60 Ultra, so Samsung has some catching up to do.

While last year's Galaxy Z Flip6 was a little underwhelming, it looks like there's plenty to be excited about regarding the Galaxy Z Flip7 and its new, more affordable sibling: the Z Flip7 FE.

RELEASE DATE

The Flip7 is available to buy now.

PRICE

The pricing for Samsung's Galaxy Z Flip7 has remained the same as its predecessor, the Z Flip6:

256GB: £1,049
512GB: £1,149

However, the Galaxy Z Flip7 FE is significantly more affordable:

128GB: £849
256GB: £959

While much cheaper than the regular phone, the FE is still quite a bit more expensive than the regular Motorola Razr 60, which costs £799.

SPECIFICATIONS

Galaxy Z Flip7

- 6.9-inch (2,520x1,080; 397ppi) Foldable Dynamic LTPO AMOLED 2X, 120Hz, HDR10+, 2600 nits (peak). Cover display: 4.1-inch (1,048x948) Super AMOLED, 120Hz, 2600 nits (peak)
- Android 16, up to 7 major Android upgrades, One UI 8
- Exynos 2500 (3nm) processor
- 10-core (1x 3.3GHz Cortex-X5, 2x 2.74GHz Cortex-A725, 5x 2.36GHz Cortex-A725 & 2x 1.8GHz Cortex-A520) CPU
- Xclipse 950 GPU
- No card slot
- 12GB RAM
- 256GB/512GB storage
- Two rear-facing cameras: 50Mp, f/1.8, 23mm (wide), 1/1.57-inch, 1.0µm, dual pixel PDAF, OIS; 12Mp, f/2.2, 13mm, 123-degree (ultrawide), 1/3.2-inch, 1.12µm
- Selfie camera: 10Mp, f/2.2, 23mm (wide), 1/3.0-inch, 1.22µm
- Stereo speakers
- No 3.5mm audio jack
- Wi-Fi 802.11 a/b/g/n/ac/6e/7, tri-band, Wi-Fi Direct
- Bluetooth 5.4, A2DP, LE
- NFC
- GPS, GALILEO, GLONASS, BDS, QZSS
- USB Type-C 3.2, OTG
- Fingerprint sensor (side-mounted)
- Non-removable 4,300mAh battery
- Unfolded: 166.7 75.2x6.5 mm. Folded: 85.5x75.2x13.7mm
- 188g

Galaxy Z Flip7 FE

- 6.7-inch (2,640x1,080; 426ppi) Foldable Dynamic LTPO AMOLED 2X, 120Hz, HDR10+, 2600 nits (peak). Cover display: 3.4-inch (748x720) Super AMOLED, 60Hz, 2600 nits (peak)
- Android 16, up to 7 major Android

upgrades, One UI 8
- Exynos 2400 (4nm) processor
- 10-core (1x 3.2GHz Cortex-X4, 2x 2.9GHz Cortex-A720, 3x 2.6GHz Cortex-A720, 4x1 .95GHz Cortex-A520) CPU
- Xclipse 940 GPU
- No card slot
- 8GB RAM
- 128GB/256GB storage
- Two rear-facing cameras: 50Mp, f/1.8, 23mm (wide), 1/1.57-inch, 1.0µm, dual pixel PDAF, OIS; 12Mp, f/2.2, 13mm, 123-degree (ultrawide), 1/3.2-inch, 1.12µm
- Selfie camera: 10Mp, f/2.2, 23mm (wide), 1/3.0-inch, 1.22µm
- Stereo speakers
- No 3.5mm audio jack
- Wi-Fi 802.11 a/b/g/n/ac/6e/7, tri-band, Wi-Fi Direct
- Bluetooth 5.4, A2DP, LE
- NFC
- GPS, GALILEO, GLONASS, BDS, QZSS
- USB Type-C 3.2, OTG
- Fingerprint sensor (side-mounted)
- Non-removable 4,000mAh battery
- Unfolded: 165.1x71.9x6.9mm. Folded: 85.1x71.9x14.9mm
- 187g

The Z Flip7 is available in four colours: Blue Shadow, Jet-Black, Coral-red and Mint.

DESIGN

The Galaxy Z Flip7 has had something of a design overhaul. A full-screen cover display and larger main screen give it a very different look and feel from its predecessor, the Z Flip6.

It's thinner than the Razr 60 Ultra, measuring 75.2x166.7x6.5mm when folded. And at 188g, it remains one of the lighter phones of any kind on the market. The Galaxy Z Flip7 FE is a little more compact but also thicker, coming in at 71.9x165.1x6.9mm. With a weight of 187g, you won't be able to tell the difference between the two.

Both devices are built to last, with Corning's tough Gorilla Glass Victus 2 and an 'Armour Aluminium' frame.

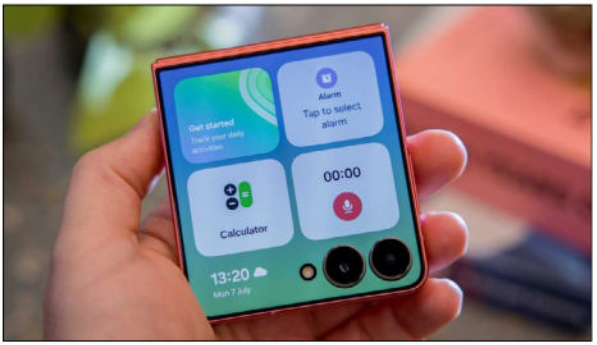
They also both have an IP48 rating, meaning they can survive submersion in up to 1.5m of fresh water for 30 minutes, but are only protected against objects 1mm or larger.

The Z Flip7 is available in four colours: Blue Shadow, Jet-Black, Coral-red and Mint, with the latter being exclusive to the Samsung website. Meanwhile, the Z Flip7 FE is only available in Black or White.

DISPLAY

Both the outer and internal displays on the Galaxy Z Flip7 are significantly larger than on its predecessor.

On the front, a 4.1-inch, 1,048x948 AMOLED panel covers almost the entire top half of the back of the phone, just like the Motorola Razr 60 Ultra. It also boasts a dynamic 120Hz refresh rate, up from 60Hz on its predecessor.



On the front, a 4.1-inch AMOLED panel covers almost the entire top half of the back of the phone.

The internal screen maintains the 120Hz, but it can automatically drop down as low as 1Hz to conserve battery life when not needed. It's a 6.9-inch, 2,520x1,080 AMOLED display.

Meanwhile, the Z Flip7 FE has a 3.4-inch, 748x720 AMOLED cover screen that opens to reveal a 6.7-inch, 2,640x1,080 AMOLED internal panel. The latter has an adaptive 1-120Hz refresh rate, though the cover display is limited to 60Hz.

PERFORMANCE

While previous Galaxy Z Flip phones have used Qualcomm Snapdragon chipsets, both the Z Flip7 and Z Flip7 FE shift to Samsung's own Exynos line.

Specifically, the regular Z Flip7 uses the latest and greatest Exynos 2500, while the Z Flip7 FE uses the previous-gen Exynos 2400.

Samsung's chipsets are typically a small step down from Qualcomm and MediaTek flagships, but still offer strong performance. The Z Flip7 combines it with 12GB of RAM and 256- or 512GB of RAM, while the Z Flip7 FE offers 8GB of RAM and 128- or 256GB of storage. However, there's no support for MicroSD expandable storage.

The Galaxy Z Flip7 doesn't offer any meaningful camera upgrades.

PHOTOGRAPHY

The Galaxy Z Flip7 doesn't offer any meaningful camera upgrades, at least when it comes to the hardware.

It still has the 50Mp, f/1.8 main lens, which is joined by a 12Mp, f/2.2 ultrawide (with a 123-degree field of view) and a 10Mp, f/2.2 selfie lens. As a flip phone, you probably won't be using the latter much, as the main camera can easily be used to take selfies.

However, it means there's still no space for a dedicated telephoto lens. Samsung claims the main camera can offer comparable image quality at 2x zoom, but it's not quite the same.

Impressively, the cheaper Z Flip7 FE doesn't look to be downgraded at all, meaning you can expect image quality to at least be on par with the Galaxy Z Flip6.

BATTERY LIFE

Samsung has upgraded the battery capacity on the Galaxy Z Flip7, replacing the Z Flip6's 4,000mAh cell with a new 43,000mAh one.

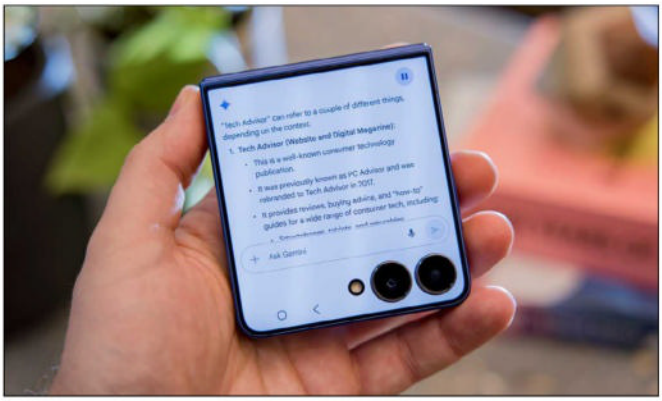
That's a significant generational upgrade, with Samsung now claiming up to 31 hours of video playback (720p, video stored locally) on a single charge. However, it's still much smaller than most non-folding phones, which regularly exceed 5000mAh when it comes to battery capacity.

Meanwhile, the Galaxy Z Flip7 FE has the exact same battery capacity as the Z Flip6 – 4,000mAh.

Disappointingly, both phones remain limited to wired charging speeds of just 25 watts. On both devices, Samsung claims you can go from 0- to 50 percent in 30 minutes. Wireless and reverse wireless charging are also available, but at even slower speeds.

SOFTWARE

Both the Galaxy Z Flip7 and Z Flip7 FE ship running One UI 8. Alongside the new Galaxy Z Fold7, they're the first devices to run the latest version of Samsung's skin, which is based on Android 16.



Both the Galaxy Z Flip7 and Z Flip7 FE ship running One UI 8.

It includes plenty of new experiences for the 'FlexWindow' cover screen, including Gemini Live integration, support for the 'Now Bar' (which displays relevant information at a glance) and lots of customisation options. However, by default, only a handful of third-party apps are supported, with the complicated process for running any app remaining.

Elsewhere, look out for plenty of Galaxy AI features, with Samsung confirming to Tech Advisor that it has no plans to charge for any of these in the foreseeable future.

First look: Samsung Galaxy Watch8

2025 smartwatches are official. CHRIS MARTIN reports

Samsung has officially announced its 2025 line-up of flagship smartwatches, unveiling the Galaxy Watch8 series at Unpacked July.

The family of wearables consists of two devices: the regular Galaxy Watch8 and the Galaxy Watch8 Classic, seeing the return of the beloved rotating bezel Classic model after skipping the seventh generation.

Both have adopted the 'squircle' design of the Galaxy Watch Ultra, and come with features like a slimmer profile, bigger battery and they are also the first smartwatches to ship with Wear OS 6 software.

RELEASE DATE

The Galaxy Watch8 series is available to buy now.

PRICE

You might not be surprised to hear that the Galaxy Watch8 has seen a price increase compared to last year's Galaxy Watch 7. Both sizes are £30 more for the starting price and you can still add £50 on top if you want LTE connectivity.

We can sort of treat the Classic as 'new' since this hasn't been updated since the Galaxy Watch 6 Classic. You will need to pay more for this model, which comes in just one size – 46mm.

Here's the full Galaxy Watch8 series price list:

Galaxy Watch8 (40mm) Bluetooth: £319
Galaxy Watch8 (40mm) LTE: £369
Galaxy Watch8 (44mm) Bluetooth: £349
Galaxy Watch8 (44mm) LTE: £399
Galaxy Watch8 Classic Bluetooth: £449
Galaxy Watch8 Classic LTE: £499

SPECIFICATIONS

Galaxy Watch8

- 1.47-inch (480x480; 327ppi) Super AMOLED, 3,000 nits (peak) display
- Android Wear OS 6, One UI 8 Watch
- Exynos W1000 (3nm) processor
- Penta-core CPU
- Mali-G68 GPU
- 2GB RAM
- 32GB storage
- Loudspeaker
- No 3.5mm audio jack
- Wi-Fi 802.11 a/b/g/n, dual-band
- Bluetooth 5.3, A2DP, LE
- NFC
- GPS (L1+L5), GLONASS, GALILEO, BDS
- Sensors: Accelerometer, gyro, heart rate, barometer, altimeter, compass, SpO2, temperature (skin), BioActive, antioxidant index
- USB Type-C 3.2, OTG
- Fingerprint sensor (side-mounted)
- Non-removable 435mAh battery
- 46x43.7x8.6mm
- 34g (44mm), 30g (40mm)

Galaxy Watch8 Classic

- 1.34-inch (438x438; 327ppi) Super AMOLED, 3000 nits (peak) display
- Android Wear OS 6, One UI 8 Watch
- Exynos W1000 (3nm) processor
- Penta-core CPU
- Mali-G68 GPU
- 2GB RAM
- 32GB storage
- Loudspeaker
- No 3.5mm audio jack
- Wi-Fi 802.11 a/b/g/n, dual-band
- Bluetooth 5.3, A2DP, LE
- GPS (L1+L5), GLONASS, GALILEO, BDS

- NFC
- USB Type-C 3.2, OTG
- Fingerprint sensor (side-mounted)
- Non-removable 445mAh battery
- 46.4x46x10.6mm
- 63.5g

The Galaxy Watch8 series not only introduces a refreshed design but also plenty of new features. Specs haven't moved on all that much from the previous generation, but upgrades have been made in key areas like the screen.

They are also the first smartwatches to hit the market with Wear OS 6, essentially the latest version of Android for wearables.

DESIGN

There's quite a distinct difference between the two Galaxy Watch8 smartwatches, even though both adopt the 'squircle' design of the Galaxy Watch Ultra to a to a lesser or greater extent. Samsung calls this a "cushion design" and we think it might be quite divisive, though the series was due a refresh in this area.

The regular Galaxy Watch8 has a much more subtle and clean design. Samsung dubs it 'Minimalistic Essentials', which actually fits quite well.

It's 11 percent slimmer than its predecessor at 8.6mm, which Samsung says improves comfort by 12 percent and stability by 8 percent. Overall, resulting in a smartwatch that's easier to wear 24/7 and provides more accurate tracking.

At launch, it's available in two sizes (40- and 44mm like normal) and two colours: Graphite and Silver.

There's a distinct difference between Samsung's two Galaxy Watch8 smartwatches.

Meanwhile, the Galaxy Watch8 Classic looks much more like the Ultra with a much more chunky 46mm case and the same rotating bezel and the Quick Button which has a selection of supported apps. It comes in just black or white colourways and doesn't adopt the Dynamic Lug system for quickly

swapping straps like the regular Watch8 does.

Both watches have 5ATM, IP68 and MIL-STD-810H durability ratings.

The Galaxy Watch8 Classic looks like the Ultra.

DISPLAY

You might expect the Watch8 Classic to have a larger screen than the regular model but it's actually the same as the 40mm model at 1.34-inch.

The regular 44mm option has the biggest screen of the trio at 1.47-inch. All three are Super AMOLED, always on displays covered in Sapphire Glass.

Samsung says the screen is 50 percent brighter and now peaks at an impressive 3,000 nits helping you to use the devices outdoors or other challenging conditions.

CORE SPECS

Both Galaxy Watch8 models are powered by the Exynos W1000. It's the same chip used in the Galaxy Watch 7 and Galaxy Watch Ultra but is still a powerful option based on a 3nm process. If you opt for the regular model, you get 32GB of storage, while the Galaxy Watch8 Classic doubles that to 64GB. Either way, you get 2GB of RAM but battery size varies between size and model. The smaller 8 has a 325mAh battery, while the larger bumps this to 435mAh and the Classic goes to 445mAh.

Here's a list of other internal specs you get with either model:

- Bluetooth 5.3
- Dual-band Wi-Fi
- NFC
- Dual-band GPS
- Samsung BioActive Sensor
- Temperature sensor
- Accelerometer
- Barometer
- Gyro Sensor
- Geomagnetic Sensor
- Light Sensor

HEALTH TRACKING

As mentioned earlier, the Galaxy Watch8 models are the first to come with Wear OS 6. This is ahead of the upcoming Google Pixel Watch 4, though the software looks different as Samsung adds One UI 8 Watch over the top.

Features for this year include glanceable tiles, a Now Bar, app suggestions and quick access to an AI Assistant via one of the physical buttons. That assistant is Google Gemini as expected and can do various things for you, like find the nearest gym, start a specific workout, or create a playlist.

Samsung announced various software features ahead of Unpacked and these include a new Antioxidant Index to "motivate you to make healthier choices". The watch can measure the level of carotenoids stored in your skin, so you know, in simple terms, when to eat fruit and vegetables.

Other features include a Running Coach with various analysis and motivational elements, Vascular Load to track the stress levels of your heart (with the aim of avoiding heart disease), and Bedtime Guidance.

Redmagic 10S Pro

Price when reviewed: £579 ★★★★½

Redmagic has updated its 10 Series of gaming smartphones, keeping to its now traditional six-month schedule. The 10S Pro shares many of the same design and feature elements of its predecessor – the Redmagic 10 Pro – but with some upgrades in key areas. So, should you move to the 10S Pro or hang on to your older model? Here's the full Tech Advisor review.

DESIGN

With only six months between releases, it's no surprise that the 10S Pro has many of the same components and construction as the 10 Pro I reviewed back in December 2024. That's not a downside though, as Redmagic has tried and tested this format and delivers a solid, premium feeling handset that's purpose-built for mobile gaming.

This is a solid-feeling smartphone.

The device remains a bit chunky, with its 163.4x76.1x8.9mm frame mimicking that of its older sibling. The weight is also the same hefty 229g that I've come to expect from this brand.

If you've used a Redmagic phone in recent years, everything will feel very familiar. The aluminium chassis has venting ports on either side of the flank to expel air driven out by the internal cooling fan, twin 520Hz touch-sensitive shoulder controls on the right side to execute commands in games, the red Magic Key which opens up the Game Space software or can be configured to trigger other features, volume and power buttons, plus the twin speakers and a 3.5mm port to provide the audio side of things.

The front panel is made up almost entirely of the 6.85-inch display, and turning the device over reveals a flat glass back that covers the two circular camera openings and the RGB light around the fan. The fan vents mean that the 10S Pro only has a waterproof rating of IP54, so don't drop it in the sink.

In the box, you'll get a slimline case that leaves the two longer side panels exposed so you can use the controls. While this is handy, it doesn't offer much protection for the device, so you might want to invest in a proper case if you're intending to carry the 10S Pro around with you all the time.

The red Magic Key opens the phone's Game Space software.

Redmagic offers the 10S Pro in three colours – Nightfall (matt black), Moonlight (transparent white) and Dusk (transparent black).

DISPLAY

There's no change to the display on the 10S Pro, as it's the same 6.85-inch BOE AMOLED panel that the 10 Pro has. There's good reason for this though, as it's a great screen. The 1.5K (2,688x1,216) resolution is very sharp, with bright, warm colours rendered consistently throughout the system. A maximum brightness of 2,000 nits means you'll be able to see things clearly even when outside in the sun. In my own testing I found the levels reached just over 1,200 in normal use, which is still bright enough to make you squint.

The display is sharp, with bright, warm colours rendered consistently throughout the system.

Obviously, this is a smooth panel and as such reflects strong light sources, so if you do want to spend a lot of time playing in the sunshine, you may want to consider a matt screen protector to makes things a little more discernible.

A 144Hz refresh rate is perfect for gaming, ensuring that everything on the screen moves smoothly and without jags or judders. It also makes for pleasant viewing when navigating the interface or watching video content. The latter is aided by the under-display selfie camera – a stalwart of the Redmagic line-up – which means you don't have to contend with notches or punch-holes spoiling the display.

There's a fingerprint sensor embedded in the display, which worked efficiently a good proportion of the time I spent with the device.

A body to screen ratio of 95.3 percent means there's little in the way of a bezel, but thankfully the palm-cancellation is decent, so you don't get many false taps when using the 10S Pro.

Redmagic equips the 10S Pro with dual 1115K speakers which kick out a good level of volume, with a wide

range of frequencies represented in the mix. It's not going to match a dedicated speaker, but for on-the-go sounds you won't struggle to hear or understand what's being played. Bluetooth 5.4 capabilities mean you can get a stable and strong connection to external headphones, plus there's the 3.5mm jack if you prefer a wired option.

Playing graphically demanding titles, such as Asphalt Legends Unite, I found the performance to be consistently high.

PERFORMANCE

While the exterior features are the same as the Redmagic 10 Pro, the real upgrades are found under the hood. This time around the 10S Pro comes with the latest 4.47GHz Snapdragon 8 Elite Leading Version processor. This appears to be an overclocked version of the 4.32GHz Elite chip in the 10 Pro. The AI gaming chip has also been upgraded, with the RedCore 3 in the older model replaced with the RedCore R3 Pro.

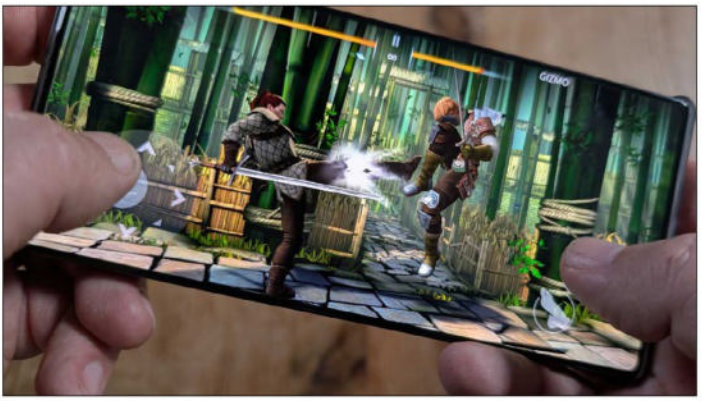
Redmagic states that this delivers a 30 percent power boost, and that AI performance is enhanced by 40 percent. These represent impressive gains over the previous processor, and when it comes to gaming every little performance advantage is important.

Playing the usual range of graphically demanding titles, such as Asphalt Legends Unite, Genshin Impact, PubG, and a few others, I found the performance to be consistently high on the 10S Pro, with the 2,500Hz instant touch sampling rates of the display making controls feel responsive. Frame rates stayed steady, with no drop-offs during combat heavy scenes, and the new cooling system kept things to temperatures that remained comfortable in the hand.

The 10 Pro was the first Redmagic phone to use liquid metal cooling, and the new version in the 10S Pro adjusts the placement so that the cooling area

is now directly over the CPU. This seems to help, as the device proved reliable and performed well even through heavy gaming sessions.

I did notice the fans going strongly if I had the volume low, but with headphones or an empty house in which I could blast out audio without annoying anyone, I couldn't hear the fans at all.



Frame rates stayed steady during combat heavy scenes.

The storage and memory options are dependent on the colour scheme you choose, with Nightfall offering 12GB of LPDDR5. Here's a breakdown of the standard benchmark tests to see how the Redmagic 10S Pro compares to other gaming handsets.

Geekbench 6 (multi-core)

Redmagic 10S Pro: 9,916
Redmagic 10 Air: 7,102
Redmagic 10 Pro: 10,099
Asus ROG Phone 9 Pro: 9,957
Asus ROG Phone 8 Pro: 7,440
Redmagic 9S Pro: 7,018

GFX Manhattan 3.1

Redmagic 10S Pro: 60fps
Redmagic 10 Air: 60fps
Redmagic 10 Pro: 120fps
Asus ROG Phone 9 Pro: 130fps
Asus ROG Phone 8 Pro: 165fps
Redmagic 9S Pro: 60fps

Battery life

Redmagic 10S Pro: 9 hours, 4 minutes
Redmagic 10 Air: 10 hours, 8 minutes
Asus ROG Phone 9 Pro: 14 hours, 40 minutes
Asus ROG Phone 8 Pro: 11 hours, 34 minutes
Redmagic 9S Pro: 10 hours, 50 minutes

Charge in 30 minutes

Redmagic 10S Pro: 86%
Redmagic 10 Air: 76%
Redmagic 10 Pro: 86%
Asus ROG Phone 9 Pro: 75%
Asus ROG Phone 8 Pro: 80%
Redmagic 9S Pro: 54%

PHOTOGRAPHY

Cameras are rarely the focus on a device like this, but Redmagic has been steadily improving the quality of the images and video offered by its gaming phones. With the 10S Pro you get the same optics as on the previous model, with some AI tweaks for the under-display selfie camera.

There are two main lenses on the rear array, the standard 50Mp f/1.88 24mm main camera, and a 50Mp f/2.0 14mm ultra wide. There's also a 2Mp depth camera. Sticking with the main shooter gets the best results, as I found that the exposure levels dropped a little when swapping to the 14mm ultra-wide, producing slightly darker images.

The main camera, however, can deliver some very decent shots. Focusing was reasonably quick (the touch response did sometimes fail to come up when I pressed on the spot I wanted the camera to focus on), and the shots I captured were more than usable for social media and other online outlets.

Colours are vibrant, with perhaps a lean into the Samsung territory of making reds punch a bit too much, but it's nothing that can't be calmed in an edit. I was pleased with the detail captured and the algorithm in portrait mode seems to have improved as I got a lot fewer miscalculations where the camera mistook part of an object for the background.

You get the usual barrage of special modes to play with, but I suspect these will not get much use as the main camera is a solid and dependable lens that covers a decent amount of ground. Video is also good, with the option to go all the way up to 8K at 30fps, but the 4K/60fps is the sweet spot. Footage is smooth, colours are well balanced, and the focus tracking is solid throughout.

The under-display selfie camera is still pretty terrible though, even with AI adjustments. It's just hard to make anything look good when the lens itself is obscured by the panel. Redmagic does try hard to make it usable, but to be honest I think trading the selfie

The main camera can deliver some very decent shots.

We'll begin our set of test photos with examples of the same scene taken with the main…

…and ultrawide lens.

Next up, we have a couple of examples of macro shots.

Our final test photo is a selfie.

camera for a display with no cut-outs is a price worth paying, especially if you want to game and watch video content.

BATTERY LIFE

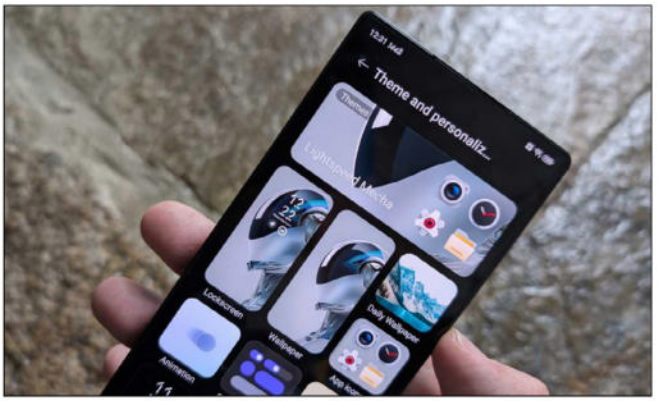
Battery life is another important factor with a gaming device, as those AAA-titles are very hard on power consumption. Redmagic gets around this issue by installing a whopping great 7,050mAh cell in the 10S Pro (again, the same as on the 10 Pro). This delivers all-day power, and if you go light on the gaming side of things you should find that the 10S Pro can easily last for two days before needing to be recharged.

Of course, you're unlikely to be buying a device like this unless you plan to fire up some serious games and play them everywhere. With that in mind, you're looking at between five to six hours of action before you'll need to recharge.

But here's the good news – a full recharge (using the included 80-watt charger) takes just shy of 40 minutes, with a quick 15-minute charge returning you to 51 percent. So, by taking short breaks to let your hands recover, the 10S Pro will allow you to play for as long as you like (provided you have a charging point nearby).

SOFTWARE

Android 15 underpins the Redmagic OS 10.5 that powers the 10S Pro. As interfaces go, the latter is not too bad and has certainly undergone some refinement over the past few years. You get a lot of customisation options, a dedicated gaming suite, plus the general Android fare that you'd expect. There's a little bit of bloatware when you first boot up the device, but this can be dispensed with easily, leaving you with a clean system. The software



Redmagic OS 10.5 is highly customisable.

runs smoothly, with quick transitions and I didn't experience any sudden crashes during my test period.

Anyone who knows Redmagic will be aware of Game Space, the dedicated section of the OS that allows gamers to optimise performance, settings and other features within their game library. Some of the settings available can boost frame rates, add a zoom so you can see far-off targets, or capture gameplay video that you can share later.

There's plenty to mess about with in Game Space, which at this point is a mature piece of software, so if you really want to get the most of your mobile gaming, it's a great addition.

In terms of software support, Redmagic has confirmed that the 10S Pro will receive 3 years of support. It's unclear how many versions of Android this will entail, but it's not a great length of time when compared to the likes of Samsung or Google which offer at least double that of the 10S Pro.

VERDICT

The 10S Pro may share many of the appointments of the 10 Pro, but improving the processor and cooling, while retaining the pricing, makes it an easy phone to recommend. Obviously,

Game Space allows gamers to optimise performance, settings and other features within their game library.

its bulk means that it won't suit someone looking for a normal, everyday phone, but if mobile gaming is your thing, the Redmagic 10S Pro is one of the very best options on the market today. Martyn Casserly

SPECIFICATIONS

- 6.85-inch (2,688x1,216; 431ppi) AMOLED, 1B colours, 144Hz, 2592Hz PWM, 2000 nits (peak) display
- Android 15, Redmagic OS 10.5
- Qualcomm SM8750-AC Snapdragon 8 Elite (3nm) processor
- Octa-core (2x 4.47GHz Oryon V2 Phoenix L, 6x 3.53GHz Oryon V2 Phoenix M) CPU
- Adreno 830 (1,200MHz) GPU
- No card slot
- 12GB/24GB RAM
- 256GB/512GB/1TB storage
- Three rear-facing cameras: 50Mp, f/1.9, 23mm (wide), 1/1.55-inch, 1.0µm, PDAF, OIS; 50Mp, f/2.0, 13mm (ultrawide), 1/2.88-inch, 0.61µm, AF; 2Mp
- Selfie camera: 16Mp, f/2.0, (wide), 1/2.77-inch, under display
- Stereo speakers
- 3.5mm audio jack
- Wi-Fi 802.11 a/b/g/n/ac/6e/7, tri-band, Wi-Fi Direct)
- Bluetooth 5.4, A2DP, LEs
- NFC
- GPS (L1+L2+L5), GLONASS, BDS, GALILEO
- USB Type-C 3.2 Gen 2, OTG, accessory connector, DisplayPort
- Fingerprint sensor (under display, optical)
- Non-removable 7,050mAh battery
- 163.4x76.1x8.9mm
- 229g

Motorola Edge 60

Price when reviewed: £379 ★★★½☆

The Motorola Edge family has a problem: the Edge 60 Fusion, Edge 60 and Edge 60 Pro all offer a very similar proposition. These three devices all look the same and share many of the same specs, yet are available at three distinct price points. While the Edge 60 Fusion costs £299, the Edge 60 is £379, and the Edge 60 Pro is £599.

The focus of this review is the middle phone in the line-up. Compared to the Fusion, the extra £80 only really gets you a better camera.

Is this a mid-range phone that's worth buying, or are there better options out there? Here's my full review.

DESIGN

Across a number of generations, Motorola has been pushing its partnership with Pantone, resulting in some of the most interesting colours around.

Motorola has opted for Pantone's Gibraltar Sea colour.

While most brands offer a safe selection of black and silver hues, Motorola has chosen Pantone Gibraltar Sea (pictured here, your only colour option) for the Edge 60. This is paired with a canvas finish, so there's a soft-touch effect.

Many of Motorola's phones have used faux leather on the back, but the canvas feel is something new, with a slightly coarser texture that offers plenty of grip. It's a move that might make you think twice about putting a cover on your phone, because the Edge 60 looks and feels great without showing fingerprint smudges.

The Moto 60 Edge comes with IP68 water and dust resistance, which is pretty standard on flagship phones but less common at this price point. It ensures there's full protection against dust and submersion in fresh water of up to 1.5m for up to 30 minutes. A separate IP69 certification means the phone has additional protection against water jets, which is something which remains rare.

Meanwhile, the phone offers MIL-STD 810H protection, which is a set of military-grade protections against various environmental conditions beyond just water and dust, including temperature, humidity, vibration, the shock from drops and more.

The phone has Gorilla Glass 7i,

The phone's curved edges give it a slimmer side profile.

which is designed for mid-range devices, but having used the Edge 60 Fusion (with the same protection) and accidentally scratched the screen, you still have to be careful with these phones.

Both the front glass and rear canvas curve at the sides, making the phone feel narrower than it actually is. Compared to regular square-edged phones, it gives the phone a slimmer side profile.

There's plenty of vibrancy and colour in this display.

At 7.9mm and 179g, it's an impressively slender device, albeit not quite on the same level as the Samsung Galaxy S25 Edge.

DISPLAY

There's a 6.67-inch display on the front of the Edge 60, and as far as I can tell, it's the exact same screen as you have in the Edge 60 Fusion.

That's no bad thing, as it's a great display. It packs in a 2,712x1,200-pixel resolution, which results in 446 pixels per inch. That's nice and detailed.

It's a 120Hz display, designed to keep your scrolling nice and smooth, while it's also equipped with a 4,500 nits peak brightness. That's incredibly bright, but this isn't about retina-searing brightness all the time; it's about making HDR highlights look great.

There seems to be a slight issue here, however, as I didn't find any support for HDR in common streaming services, and Google Photos doesn't show the HDR pop that you get from other phones. I compared photos I'd taken on the Edge 60 with those images on the Pixel 9 Pro XL in Google Photos, and the Pixel had brighter highlights on every photo. That appears to be because it's not displaying Ultra HDR images on the Moto phone, so compared to the Pixel, the photos look a little flat when viewed.

There's plenty of vibrancy and colour in this display, with 'Natural', 'Radiant' and 'Vivid' options to change the tonality. I was happy with 'Vivid', but if

you find that it's too saturated, it's easy enough to change.

In my opinion, the curved display is another downside. Curved edges might look good from an aesthetic point of view, but it means that the sides of the display aren't as touch-responsive as the centre. The borderless visuals look great until you have to tap on an icon in a game that's not on the flat part of the screen, and it doesn't respond as quickly.

If you're not a hardcore gamer, that won't matter, but if you're playing a lot of titles such as Call of Duty: Mobile or PUBG Mobile, you might find the design to be problematic.

The stereo speakers, however, offer impressive performance. They have plenty of volume with decent bass. They support Dolby Atmos, but don't expect the kind of immersive sound you'd get with a home cinema set-up. For ad hoc videos at high volume, however, these speakers are pretty good.

There's a fingerprint sensor in the display, which I found the be quick to register fingers and quick to unlock the phone, too. There's also the option to use face unlock to get into the device, which is really convenient (and fast), although it isn't as secure as fingerprint or PIN entry.

PERFORMANCE

The Edge 60 and Edge 60 Fusion share the same core hardware. Both run on the Dimensity 7300 from MediaTek, a mid-range chipset that's designed for exactly this type of device.

But before you baulk at that, in day-to-day use, the Edge 60 is perfectly smooth. One advantage compared to the Fusion is the extra 4GB of RAM (now 12GB), while the storage is boosted from 256- to 512GB. The latter can be expanded up to 1TB via a MicroSD card.

The Dolby Atmos speakers offer plenty of volume with decent bass.

However, I found the Edge 60's Wi-Fi wasn't as solid as rival devices I've tested, sometimes dropping out on my home network, especially when further away from the

router. This resulted in some timeouts in games and error messages, which I'd often bypass by switching off Wi-Fi and just using 5G.

Otherwise, I found the performance to be strong, but the gaming performance can't compete with more powerful hardware. If you're the sort of user who lives on social media, streams a little, takes photos and crunches emails, you'll be totally fine.

Overall, this phone provides strong performance.

For great mid-range gaming performance, I'd recommend the Poco X7 Pro instead.

Geekbench 6 (multi-core)

Motorola Edge 60: 3,012
Nothing Phone (3a): 3,252
Samsung Galaxy A36: 2,879
Google Pixel 9a: 4,373
Motorola Edge 60 Fusion: 4,632

GFX Manhattan 3.1

Motorola Edge 60: 36fps
Nothing Phone (3a): 55fps
Samsung Galaxy A36: 51fps
Google Pixel 9a: 119fps
Motorola Edge 60 Fusion: 118fps

Battery life

Motorola Edge 60: 12 hours, 1 minute
Nothing Phone (3a): 16 hours, 14 minutes
Samsung Galaxy A36: 11 hours, 27 minutes
Google Pixel 9a: 14 hours, 11 minutes
Motorola Edge 60 Fusion: 6 hours, 10 minutes

Charge in 30 minutes

Motorola Edge 60: 61%
Nothing Phone (3a): 71%
Samsung Galaxy A36: 63%
Google Pixel 9a: 40%
Motorola Edge 60 Fusion: 38%

PHOTOGRAPHY

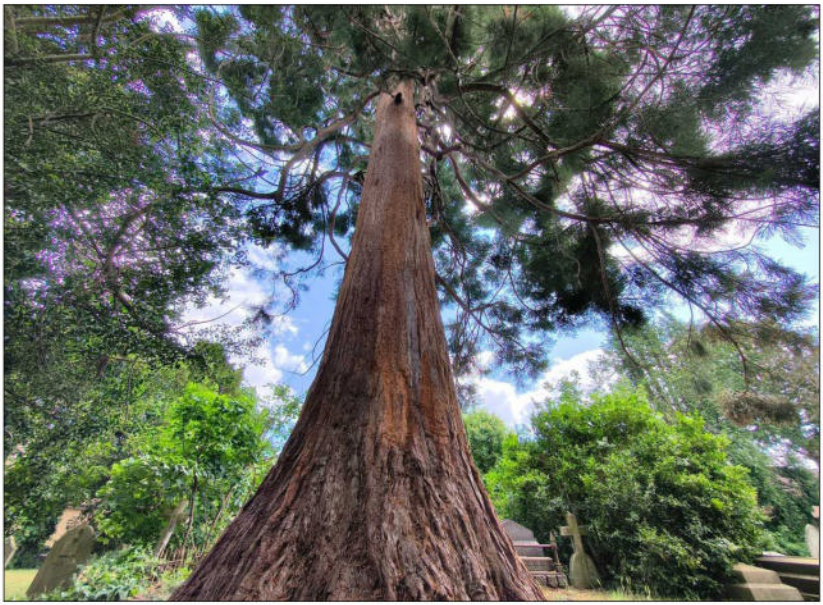
The cameras are one of the areas where the Edge 60 performs well for the price.

It has a 50Mp Sony Lytia 700C main camera with an f/1.8 aperture. This has large 2.0µm pixels, designed to increase the light absorption to boost performance.

Gone is the '3-in-1' light sensor that the cheaper Edge 60 Fusion offers, replaced by two proper supporting cameras instead. There's a 50Mp ultrawide which, thanks to that high resolution, doubles as a macro camera. Then there's a 10Mp telephoto camera, offering 3x optical zoom and 30x digital zoom. These cameras are basically the same as the more expensive Edge 60 Pro, although that model extends the digital zoom out to 50x, for better or worse. It's no surprise the camera performance on the Edge 60 is similar to the Edge 60 Fusion. In other words, it's generally good.

Some images struggle with exposure, coming out brighter than I'd expect, and that can make HDR look a little forced. For example, with skies brighter than you'd expect and some inconsistencies around the edges.

That's really apparent in the image I took of some impressive Giant Sequoia trees shown below, where the sky seen through the pines is unnaturally purple. This is the camera trying to process the sky area and generally not making a good job of it.



Some images struggle with exposure, coming out brighter than I'd expect.

There's some colour difference between the lenses: the telephoto is cooler than the main and ultrawide cameras, but not as drastic as you see in some other cameras.

Don't get too excited about the telephoto, though, because detail drops off rapidly as you zoom in closer. The 3x optical results are pretty good, but out at 10x or 30x, I don't think the results are worth it. However, when more expensive phones such as the Pixel 9a still don't have a telephoto lens, it's nice to see it here.

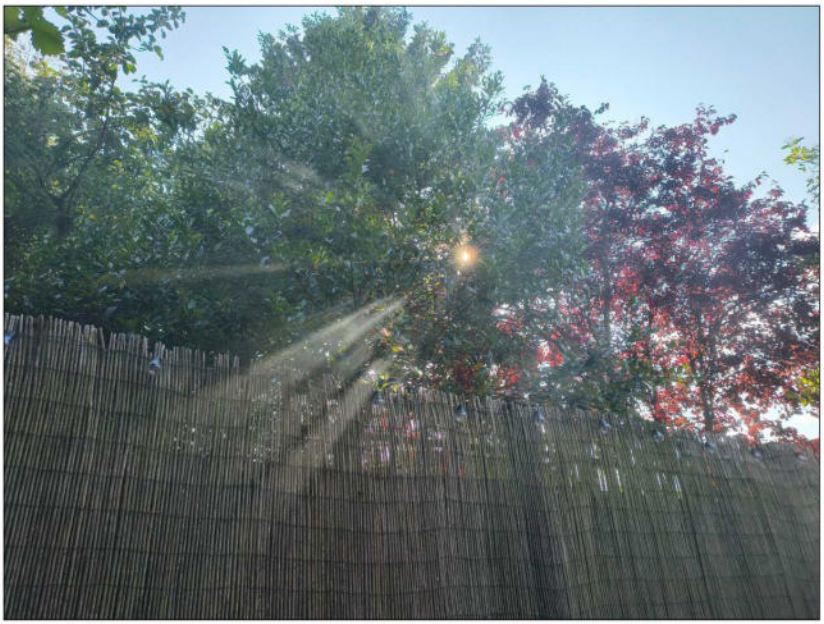
The addition of macro can give you some nice photos. There's an auto-macro feature that I ultimately turned off, because if you get too close to something, it will switch to macro, with a slight change in the colour balance, which can be inconsistent. I tended just to use the 2x zoom option from the main camera instead. However, the dedicated macro mode gives good detail and is a useful addition.

There's a full range of camera features present, with the portrait mode working generally well. In low light conditions, the main camera works pretty well, with a dedicated 'Night Vision' mode on hand to give longer exposures in darker conditions.

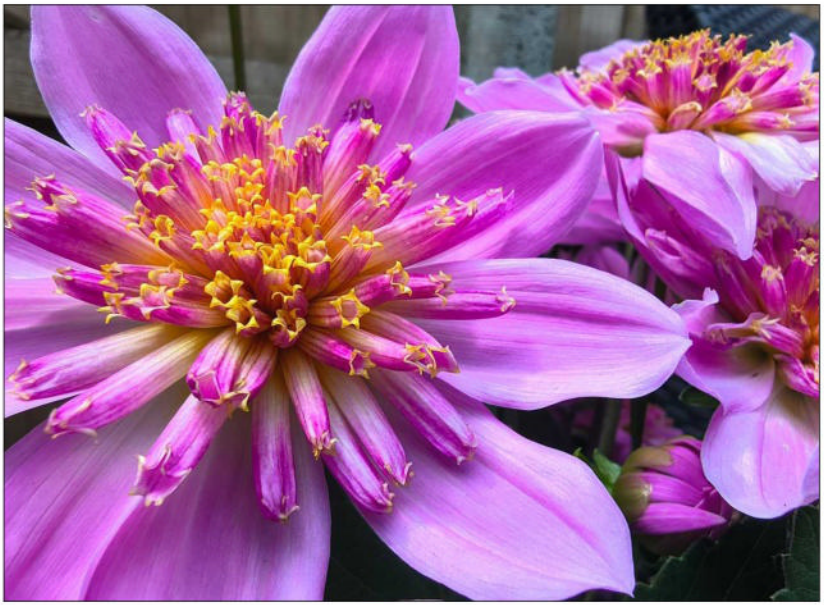
One weakness in low light is that it can lift shadows a little too vigorously,

Here's an example of a photo taken with the main lens.

Low light can lift shadows a little too vigorously.



We tended to use the 2x zoom option from the main camera rather than switch to macro.



The 50Mp selfie camera gives good results.

resulting in noise creeping in. However, those atmospheric night shots, are still very possible.

The 50Mp selfie camera offers good results, although the high-resolution sensor seems to offer few advantages compared to lower-megapixel competitors.

When it comes to video, the Edge 60 offers up to 4K resolution, but this is limited to 30fps. If you want 60fps, to smooth out fast-moving subjects, you're limited to FHD (1080p). You get access to all the lenses in this mode, but once you flip to 4K video, you're also limited to 10x zoom. Not that that should be a concern – while captured video is generally good, once you start zooming, the quality quickly drops.

However, OIS (optical image stabilisation) on the main lens means footage remains relatively smooth when you're moving around.

BATTERY LIFE

There's a 5,200mAh battery in the Edge 60, which is pretty generous considering how slim this phone is. It's supported by 68-watt charging, which is one of the fastest at this price point, beating the likes of the Pixel 9a and Galaxy A36.

There's no charger in the box, so

you'll have to supply that yourself. With a compatible charger, you'll get a notification on the display that you're using 68-watt TurboPower and see the percentage ticking up in real time.

I used a 125-watt Motorola charger that I already had to test this, with great results. In just 30 minutes, the phone went from empty to 61 percent.

Thanks to that charging speed, you'll worry less about charging overnight because it's so fast to top up in the morning. That meant I'd often leave it longer between charges.

Battery life itself is generally good. I found that I'd often reach the end of the day with charge left in the phone and get through much of the next day, only pausing to charge if I was heading out in the evening or planning on gaming.

The starting point for the Edge 60 is Android 15.

Naturally, fast charging all the time isn't great for battery health, so it's worth taking advantage of the optimised charging options in Settings.

There's no wireless charging, but that isn't unexpected on a mid-range phone.

SOFTWARE

For a long time, Motorola has offered the experience closest to stock Android. If you were looking for a cheaper alternative to the Pixel, then it was the safest bet.

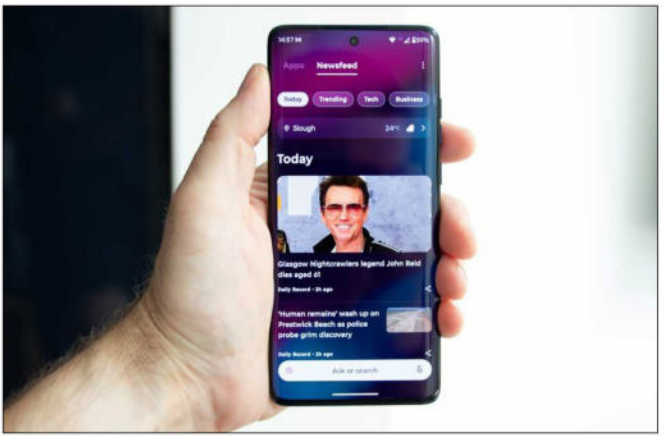
But that's changed in 2025 with the launch of the Edge 60 and Razr 60 devices, with the ushering in of Moto AI and several changes throughout the user interface as a result.

The starting point for the Moto Edge 60 is Android 15. There's the promise of three OS updates (so it will finish on Android 18, which is likely to arrive in 2027). Then there are four years of security updates, running to March 2029. However, that's still some way behind the best at this price point, with the Galaxy A36 offering six years of both.

Sticking to that core experience, there's some bloatware on devices, mostly pre-installed apps. Some of these are Moto apps, providing access to some Moto services, but they're joined by the likes of Opera,

Adobe Scan, Temu and a couple of games. You can't avoid these, but you can at least uninstall them.

During set-up, you're also offered a whole range of other apps which you can opt out of. There's no duplication of services (which you'll find on many cheaper phones), so at least Google services are the default in most conditions.



There are some insertions I'm not a fan of, such as adding a newsfeed to the apps tray.

Then you come to Moto AI. This is Motorola's big push for 2025, sitting in the phone alongside Google Gemini, and powered by Perplexity AI. Moto AI requires sign-in using a Motorola account, so just like Galaxy AI on Samsung phones, it's a way for Motorola to own some of the experience outside of Google.

There are some insertions I'm not a fan of, such as adding a newsfeed to the apps tray. It's powered by Taboola, a service that lurks on the bottom of many websites, offering almost-related stories to click through to and providing a route to the insertion of more adverts. There's already Google Discover on your phone (tailored by your Google search behaviour), so Moto's newsfeed doesn't really add anything good. At least you can turn it off.

The other addition is the option to search in the apps tray using natural language. This is again AI-powered and seems to be trying to do too much. Searching for apps is fine, but shoe-horning in an AI chatbot is a little confusing. This feels like a move to offer an alternative to the Google Search bar, familiar as a home screen option, but when you're thinking about apps, you expect apps to be returned, not to go down a rabbit hole with a chatbot.

Moto AI offers up opportunities to update you on your notifications, remember details, generate images and so on. It all feels a little extra and

doesn't really fit seamlessly into the phone's other software. A case of AI overload, perhaps.

VERDICT

Probably not. The regular Edge 60 is an impressive phone in several areas, but it occupies an awkward middle ground between the budget Edge 60 Fusion and the more premium Edge 60 Pro.

Ultimately, there are more exciting phones in this price bracket – if you want to game, I'd go with Poco X7 Pro, if you're more interested in design, the Nothing Phone (3a) is a great option. For greater longevity and support, Samsung's Galaxy A36 is your best bet.

The Edge 60 gets a lot right, but I can't recommend anyone buy it over these superior rivals. Chris Hall

SPECIFICATIONS

- 6.67-inch (2,712x1,220; 446ppi) P-OLED, 1B colours, 120Hz, 720Hz PWM, HDR10+, 4500 nits peak display
- Android 15, up to 3 major Android upgrades
- Mediatek Dimensity 7300 (4nm) processor
- Octa-core (4x 2.5GHz Cortex-A78, 4x 2GHz Cortex-A55) CPU
- Mali-G615 MC2 GPU
- microSDXC card slot
- 8GB/12GB RAM
- 256GB/512GB storage
- Three rear-facing cameras: 50Mp, f/1.8, 24mm (wide), 1/1.56-inch, 1.0µm, multi-directional PDAF, OIS; 10Mp, f2.0, 73mm (telephoto), 1/3.94-inch, 1.0µm, PDAF, 3x optical zoom, OIS; 50Mp, f/2.0, 12mm, 122-degree (ultrawide), 1/2.76-inch, 0.64µm, PDAF
- Selfie camera: 50Mp, f/22.0, (wide), 0.64µm
- Stereo speakers
- No 3.5mm audio jack
- Wi-Fi 802.11 a/b/g/n/ac/6, dual-band
- Bluetooth
- NFC
- GPS, GLONASS, GALILEO
- USB Type-C 2.0, OTG
- Fingerprint (under display, optical)
- Non-removable 5,200mAh battery
- 161.2x73.1x7.9mm
- 179g

OnePlus Pad 3

Price when reviewed: £529 ★★★★½

In 2025, there's more competition among tablets than ever before. Even if you're set on an iPad, there are several different models to choose from.

On the Android side, things get even more complicated. Samsung's Galaxy Tab range might be the market leader, but it tends to focus on high-end and budget slates. What if you want something in between?

Enter the OnePlus Pad 3. The Chinese company's third tablet is undoubtedly its best yet, combining a premium hardware and software experience with an impressively affordable starting price, at least in the UK. Is it too good to be true, or is this the mid-range Android tablet you've been waiting for? I spent over a week using it, including as my main work machine for a full day, to find out.

DESIGN

The OnePlus Pad 3's design is one of the best things about it. A blend of aluminium and glass screams premium,

OnePlus doesn't include any accessories in the box, though our review unit came with a keyboard cover.

and I really couldn't tell it apart from a flagship tablet.

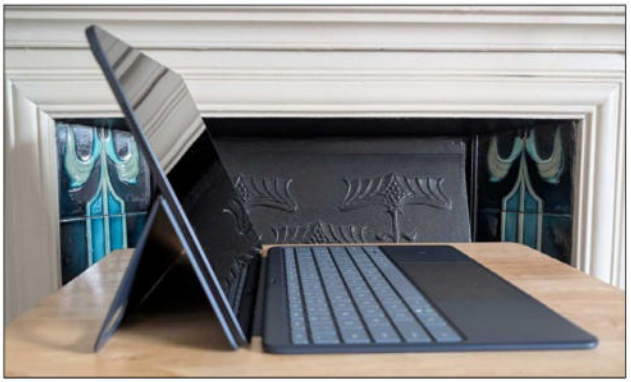
Opting for metal rather than glass on the back also boosts durability – the Pad 3 feels sturdy and robust, even without a case or cover applied. I'd have no concerns about throwing this into a bag for travelling.

At 675g, it's light enough to come almost anywhere with you, though it is heavier than both the 13-inch iPad Pro and Galaxy Tab S10+. At 5.97mm, it's also thicker than both those devices, despite being significantly slimmer than the 6.5mm Pad 2.

However, you'll have to be careful when using it around water and dust, as there's no official IP rating. I'd still expect it to survive a light rain shower or a day at the beach, but neither is guaranteed, so take care.

I'm also a little underwhelmed by the colour options, or should I say, option. In most countries, including the UK, the OnePlus Pad is only available in the 'Storm Blue' finish you see here. Make no mistake, it looks really nice, but it's also a little boring.

OnePlus doesn't include any accessories in the box, though my review sample came with the £169 keyboard cover. Is it worth buying? The short answer is yes, but only for



The accompanying stand can be adjusted to a range of different angles, helping it to resemble a real laptop.

occasional use. If you're away from your desk, the extra functionality of a physical keyboard is very useful.

The Pad 3's version seamlessly connects to the tablet via the built-in pogo pins – no Bluetooth required. And the accompanying stand can be adjusted to a range of different angles, helping it to resemble a real laptop.

Each key offers a good amount of travel and is satisfyingly clicky, making for an impressive typing experience. Within a couple of hours, I was back typing at my usual speed, though the slightly unusual placement of the Enter key caused a few issues.

However, the lack of backlighting means the Pad 3's keyboard is unsuitable for use in the dark. And the dedicated AI button simply launches Google Gemini, making it feel like a waste of space.

Then there's the trackpad, which proved more frustrating than functional. I like how large it is, but navigating around the operating system is very fiddly, with selecting specific text proving particularly challenging. If you're serious about this set-up, I'd recommend connecting a wireless mouse too.

Overall, the keyboard cover adds useful extra functionality to the OnePlus Pad 3 that will help boost your productivity. But it won't be replacing most people's laptops anytime soon.

The Pad 3 is also compatible with OnePlus' Stylo 2 pen (£99), which is also sold separately. I didn't get a chance to try this, but it's the same version that launched alongside the Pad 2.

DISPLAY

I absolutely love the OnePlus Pad 3's display. The expansive 13.2-inch panel rivals many laptops in terms of size, while the crystal-clear 3,392x2,400 resolution beats most of them when it comes to detail.

You also get the benefit of a 144Hz refresh rate, resulting in fluid transitions and ultra-smooth visuals. However, to

The 13.2-inch panel rivals many laptops in terms of size.

showcase its full potential, you'll need to manually select 144Hz and enable the relevant apps in Settings. Most people will be happy with the default 'Auto-select' mode, which balances refresh rate with battery life. With no LTPO tech, the lowest it'll go is 60Hz.

It speaks volumes that I haven't mentioned that it's an LCD screen yet. Before testing, I was disappointed by the lack of OLED, but you still get the vibrant colours and deep blacks you'd usually associate with it.

OnePlus indicated that opting for LCD has ensured it can include a high resolution and refresh rate without increasing the cost too much. After testing the Pad 3, that feels like a great decision.

Perhaps the only downside is visibility. I recorded a decent maximum brightness of 517 nits, but given how reflective the display is, you may struggle to set it in direct sunlight.

There are four speakers at either end of the Pad 3.

However, another area where the Pad 3 excels is audio. It features no less than eight speakers (four woofers, four tweeters), which combine to deliver impressively punchy sound across all the content I tried. While not quite room-filling, there's a depth to the sound that you just don't get with most tablets, and it gets impressively loud without audible distortion.

Alongside that excellent display, I'd be very comfortable using the Pad 3 to watch movies and TV shows without connecting to headphones or speakers.

PERFORMANCE

The Pad 3 might be a mid-range tablet, but OnePlus is making no compromises when it comes to performance.

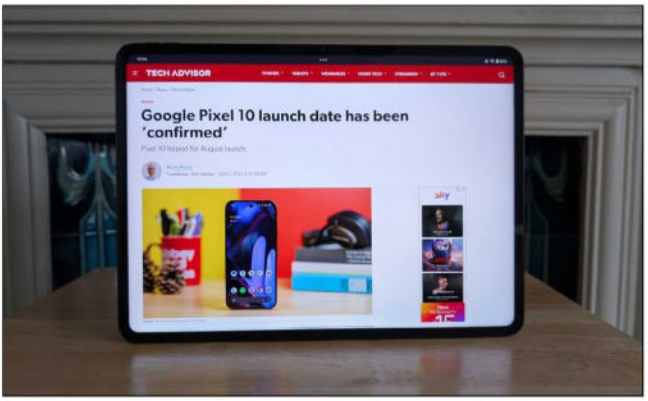
It's powered by the Snapdragon 8 Elite, Qualcomm's latest (at the time of writing) flagship chipset. You'll find it in many of the very best Android phones and tablets on the market, so to see it on such an affordable tablet is a real bonus.

Even with 12GB of RAM on the cheapest model I tested (16GB is also available), the performance is incredible. The Pad 3 is absolutely rapid, allowing me to use

multiple apps and multitasking features without breaking a sweat.

When using it instead of my laptop for a full working day, I primarily cycled between Chrome (with loads of open tabs), Microsoft Word and Slack.

This included making full use of OnePlus multitasking features (Open Canvas, Split-screen, Floating windows), all of which require multiple apps to run simultaneously. At no point did the device even get warm, let alone show any signs of slowing down.



When it comes to performance, the OnePlus Pad 3 is up there with the very best tablets you can buy.

The strong performance extends to gaming. Throughout sessions with Call of Duty: Mobile, PUBG Mobile and Real Racing 3, gameplay remained smooth and lag-free at 120fps. The impressive cooling system also avoided the device becoming anything more than slightly warm to the touch.

When it comes to performance, there's no doubt that the OnePlus Pad 3 is up there with the very best tablets you can buy.

In terms of storage, OnePlus offers a choice between 256- and 512GB. With files often stored on the cloud these days, the former should be enough for most people. However, you'll need to be sure, as there's no MicroSD slot for expandable storage.

Geekbench 6 (multi-core)

OnePlus Pad 3: 9,004
OnePlus Pad 2: 4,440
Xiaomi Pad 7: 5,205
Samsung Galaxy Tab S10 FE: 3,930

GFX Manhattan 3.1

OnePlus Pad 3: 50fps
OnePlus Pad 2: 50fps
Xiaomi Pad 7: 56fps
Samsung Galaxy Tab S10 FE: 55fps
Google Pixel Tablet: 57fps

Battery life

OnePlus Pad 3: 13 hours, 21 minutes
OnePlus Pad 2: 13 hours, 25 minutes

Xiaomi Pad 7: 6 hours, 34 minutes
Samsung Galaxy Tab S10 FE: 13 hours, 28 minutes
Google Pixel Tablet: 14 hours, 19 minutes

Charge in 30 minutes

OnePlus Pad 3: 15%
OnePlus Pad 2: 19%
Xiaomi Pad 7: 54%
Samsung Galaxy Tab S10 FE: 49%
Google Pixel Tablet: 21%

PHOTOGRAPHY

Let's face it, you're not buying an Android tablet for its photography performance. But what you might care about is video calls, for which the 8Mp front-facing camera is crucial.

The Pad 3 can capture footage at up to 1080p at 30fps, and the results are…fine. Focus and exposure are generally accurate, and it did a good job with my skin tone, but colours look dull and washed out. It's better than many laptop webcams, but it falls short of the experience you'll get on most smartphones.

Interestingly, that lens does a much better job when it comes to stills, delivering crisp, detailed selfies. It even offers a subtle portrait-style background blur that looks convincing.

For the purposes of testing, I also tried out the 13Mp rear camera at my local park, embarrassing myself in the process. I wouldn't recommend you do this, but it is possible to get decent photos if you really need to. Just watch out for exposure, which can vary significantly, as our test photos opposite and overleaf show.

The Pad 3 can capture footage at up to 1080p at 30fps.

Video from this lens tops out at 4K at 30fps, but the results are similar to the front camera: fairly detailed but with muted colours. The lack of OIS (optical image stabilisation) also means footage is very wobbly with any major movement.

BATTERY LIFE

The OnePlus Pad 3 boasts a huge 12,140mAh battery.

Here's a selection of photos taken with the OnePlus Pad 3.

It's a massive upgrade compared to the Pad 2's 9,510mAh cell, and one of the biggest we've ever seen on a tablet. So, I was expecting battery life to be good, but not this good.

A popular benchmark for tablet and laptop battery life is lasting a full working day on a single charge. But after a full seven hours of use as my main device for work, it'd only dropped to 53 percent, meaning you could go two days before needing to reach for the charger.

With light usage, such as web browsing and watching videos for a couple of hours each night, I think you could stretch to a full week of battery life, which is incredible.

Of course, it won't quite last that long if you plan on gaming or using other demanding apps. But unlike on some tablets, you can use the Pad 3 for long sessions and forget about the charger.

The result of 13 hours and 21 minutes in our regular PCMark battery test (which simulates real-world tasks at 200 nits of brightness) doesn't fully reflect that, but it is well above average.

What's more, even if you use your tablet very occasionally, OnePlus' claim of up to 60 days of standby time means it should still have battery when you need it.

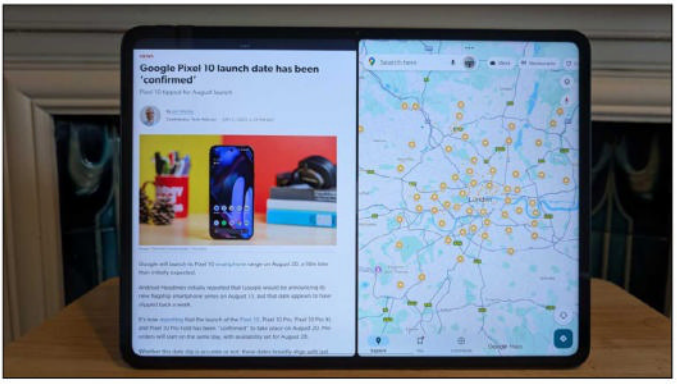
On paper, charging is almost as impressive, with support for fast 80-watt 'Supervooc' charging that OnePlus says can go from 0- to 100 percent in just 92 minutes.

However, there's no charger in the box. Using the 65-watt one I had at home was much slower, reaching just 15 percent after 30 minutes plugged in. A full charge took well over three hours.

Also, like pretty much all tablets, there's no wireless charging.

SOFTWARE

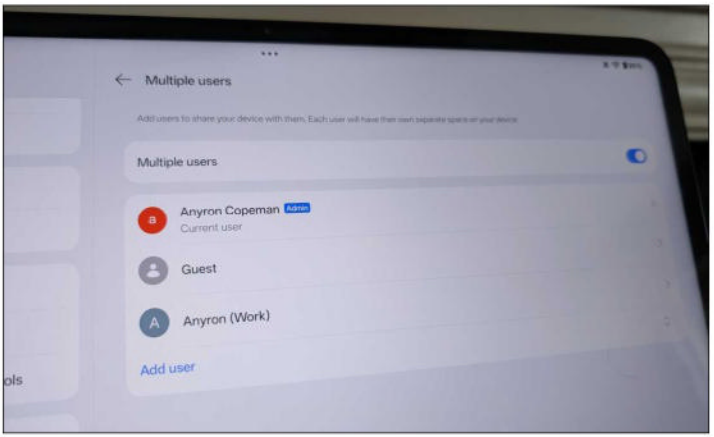
Out of the box, the Pad 3 runs OnePlus's OxygenOS 15 software. It's



Open Canvas lets you run up to three apps side-by-side and swipe between them, even if one is off the edge of the screen.

based on Android 15, but introduces several new features, including those specifically designed for the larger display.

Open Canvas is undoubtedly the highlight, allowing you to run up to three apps side-by-side and easily swipe between them, even if one is off the edge of the screen. This now includes system-wide drag and drop functionality, so you don't have to suffer with the fiddly process of copy and paste (as I found out later than hoped).



Being able to separate work and personal has been great.

If you're regularly switching between three apps, I can see how useful Open Canvas can be. But with no option to resize individual windows, I prefer the regular split-screen mode. It's easy to set up (manually or via useful pop-up suggestions), while the arrangement runs separately to the main app itself.

Alongside the option for a floating window, you can run up to four apps at the same time. But unless you connect to another display, I think that's overkill.

As you might expect, you can mirror the content from your OnePlus phone on the Pad 3 and share files via NFC. A partnership with Apple also enables full remote control and file sharing with the Mac, though I haven't been able to try either of these.

Elsewhere, the software experience is what we've come to expect from OnePlus. OxygenOS is clean, easy to navigate and highly customisable, with many stock apps that have been specifically designed for the larger display. The selection of optimised third-party apps is a lot more limited, with Facebook Messenger refusing to even display in landscape mode. But that's a problem that affects all Android tablets, not just OnePlus.

I'd prefer it if the company didn't pre-install so many extra apps, including its own versions of many Google ones.

However, most of these can be easily uninstalled or ignored, and OnePlus doesn't constantly bug you to use them.

Software support is decent, with six full years of security patches, meaning the Pad 3 will be safe to use until 2031. But OS updates are limited to three years, so Android 19 will be its last major version. For context, Samsung's Galaxy Tab S10+ offers a class-leading seven years of both.

VERDICT

If you want a mid-range Android tablet that feels like a flagship, yes. For many people, the OnePlus Pad 3 offers everything most people are looking for in a slate.

OnePlus has absolutely nailed the fundamentals here, with incredible performance, a stunning display and some of the best battery life I've ever seen on a tablet.

You also get a flagship design and useful software features to help you make the most out of that big screen.

However, it's not perfect. While security updates will continue for six years, OnePlus' commitment to major OS updates is half that. There's also no official water or dust resistance, while the optional keyboard cover could do with some improvement. But considering its price point, the OnePlus Pad 3 is still a superb buy that's easy to recommend. Anyron Copeman

SPECIFICATIONS

- 13.2-inch (3,392x2,400; 291ppi) IPS LCD, 68B colours, Dolby Vision, 144Hz, 900 nits (HBM) display
- Android 15, ColorOS 15
- Qualcomm SM8750-AB Snapdragon 8 Elite (3nm) processor
- Octa-core (2x 4.32GHz Oryon V2 Phoenix L, 6x 3.53GHz Oryon V2 Phoenix M) CPU
- Adreno 830 GPU
- No card slot
- 12GB/16GB RAM
- 256GB/512GB storage
- Rear-facing camera: 13Mp
- Selfie camera: 8Mp
- Stereo speakers
- No 3.5mm audio jack
- Wi-Fi 802.11 a/b/g/n/ac/6/7, dual-band
- Bluetooth 5.4, A2DP, LE, aptX HD
- No NFC
- USB Type-C 3.2, OTG, accessory connector
- Non-removable 12,140mAh battery
- 289.6x209.7x6mm
- 675g

Xiaomi Redmi Pad 2

Price when reviewed: £169 ★★★★☆

Xiaomi has long established itself as a tour de force in the tech world, making value for money for just about everything, including phones and tablets.

Its latest budget tablet offering is the Redmi Pad 2, a stylish and well-featured Android tablet which costs just £169. That's more than £200 cheaper than Google's Pixel Tablet or Samsung's Galaxy Tab S10 FE.

Of course, it's also a cheaper alternative to the entry-level iPad, but does Xiaomi do enough here to make the Redmi Pad 2 worth buying or should you steer clear and get a rival like the Samsung Galaxy Tab A9+? It's an excellent option for a budget tablet in most use cases, though I'm not sure I would recommend the cheapest model.

DESIGN

First things first, you would have no idea the Redmi Pad 2 was so cheap if I just handed it over. It looks and feels every bit as good as tablets double

Xiaomi has opted for a flat-sided design much like previous Redmi tablets.

the price or even more expensive. This is largely due to its clean unibody aluminium chassis, which is understated and avoids any unnecessary design elements. I like the simple Redmi logo on the back and the compact camera module in the corner, now in a more pleasing oval shape.

Xiaomi has opted for a flat-sided design much like previous Redmi tablets and the firm's flagship range, including the Pad 7. The corners and edges are rounded, making it comfortable to handle. It's nice and thin at 7.4mm and although it's a little heavier than some rivals, 510g is perfectly serviceable and the device doesn't feel too weighty.

I've tested the new Lavender Purple colourway. However, only Graphite Black and Mint Green appear to be available on the Mi UK store (tinyurl.com/4vzr8mcj).

The design is split-orientated to be used in portrait and landscape modes, but it favours the latter a little bit more due to the placement of the front-facing camera on the longer edge.

One thing that bugs me somewhat is the placement of the power and volume buttons. They are on different sides, and when in landscape the volume rocker works backwards to what you would expect it to do.

Otherwise, I'm quite taken with the device, apart from how close to the edge the headphone jack is.

The camera module on the rear is a pleasing oval shape.

There's no IP dust or waterproofing here, but that's to be expected at this price.

ACCESSORIES

A quick note on the Redmi Pad 2 accessories, as I've been able to try out a couple. The official case is a worthwhile investment at £29. Not only does it protect the design, but it allows the screen to automatically turn on when you open it and acts like a stand, too. You just need to bend the folding section back a bit after it's been in stand mode for a while.

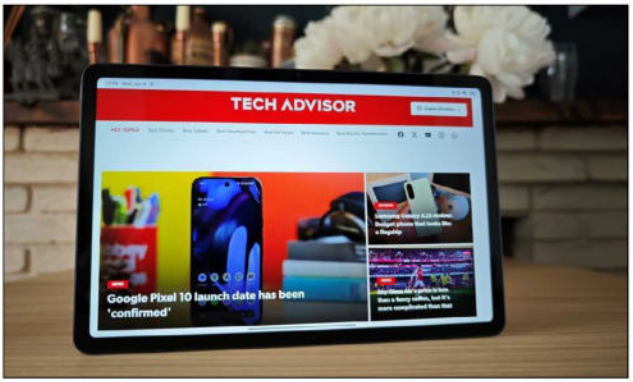
The official case protects the display and acts like a stand.

There's also a compatible stylus in the Redmi Smart Pen. It's £59, but Xiaomi often offers it at a reduced price of £19 when buying the tablet. At that cost, it's a useful add-on for a spot of sketching, note-taking, relaxing colouring or even just navigation without getting the screen grubby.

DISPLAY

While the screen is still an 11-inch LCD panel with a 90Hz refresh rate, Xiaomi has upgraded the resolution to 2,560x1,600 pixels with a 274ppi density. It's also brighter than its predecessor at 600 nits compared to 400. I measured it at 480 nits with a Spyder X colorimeter in normal mode and a decent 570 nits in outdoor mode.

Overall, it's a nice screen for a budget tablet, with good colour



This is a nice screen for a budget tablet, with good colour reproduction and contrast.

reproduction and contrast. Not only is it as crisp and colourful as many more expensive options, but that 90Hz refresh rate helps keep things smooth, though you will have to switch it into custom 90Hz to use it more as the default auto mode uses 60Hz for most apps.

The bezel is thin enough to look modern while providing an area with which to hold the tablet.

The bezel is thin enough to look modern while providing an area with which to hold the tablet.

On the downside, though hardly surprising at this price, the Redmi Pad 2 doesn't have the best viewing angles so ideally, you'll be using it looking straight on. Other things you have to understandably deal with at this price include reflective glass, uneven backlighting and basic auto brightness.

There's no fingerprint scanner here – not in the display or power button – but you can use face unlock, which I've found to be quite reliable.

The audio is really impressive. It's not uncommon for devices this cheap to just go with the bare minimum, offering either a mono speaker or the most basic stereo speakers. Xiaomi has fitted the tablet with no less than four speakers – two on each short side – and it also has Dolby Atmos support. The speakers sound great for a range of content and the Atmos support makes a real difference, providing a much more dynamic and spacious audio. I've heard plenty of worse-sounding tablets for a lot more money.

PERFORMANCE

The Redmi Pad 2 runs on a Mediatek Helio G100 Ultra processor. A 2024 octa-core chip found in devices from the likes of Xiaomi, Tecno and Infinix.

It's a step up in name from the G99 found in the original but the pair have very similar specs.

If you buy the cheapest Redmi Pad 2 you get just 4GB of RAM and 128GB of storage. However, for an extra £50 you can upgrade to double both of those specifications.

You might not need the additional storage, perhaps (and you can add more via the microSD card slot if needed), but the 8GB of RAM could be an important asset. If you want to use the Redmi Pad 2 for anything demanding like running apps simultaneously or 3D games, then I'd seriously consider getting this model.

It's the model I've been testing here, and I don't think I'd want to drop down to 4GB of memory. Sure, the tablet has adequate performance overall for navigating, running various apps and gaming if it's at the lighter end of the scale, but even with 8GB of RAM, I've seen the device occasionally slow down.

It's one of the best for performance at this price range, but equally, you shouldn't expect too much of it. In other words, you can watch video content but don't try and edit gigabytes of footage. The Galaxy Tab A9 tablets offer better gaming performance if that's what you're after.

Elsewhere, you get a sufficient set of specifications like Wi-Fi 5, Bluetooth 5.3 and a headphone jack. Nothing exciting but they do the job while keeping the cost down.

Xiaomi has added an LTE model this year (with GPS) so you can get data on the go without having to find a Wi-Fi network, but this doesn't appear to be on sale in the UK.

Geekbench 6 (multi-core)

Xiaomi Redmi Pad 2: 1,946
Samsung Galaxy A9+: 2,010
Samsung Galaxy A9: 2,000

GFX Manhattan 3.1

Xiaomi Redmi Pad 2: 12fps
Samsung Galaxy A9+: 33fps
Samsung Galaxy A9: 50fps
Xiaomi Redmi Pad SE: 14fps
Oppo Pad Air: 13fps

Battery life

Xiaomi Redmi Pad 2: 10 hours, 2 minutes
Samsung Galaxy A9+: 8 hours, 32 minutes
Samsung Galaxy A9: 12 hours, 18 minutes
Xiaomi Redmi Pad SE: 13 hours, 16 minutes

Charge in 30 minutes

Xiaomi Redmi Pad 2: 21%
Samsung Galaxy A9+: 16%
Samsung Galaxy A9: 15%
Xiaomi Redmi Pad SE: 16%
Oppo Pad Air: 23%

PHOTOGRAPHY

We don't care about the cameras on tablets much and nor should you (really, just buy a budget phone if photography is important). However, you might find

you need them in certain situations. Primarily, a tablet (especially with a case that works as a stand) can be a useful tool for video calls. It's frustrating, then, that Xiaomi has done what a lot of tablet makers do and put the better shooter on the back.

It's frustrating that Xiaomi has put the better shooter on the back.

Even worse, is that the front camera has been downgraded from 8- to 5Mp. The quality is good enough for a video chat or meeting, provided the lighting is decent (don't have a window behind you).

Meanwhile, the rear camera is fine if you need some basic snaps – again, only in good lighting – but don't expect anything that looks better than a phone from 10 years ago.

BATTERY LIFE

The Redmi Pad 2 has a 9,000mAh battery inside, which makes it almost 2,000mAh larger than the Galaxy Tab A9+ and 1,000mAh more than its predecessor.

In our usual PCMark for Android battery test, the tablet lasted a respectable 10 hours and two minutes, outpacing the A9+'s eight hours and 32 minutes.


The Redmi Pad 2 went from 0- to 21 percent in 30 minutes.

It's a little behind the Redmi Pad SE's impressive 13 hours and 16 minutes, but that tablet has a much lower resolution screen.

In my real-world testing, watching an hour of video on YouTube saw the battery drop just over 10 percent, which is roughly in line with the PCMark result of 10

hours. Considering this is still what Apple quotes for video playback on iPads, it's a solid result, even if it's far off the 17 hours the firm claims.

It also offers slightly faster charging than its key Samsung rival at 18- versus 15 watts. However, this isn't anything to write home about.

The operating system is more intuitive and suitable for tablets compared to smartphones

In my test, using a Xiaomi 67-watt charger, the Redmi Pad 2 went from dead to 21 percent in 30 minutes. That's 5 percent more than the A9+, but not exactly 'fast'. A charger doesn't come in the box, but Xiaomi often adds one in for free on the Mi store.

SOFTWARE

Software is often something of a sticking point with Xiaomi devices. MIUI, the firm's own user interface, was divisive, and the pivot to HyperOS isn't actually that different.

I've personally found it a lot better over the last couple of years and I find the operating system more intuitive and suitable for tablets compared to smartphones.

Overall, the HyperOS 2 software based on Android 15 – which by the way is the most recent version and not a given on cheap tech – looks nice and is far cleaner and more intuitive than it used to be. I particularly like the static launcher bar at the bottom which shows your favourite and recent apps.

Elsewhere, you have the Google Discover feed to the left of the main home page and typical Android gesture-based navigation (or you can use buttons if you prefer).

If you're new to HyperOS, it might take a while to get used to the Apple-style system of splitting the notification and quick settings panels. You'll need to swipe down from left or right, respectively, depending on which you need. The Redmi Pad 2 comes with bloatware in different forms, but nothing too bad. First up, you have Xiaomi's

own apps like the Mi Browser, which duplicate Google's better ones (why would I use that instead of Chrome?).

Some may come in useful, such as Recorder, Mi Canvas and Security, but others can be simply hidden and forgotten about.

Then you get pre-loaded apps like WPS Office, LinkedIn, Netflix, Spotify, Temu and TikTok – some of which might save you the hassle of downloading them to be fair. Ones you're not keen on can fortunately be quickly uninstalled.

A frustrating omission is the ability to run two apps simultaneously in a split-screen view. This is a feature in HyperOS 2 on other devices but not on the Redmi Pad 2. This may be because the performance may suffer, or Xiaomi wants to give you a reason to buy something more expensive.

The Redmi Pad 2 comes with bloatware in different forms, but nothing too bad.

Regardless of the reason, don't buy it if this is a non-negotiable. What Xiaomi is pushing instead is Xiaomi Interconnectivity, which means you can sync things like calls and clipboard, as well as automatically hotspot to your phone.

You'll need a compatible Xiaomi device, of course, and, to be honest, I'd rather just be able to split-screen apps.

I'm waiting for confirmation from Xiaomi but it looks like the Redmi Pad 2 will get two years of OS updates and three years of security updates. It's not much, but also fairly standard for something this cheap.

VERDICT

If you're looking for a very cheap Android tablet with a nice design and mostly decent specs and performance, then the Redmi Pad 2 fits the bill.

For starters, it looks and feels like a much more expensive tablet thanks to its clean metal unibody design.

It then offers similar or better specs than its pricier key rival, the Samsung Galaxy Tab A9+. Everything is sufficient for the kind

of usage a budget tablet offers, even if nothing is particularly exciting.

Optional accessories, particularly the stylus, make it an interesting option, especially when Xiaomi bundles these in or offers them at a sizable discount.

Overall, the Redmi Pad 2 is an excellent all-round value tablet, and the downsides are mostly to be expected at this price anyway. Just carefully consider what you want it for if opting for the cheaper model with only 4GB of RAM.

Chris Martin

SPECIFICATIONS

- 11-inch (2,560x1,600; 274ppi) IPS LCD, 1B colours, 90Hz, 600 nits (HBM) display
- Android 15, HyperOS 2
- Mediatek Helio G100 Ultra (6nm) processor
- Octa-core (2x 2.2GHz Cortex-A76, 6x 2GHz Cortex-A55) CPU
- Mali-G57 MC26 GPU
- microSDXC card slot
- 4GB/6GB/8GB RAM
- 128GB/256GB storage
- Rear-facing camera: 8Mp, f/2.0, (wide), 1/4.0-inch, 1.12µm
- Selfie camera: 5Mp, f/2.2, (wide), 1/5.0-inch, 1.12µm
- Stereo speakers
- 3.5mm audio jack
- Wi-Fi 802.11 a/b/g/n/ac, dual-band, Wi-Fi Direct
- Bluetooth 5.3, A2DP, LE
- NFC
- USB Type-C, OTG
- Non-removable 9,000mAh battery
- 254.6x166x7.4mm
- 510g

Xiaomi Smart Band 10

Price when reviewed: £39 ★★★★☆

The Xiaomi Smart Band 10 arrives as the latest instalment in Xiaomi's long-running fitness tracker band series, which once again wants to redefine your expectations of what a cheap fitness tracker can be and do.

For the Xiaomi Smart Band 9's successor, you can expect a larger AMOLED display, a new look and tracking sensors along with promised improvements to its onboard sports and sleep smarts.

Xiaomi has rarely put a foot wrong with its budget tracker, elevating the design and performance with every new edition. The Band 10 once again looks set to build on that good work to make the latest Band a tracker that continues to punch above its price tag of just £39.

DESIGN

Xiaomi sticks largely to the same look as the Smart Band 9, matching up an aluminium case with a TPU strap and it's now introduced a new ceramic finish

case that's partnered up with a fluororubber strap.

The non-ceramic version comes in black, silver or rose, while the ceramic version comes in pearl white. I can't vouch for the look of the new model, but I can say that there's nothing cheap-feeling about the standard model I've tested here. The full colourways options are as follows: Midnight Black, Glacier Silver, Mystic Rose and Ceramic Edition Pearl White.

The new ceramic strap comes in pearl white.

Both versions measure 10.95mm thick, so again, the same as the Band 9. They weigh less than 30g without the strap and even with the strap, this is a light tracker to wear and is very unobtrusive to take to bed as well.

Xiaomi lets you match up those cases with 11 optional band accessories and that includes a pendant option to let you wear it around your neck. Removing the straps is a breeze and is done by pressing two buttons on the back of each strap.

I was able to switch between living with the TPU band and one of the metallic link bracelet-style straps. I didn't love the janky design of the metallic one, but it did at least offer a really nice solution to removing links to make it fit better. The TPU, while comfortable to wear, features one of my least favourite button clasp mechanisms that has on the odd occasion, got caught when taking off a T-shirt or jumper.


Xiaomi lets you match its cases with 11 band accessories.

I was able to switch between living with the TPU band and one of the metallic link bracelet-style straps.

A 5ATM waterproof rating does make it safe to go swimming and to keep on in the shower. I've taken it for a dip in the pool and it'll lock that screen before you get into swim tracking mode to prevent accidentally activating the display.

DISPLAY

The most notable design change lies with the screen where Xiaomi has moved from a 1.62-inch AMOLED display to a 1.72-inch, 520x212 one. That's protected by 2.5D reinforced glass. Xiaomi says it's also notched up the brightness, going from 1,200- to 1,500 nits.

The display is supposedly surrounded by thinner bezels than the previous Band, though I'm not sure I could really tell a massive difference. What I could tell is that growing the screen helps to make features like displaying notifications feel less cramped.

It is a nicely bright screen and you can adjust that brightness manually or leave the Band to do it automatically based on your conditions. You can keep the display on at all times too, with useful scheduled and smart modes available that display mode where it's most relevant to do so and help keep battery life strong.

Growing the screen helps to make features like displaying notifications feel a little less cramped.

Unlike the Chinese version of the Band 10, a microphone and speaker remain missing in action for Xiaomi's global model, which means missing out on being able to speak to Xiaomi's Xiao assistant.

The software runs smoothly and is a very easy operating system to get to grips with.

SOFTWARE

The look and feel of Xiaomi's HyperOS 2.0 feels mostly identical to what we got on the Band 9. It's a continuation of the good work Xiaomi has done to work on the Band's slim screen.

Swipe from the main watch face in all directions and that is your way to get around. There are no physical buttons, so it's all about taps, swipes and presses to navigate through menus and select items on screen.

The software runs smoothly and is a very easy operating system to get to grips with. The larger display gives widgets and text more room to spread out to help make things more glanceable.

While this is a fitness tracker first, it's not enough these days to just focus on that. While the small design does bring limitations on what Xiaomi can offer, it manages to squeeze in features like the ability to view notifications, weather forecasts, set up alarms, music controls and act a smartphone camera shutter.

Xiaomi manages to squeeze in features like the ability to view weather forecasts.

A focus mode removes distractions like notifications buzzing, so you can fully concentrate on any important tasks.

If you own a Xiaomi smartphone and some Xiaomi smart home kit, you can use the Band to take control of those smart home devices.

What is here works well. The screen is always going to make it feel inferior to a larger smartwatch display for viewing phone notifications, but for features including the music controls and viewing weather updates, it's perfectly fine.

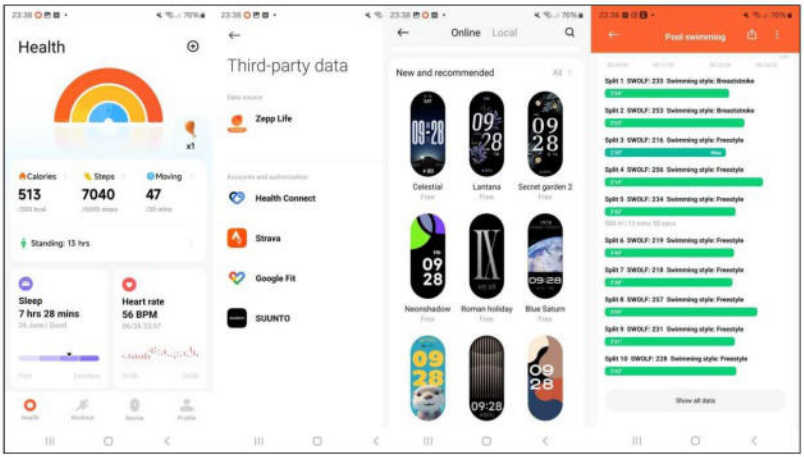
I also think Xiaomi does a great job with the quality of watch faces it offers on the Band and how well optimised they are to that AMOLED display.

Some of these features need to be first enabled in the Mi Fitness app, which can be an arduous process at times. It's also not one of the slickest companion apps available, either.

FITNESS & TRACKING

Tracking your health and fitness is really what the Smart Band 10 is all about. You won't find medical-grade sensors or built-in GPS (again). What you do get is enough sensors, modes and insights that can make it more than useful to have on your wrist during workouts, sitting at your desk or when heading for bed.

Sports tracking is an area where Xiaomi tries to improve the Band's abilities. You still have connected GPS to use your phone's GPS signal to track outdoor workouts. You're also getting hundreds of sports profiles, including indoor ones like rowing and more niche ones like horse riding.



The Mi Fitness app displays a range of information.

Xiaomi has moved to a 9-axis motion sensor it says most notably improves swim tracking performance and can

Xiaomi has moved to a 9-axis motion sensor it says most notably improves swim tracking performance.

offer a 96 percent lap count accuracy.

It now lets you broadcast heart rate data in real-time to other Bluetooth devices and this can be useful if you want to use it with a cycling computer or other connected equipment where you want to keep track of your effort.

I used the Smart Band 10 in the pool against two other swim trackers and it was able to detect stroke type correctly in sessions where I started with breaststroke and then switched to freestyle. The distance tracking was a length out from the other trackers, while metrics like SWOLF scores and calories burned were similar.

The heart rate broadcasting is only useful if the heart rate sensor is reliable, and in my tests, it's fared pretty well on the accuracy front. I've used it for runs, rows and indoor rides against the heart rate monitor chest strap and data like average readings and heart rate graphs were similar.

It did have a tendency to overreport maximum readings, however. It wasn't massively off, but it was enough to question its reliability for higher intensity workouts.

There are plenty of additional sports watch-style metrics like VO2 Max estimates, as well as training load insights and recovery time recommendations. While I'd take them more as guidance rather than definitive advice, the delivery of the metrics on the watch is nicely done.

When you're turning to the Band 10 to track daily steps, sleep, stress or keep tabs on your heart rate, it goes about its business in a pretty dependable way. I found step counts were typically around 500 to 600 steps in range of two other fitness trackers. For daily heart rate tracking, resting heart rate generally skewed higher against other devices, while average readings were typically higher as well.

Xiaomi offers its Vitality scores to provide added motivation to stay active over a week of tracking, but as I've said

You need to enable advanced sleep monitoring in the Xiaomi app to get a big fix of sleep data.

with previous Xiaomi devices, these scores need to feel more ingrained into the daily tracking process because right now, they're too easy to ignore.

At night, you need to enable advanced sleep monitoring in the Xiaomi app to get a big fix of sleep data. The Band will assess your sleep quality, break down sleep stages, sleep efficiency and produce analysis and advice, which Xiaomi refers to as interpretation and suggestions.

For data like sleep duration and time fallen asleep, the Band 10 held up well against two other sleep trackers. For additional data like the attempts to analyse sleep, the presentation is a bit messy.

BATTERY LIFE

Xiaomi sticks to the same 233mAh capacity battery used in the Smart Band 9 and that unsurprisingly leads to a similar battery performance. That's up to 21 days, which drops to 9 days if you keep the screen on at all times.

I started my testing time using the Band 10 with the screen on at all times and the daily battery drop with some sports tracking on average was 10 percent. That roughly adds up to the promised 9 days.

The band can last up to 21 days between charges.

Swap for the raise to wake mode and battery performance goes significantly further and will push closer to two weeks. That really does depend if you're turning on everything the Band 10 is capable of, including its most advanced sleep and health tracking.

It's not an improvement on the Band 9, but it's also not a drop in battery life either. What's more disappointing is that it once again uses a proprietary charging cable that clings to the back of the tracker's case.

An hour going from 0- to 100 percent battery means you don't have to keep it charged for long, at least.

VERDICT

The Xiaomi Smart Band 10 is another Xiaomi fitness tracker that looks and feels great both in hardware and software and offers great value if you want something to keep tabs on your activity and general wellness.

If you own the Xiaomi Smart Band 9, then the main reason to upgrade is the larger display and the added 9-axis sensor. Adding a ceramic version brings a more refined option, though the Smart Band 9 does already offer a pretty customizable look. I still think the Band 9 is a great tracker and should hopefully get even cheaper now that the Band 10 has arrived.

It's a more complete package than its closest budget rivals and shows that while the price has crept up, Xiaomi still reigns as the cheap fitness tracker champ. Mike Sawh

SPECIFICATIONS

- 1.72-inch AMOLED display
- Up to 21 day battery life (same)
- Connected GPS
- 9-axis motion sensor
- Optical heart rate sensor
- Sleep and activity tracking
- 150+ sports modes
- 15.95g (without strap), 23.05g (ceramic edition without strap)
- Launch colours: Midnight Black, Glacier Silver, Mystic Rose, Ceramic Edition Pearl White

RingConn Gen 2 Air

Price when reviewed: £239 ★★★★☆

The RingConn Gen 2 Air sees the Oura Ring 4 and Samsung Galaxy Ring rival offers a more affordable route to getting a smart ring on your finger. Like the very solid and very likeable flagship RingConn Gen 2, the Gen 2 Air is subscription-free and can do pretty much all the things that other smart rings can, from monitoring sleep, heart rate or keeping tabs on your stress levels.

You will have to live without some features and design traits that spending more on the Gen 2 will get you, but having spent considerable time getting to know the Air, there's still a very capable smart ring here that comes in a lot cheaper than the competition.

It's the cheap(er) smart ring to beat.

DESIGN

The RingConn Gen 2 Air thankfully follows in the design footsteps of RingConn's other smart rings giving you one of the best-looking ones you can currently slip onto your finger.

You've got your pick of either gold or silver finishes, where RingConn has now swapped lighter titanium for stainless steel and retains a look that's more squircle than fully round. More colours would be appreciated, of course.

This is one of the best-looking ones you can currently slip onto your finger.

Like the Oura Ring 4, there's a small marker on the outer casing to remind you of the optimal way to wear it and there's a free sizing kit that offers sizes from 6-14. I had the very same size as the RingConn Gen 2 and some rivals.

While those sensors don't disappear in the same way that they do on the Oura, it provides a snug, reliable fit where the ring doesn't have a habit of rolling around my finger. It hasn't scratched as badly as some other rings I've tested in for similar periods of testing either and it's nice to see that RingConn offers optional ring protectors to help on that front.

Waterproofing remains the same as the Gen 2, so you're getting something that's suitable to be submerged in water up to 100 metres depth. I've swum in a pool and open water and showered with it and the Gen 2 Air has been fit to keep on tracking after.

One disappointing change lies with the charging set-up. RingConn has ditched the charging case used for its other ring for a charging dock. That makes it a less convenient one to

The ring has a small marker on the outer casing to remind you of the optimal way to wear it

charge if you're travelling and a shame it's not there as it was one of the most compelling reasons to grab a RingConn over some rival smart rings.

FITNESS & TRACKING

In essence, you're getting the same optical sensors as featured on the RingConn Gen 2 that can deliver metrics like heart rate, SpO2, heart rate variability, skin temperature and respiratory rate. This ring will track daily activity like steps and monitor sleep and there are now also dedicated modes for tracking exercise that right now are restricted to running, cycling and walking.

What you mainly miss from the Gen 2 is the new sleep apnea feature. However, when I tested it, it massively dented the battery life so isn't a feature I think most will be hugely disappointed to forego.

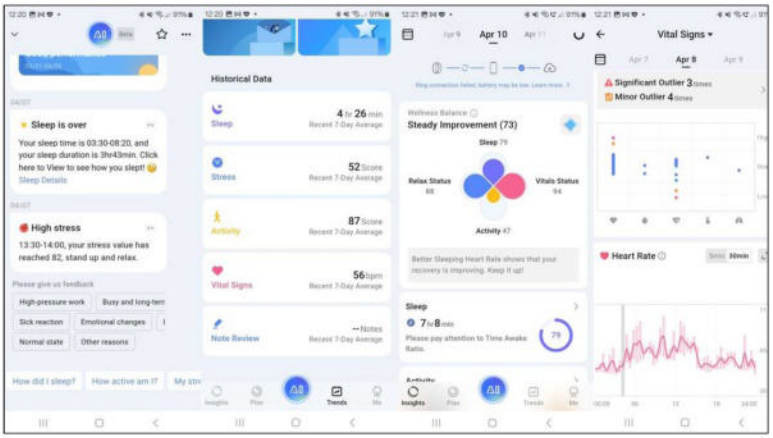
Full access to the companion app remains free as RingConn seeks to improve one part of the tracking experience that has definitely needed some refining. You've got a wellness balance widget that wants to help you understand if you've achieved a good balance of sleep, being active and staying relaxed.

The firm has added an AI-powered feature currently in beta testing that allows you to ask the chatbot about your sleep, exercise habits or stress levels.

Digging into the core tracking and I've been comparing data like step counts with the Oura Ring 4 and tracking from a Garmin watch and I've been happy with the differences between those step count totals and tells me the Air is telling me a similar story of my day in steps.

This ring will track daily activity like steps and exercise.

Looking at the daily heart rate data and I was happy with the resting heart rate and heart rate ranges as well as heart rate variability readings, though during some days when I kept it on for workouts, the max heart rate data in those recorded daily heart rate ranges



Full access to the companion app remains free.

a little extra value in terms of helping you to put data into better context, but I do still think it lacks the overall slickness of Oura's approach in comparison.

The presentation seemed low, which pointed to some problems delivering reliable heart rate during more intense use.

Taking it to bed and you can expect to see some pretty standard things in the app when you've synced your data. You'll get a sleep score, capture time slept, get a sleep efficiency breakdown and see a breakdown of sleep stages.

The core data did seem to chime well with other sleep trackers I tested it against, including the Oura Ring 4. It provided similar sleep scores, sleep duration and marked sleep stages similarly. The presentation of that data in the app is a bit busy, so is still something that RingConn needs to improve on.

Additional features like the Wellness Balance widget and the AI chatbot offer and also some of the language used need a bit of work. While RingConn doesn't promise to track serious health issues, I did become a bit unwell while testing and I found the Oura I was wearing alongside it did a better job of flagging and communicating that something wasn't quite right so bear this in mind if it's a feature you're looking for.

BATTERY LIFE

There is a drop in promised battery performance from the Gen 2, with the Air delivering up to 10 days as opposed to 12 days. However, that's still longer than many rivals, including the more expensive Samsung Galaxy Ring.

The good news is that the Air lives up to that promise. If you want a smart

If you want a smart ring that can comfortably last well over a week, this one does.

ring that can comfortably last well over a week, this one does.

I never felt that there was a worrying drop in daily battery drop-off, which was always under 10 percent a day. It didn't seem to hog the battery in a worrying way overnight either where some smart rings can work harder to track your sleep metrics.

When you do hit 0 percent, the charging dock takes 90 minutes to get you back up to full power.

The bad news here is that RingConn has disappointingly dropped the charging case from the flagship model in favour of a charging dock (above), but it's something you learn to live with, given how much better battery it offers than the competition.

VERDICT

If you're sold on the idea of owning a smart ring and you just can't stomach paying over £250 with a subscription on top, you can absolutely look at the RingConn Gen 2 Air.

It looks great, feels great to wear, has great battery life and plenty of the data it tracks feels reliable enough to make it worthy of wearing. I'd also pick it over the Amazfit Helio Ring, which can be picked up for slightly less, but has fewer ring sizes and doesn't quite match the Gen 2 Air's overall performance.

Where things do need to improve is the app, both in presentation and putting your data into better context. Granted, you don't have to pay to use that app, but if RingConn can make things better, it won't just be the price and battery life which make it a desirable option that undercuts other smart rings. Mike Sawh

SPECIFICATIONS

- Up to 10 days battery life
- Works with Android and iOS
- Subscription-free app
- 2.5- to 4g
- PPG sensor
- IP68/10 ATM water resistance
- Charging dock
- 24/7 heart rate monitoring

Best budget smartwatches

Cheap wearables that aren't trash. CHRIS MARTIN AND MIKE SAWH report

The Google Pixel Watch 3, Samsung Galaxy Watch 7 and Apple Watch Series 10 are all great premium smartwatches, but you're going to need to spend a fair amount of money to get your hands on them. In which case, one of the best budget smartwatches is the answer.

Fortunately, you don't need to spend as much money as those wearables to get a decent smartwatch. In fact, it's quite astonishing how good cheap smartwatches are these days and how small the gap is to flagship smartwatches in many ways.

We test and review countless smartwatches and here we've set the price limit at £250 to include cheap(er) models from the likes of Apple and Samsung but we have options from

just over £50. Below, you'll find our top 10 best budget smartwatches.

BUYING ADVICE

If you're looking to pick up a cheap smartwatch, there are some key things to look for. An obvious one is to make sure it's compatible with your smartphone – you can't use an Apple Watch with an Android phone, for example – but in addition to that, make sure all of the features advertised actually are available when paired to your phone. There can often be some differences in supported features for things like music players, using it to control your phone camera and enjoying the richest notification support.

If you like the idea of a smartwatch that can keep its display on at all times, make sure the smartwatch supports it, because it isn't always the case. Also, pay attention to what keeping that screen on does to the promised battery. Most smartwatch makers like to shout about the best battery life, but that figure rarely relates to when the screen is kept on.

Having GPS is great if you like to track your exercise outside predominantly, whether that's the built-in kind or connected GPS, which will mean launching the companion smartphone app to let you more accurately track your workouts. How much you should spend depends on your wish list. Do you want a premium metal design and comprehensive health tracking? If yes, then you likely need to spend a bit more. If you're happy with a more basic set of features, then you can opt for the cheapest models featured here.

What brands make cheap smartwatches?

There are a number of brands that now make cheap smartwatches with the likes of Amazfit, Xiaomi and Nothing's spin-off brand CMF among the most notable names. Samsung is also making cheaper smartwatches too – you'll see the Galaxy Watch FE above. If you're on the hunt for a cheap Apple Watch, the Apple Watch SE is only just over the £200 mark and can often be found for less in a good deal.

What can a smartwatch do without a phone?

Cheap smartwatches can do a fair bit without huge reliance on your smartphone.

While you need it to view your phone's notifications, sync over weather forecasts or calendar appointments, most have the motion and optical sensors to enable activity tracking

features like step counting, heart rate monitoring and also let you track your sleep when you take them to bed. It also means you can track your exercise without your phone too.

You also don't need your phone to access the pre-loaded watch faces where often you'll need to reach for your phone and the companion app to get more faces to choose from.

Do Google watches work with iPhone?

We mentioned compatibility as being an important part of buying your smartwatch and there's a lot of confusion about whether you can use a Google-powered wearable with iPhone.

Although it wasn't always the case, you can now use Wear OS (previously called Android Wear) with iPhone. However, there's a big but here because the experience is terrible and the Wear OS by Google app on iOS has countless 1-star reviews.

You are far better off sticking to an Apple Watch for the best experience. However, there many devices listed here that don't run Wear OS and do have support for both Android and iOS such as the CMF Watch Pro 2 and Huawei Watch Fit 3 which are significantly cheaper than an Apple Watch.

1. BEST OVERALL
CMF Watch Pro 2

Price when reviewed: £69

Pros: Watch design that doesn't feel budget; nicely stylised user interface; easy to use companion app; very affordable

Cons: Tracking can be hit and miss; not fit for swimming; some UI elements not optimised for round display

The CMF Watch Pro 2 is the second effort from the Nothing spin-off that bucks the trend that smartwatches need to feel cheap.

The Android and iOS-friendly Pro 2 does that by offering the ability to switch out both the straps and bezels

1.

to mix up what's matched up with the minimalist, aluminium case that houses a vibrant, 1.32-inch AMOLED display.

Features-wise, the Watch Pro 2 lets you make and take calls over Bluetooth, control music playing on your phone and lets you pick from over 100 different watch faces.

On the fitness tracking front, you'll find built-in GPS and support for over 120 sports modes, though it's a better fit for keeping track of daily steps, sleep and keeping an eye on your heart rate during the day.

It can run for up to nine- or 11 days with heavier usage to give this good-looking option plenty of staying power in between charges.

Perfect for: Those who want a round, affordable, stylish smartwatch with GPS that works on iOS and Android.

Further considerations: Look elsewhere for more accurate fitness tracking and if you need to take your watch swimming.

2. BEST FOR APPLE USERS
Apple Watch SE (2nd generation)

Price when reviewed: £219
Pros: Good value; solid feature set; great integration with iPhone
Cons: No always-on display; so-so battery life

The 2nd generation SE is the best Apple Watch option for most people with an iPhone who want a smartwatch without paying the prices of the flagship models or an ancient edition.

It is starting to age a little but the Watch SE 3 is still a way off and the price of the SE 2 is now under £200 if you find the right deal. Even at the full RRP of £219 for the smaller 40mm model, it is very reasonably priced – not something we can often genuinely say about Apple hardware products.

It has many of the features of the more expensive models, while maintaining the modern and iconic design with the same chipset as the Series 8. Battery

If you equally value smart features like third-party app integration, music storage, contactless payments and full fitness tracking, the Apple Watch is still the best smartwatch if you have an iPhone. The SE does everything surprisingly well considering it's the cheapest one.

Perfect for: If you want the cheapest Apple Watch currently available to use with your iPhone.

Further considerations: Look elsewhere for something cheaper (and newer) or wait for the Watch SE 3, rumoured to arrive later in 2025.

3. BEST SPORTS TRACKING
Huawei Watch Fit 3

Price when reviewed: £139
Pros: Lovely screen; nice mix of fitness and smartwatch features; good battery life; quick charging
Cons: Clunky presentation of some data; could scale back some features

The Huawei Watch Fit 3 is part of the new breed of fitness tracker and smartwatch hybrid that do both in an equally impressive manner.

Huawei ticks the design box offering a pick of six case colours made from aluminium with buttons that scream Apple Watch. It's got a decent 43mm frame and lets you remove the straps to mix up that look.

Along with a high-quality 1.82-inch AMOLED that can stay on at all times, Huawei makes room for a microphone and speaker to let you make calls and listen to music without headphones.

Running on Huawei's Harmony OS, the Fit 3 works with Android and iOS, with iPhone owners most notably missing out on the onboard music player support. You will get notifications, music controls and some preloaded watch faces. Unlike pricier Huawei watches, you don't get access to Huawei's AppGallery storefront.

It's a fitness tracker and sports watch in one with built-in GPS, activity and

sleep tracking covered and has upgraded the optical heart rate sensor to boost tracking accuracy.

You can get anywhere from four- to 10 days of battery to give the Fit 3 good stamina to go with its more likeable smartwatch look.


4.

Perfect for: Anyone who wants an Apple Watch-style design in a cheaper device, with GPS, AMOLED screen, good battery life and support for both Android and iOS.

Further considerations: Look elsewhere if you're on a tight budget.

4. BEST VALUE
Amazfit Bip 6

Price when reviewed: £79
Pros: Excellent screen; plenty of features; long battery life; very cheap
Cons: App is a little busy; an odd storage bug; AI assistant a bit disjointed

The Bip has been a smartwatch that from the very first version, has punched above its weight in terms of features and performance. For the Bip 6, Amazfit has gone big with the upgrades.

For starters, it's swapped TFT for a big and bright 1.97-inch AMOLED display and it instantly makes this budget smartwatch feel a lot less budget. Features-wise, you're getting the ability to make calls over Bluetooth, load on transport cards to make it easier to travel and have access to the Zepp Flow AI Assistant that's worked well in some, but not all, scenarios.

In the fitness department, it has built-in GPS to track outdoor runs and rides the smarts to record Hyrox workouts. You track heart rate and blood oxygen levels and it will serve up useful scores to tell you if you're ready to tackle a stressful day. There's also room for free offline maps for adventurers, which is a rare feature to find on a smartwatch this cheap.

Topped off with up to 14-day battery life or around six days in heavier use, and there's few better smartwatches at this price that can compete with

what the Amazfit Bip packs and also delivers. Overall, it's a lot of smartwatch for not much over £50 making it a top value option.

Perfect for: If you want a big OLED screen for under £100 as well as lots of features and excellent battery life.

Further considerations: Look elsewhere for a better software experience, particularly on the companion app.

5. BEST STYLE
Amazfit GTS 4

Price when reviewed: £199
Pros: Sleek design and comfortable fit; week-long battery life; wide range of tracking abilities
Cons: Lacks third-party app support; some inconsistencies with monitoring; Zepp app needs improvements

5.

Amazfit arguably kick-started the move to more attractive affordable smartwatches and the GTS 4 definitely fits the bill for delivering a sleek, cheap smartwatch.

The GTS 4 gives you four case colour options to pick from and strap options that add up to a surprisingly svelte and lightweight smartwatch. That's matched up with a bright and clear 1.73-inch AMOLED display.

Running on the Android and iOS-friendly ZeppOS, the GTS 4 has the skills to let you speak to Amazon Alexa, make Bluetooth calls and pile on your music to listen to your sounds on the move. If you want an OS that gives you big-name apps to download, then sadly that's not the case here.

The square smartwatch offers plenty of fitness tracking features to make it well-suited for runners, swimmers, cyclists and lovers of those more niche sporting pursuits.

It'll give you up to eight days of battery life or four days with heavier use, which you can extend to roughly a month if you want to strip back the features.

If you're looking for a stylish, square

smartwatch that promises a mostly solid performance, that's what the Amazfit GTS 4 gives you.

Perfect for: Those who want a stylish Apple-like wearable which isn't the Apple Watch.

Further considerations: Look elsewhere for better app support and software.

6. BEST CHANGEABLE DESIGN
Xiaomi Watch S4

Price when reviewed: £129
Pros: Rotating crown is a good addition; software has more mature look; still delivers good battery life; interchangeable bezels
Cons: Smart home controller needs Xiaomi smartphone; some features missing for iOS users; new gesture controls for Xiaomi devices only

Xiaomi's smartwatch with a switchable bezel builds on the very likeable look on the Watch S3 while adding new software features that aim to make it a much smarter smartwatch.

There's the welcome addition of a rotating crown, which makes navigating Xiaomi's HyperOS 2 software a nicer thing to do, with those swappable bezels now growing in number and generally feeling a touch more refined and polished.

Xiaomi's added a brighter AMOLED display though it doesn't keep the LTE connectivity included on the China version of the Watch S4 to make it more useful when away from your phone. Most of the new software smarts, like using it as a smart home controller, require owning additional Xiaomi hardware to use them, with the tweaked operating system now feeling like a better match for its sleek design surroundings.

There's no shortage of fitness and health features onboard, including the latest dual-frequency GNSS to offer a boost for outdoor sports tracking and you can get anywhere from a few

6.

days to a couple of weeks of battery out of this solid performer and a more sophisticated yet affordable smartwatch package.

Perfect for: If you want a flagship style watch at an affordable price with features like changeable bezels.

Further considerations: Look elsewhere for Wear OS.

7.

7. BEST PERFORMANCE
Honor Watch 4

Price when reviewed: £129
Pros: New lightweight and comfortable design; agile and fast touch experience; good AMOLED display; affordable
Cons: Honor Health mobile app; no always-on display option; cannot install third-party apps; no NFC

The Honor Watch 4 is another affordable buy that offers good looks and a software experience that, a few quirks aside, makes it a solid cheap smartwatch to pick up.

It's wrapping an aluminium case and silicone strap on your wrist with a 1.75-inch, 450x390 AMOLED display to stare down at. As a package, it's also waterproof up to 50 metres depth.

The Android and iOS compatible Watch 4 offers access to most of its features across the two phone platforms including notifications, music controls, making calls, with the music player mode only available to Android users.

For fitness tracking, there's built-in GPS along with some basic albeit useful navigation features to boost its abilities when exercising outside. There are some additional training insights like VO2 Max and rating your fitness age on offer.

It'll track your steps and sleep, though with varying accuracy, while battery life can max out at two weeks but is more likely to last a week. It's a good all-round package that offers surprisingly good sports tracking for the price.

Perfect for: Anyone who wants a cheap alternative to the Apple Watch.

Further considerations: Look elsewhere for contactless payments.

8. BEST HEALTH TRACKING
Samsung Galaxy Watch FE

Price when reviewed: £199
Pros: Responsive auto-tracking; clean Wear OS software; classic design; affordable
Cons: Old processor; not the best battery life; some hiccups with non-Samsung phone

The Samsung Galaxy Watch FE essentially sees Samsung take its older Galaxy Watch 4 and give it a bit of software tune up to make it a viable alternative to its pricier Galaxy Watch 7.

Given the Galaxy Watch hasn't radically changed all that much over the last few versions, the FE has a look very much in keeping with the latest Watch, with three colour options available and features a punchy 1.2-inch Super AMOLED display. Unlike newer watches, it comes with just the one 40mm case size option.

Running on Google's Wear OS 4 with Samsung's One UI 5 overlaid on top, the FE still gives you Google apps like Google Maps and access to the Google Play Store for more big-name apps to download.

When it's time to work out, there's your pick of over 100 workout modes and also usefully includes a running coach mode for running newbies. It'll track steps, sleep and even packs an ECG sensor, which is only accessible if you own a Samsung smartphone.

If you like the idea of a Samsung Galaxy Watch that looks and runs mostly like its latest Watch and you're an Android phone owner, this might be one for you.

8.

Perfect for: Samsung fans looking for the cheapest Galaxy Watch.

Further considerations: Look elsewhere for better performance and better value prices.

9.

9. BEST BUDGET WEAR OS
Xiaomi Watch 2

Price when reviewed: £169
Pros: Sleek design; high-quality display; slick Wear OS software; lots of health and wellness features
Cons: Erratic heart rate sensor; underwhelming battery life; not the latest software version; no automatic workout tracking

The Xiaomi Watch 2 gives you a more affordable route to Google's Wear OS when you'd typically have to spend a lot more to get access to Google's apps, user interface and all-important access to the Google Play Store.

Xiaomi gets plenty right with the design, matching up an aluminium case and the choice of a more exercise-friendly strap or leather and braided bands. The swim-proof smartwatch also hosts a good-sized, 1.43-inch AMOLED that's bright, vivid and can stay on at all times.

There's good all-round performance powered by one of Qualcomm's Snapdragon W5+ Gen 1 chipsets with 32GB of storage to play with and 2GB of RAM to keep things running nice and smooth.

Along with access to Google's best through Wear OS, there are over 160 workout modes to pick from, built-in GPS and an optical heart rate sensor that wasn't the best-performing during exercise. Like many budget options, it's a better fitness and sleep tracker. One Wear OS undesirable is that the battery isn't exactly stellar and lasts typically a day.

If you want a cheap route to Wear though, the Watch 2 will give you that.

Perfect for: Those who want an affordable and sleek smartwatch running Wear OS.

Further considerations: Look elsewhere for better battery life and tracking.

10. BEST FITNESS TRACKER HYBRID

Xiaomi Smart Band 9 Pro

Price when reviewed: £62
Pros: Attractive design; bright, vibrant display; built-in GPS; affordable
Cons: No physical buttons; some spotty fitness tracking accuracy; Mi Fitness app still needs some work

If you like your smartwatches slimmer and more fitness tracker in form, that's exactly what the Xiaomi Smart Band 9 Pro serves up.

There's three strong colour options to pick from with the ability to switch in more stylish strap options and while it's a button-less design, it helps to create a more minimalist profile where the emphasis is placed on tapping and swiping on a now brighter 1.74-inch AMOLED screen.

10.

While its smartwatch features are kept to the basics like displaying notifications and controlling music playing on your phone, it's a smartwatch that does play nice with third party apps including Apple Health, Google Health and even Strava.

There's enough room to squeeze in built-in GPS that's best suited for casual workout users, though the promise of improved heart rate and blood oxygen tracking isn't the way things played out in our testing.

Battery life of up to 21 days typically worked out to closer to a week with key features in regular use, which is still a good showing for a smartwatch that looks like a fitness tracker and is going to appeal to anyone looking for a nice Fitbit alternative.

Perfect for: If you want an affordable smartwatch with a big screen and GPS.

Further considerations: Look elsewhere for better software and tracking.

21 ways Gemini can be useful on Android

Forget all the generative-AI silliness: Gemini has some genuinely practical purposes on Android – if you know what to ask. JR RAPHAEL reports

Right now, Gemini is getting a bit of a bad rap – at least, among certain circles of savvy users who are closely tuned into the technology.

It's easy to see why: Google rushed Gemini out of the gates before it was ready. It increasingly crippled the perfectly fine Google Assistant experience in the meantime, and still today, Gemini can't do everything Assistant did in terms of day-to-day device basics (while Assistant no longer handles those same tasks consistently anymore, either).

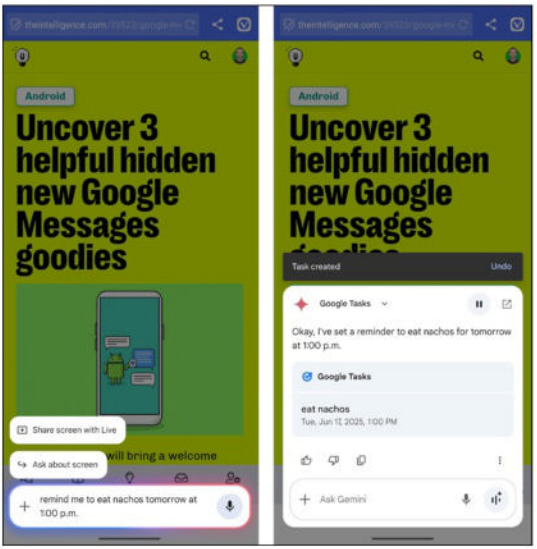
Gemini is also overly complicated and confusing, with its many models and cryptically coded options. It's being shoved in our faces at every possible opportunity in a move reminiscent of a certain other much-maligned

Google service: Google+. And, most troubling of all, it's being positioned as an all-purpose answer machine when it gets answers wildly wrong anywhere from 5 to 20 percent of the time. Just like all the other generative AI chatbots of the moment, in other words, it's a mess.

But the problem with Gemini (and other similar systems) is less the technology itself and more the way the tech industry for some reason insists on framing it. These large-language model mechanisms just aren't good at understanding context or offering factual answers. They shouldn't be set up to serve as replacements for search as they often get stuff wrong often.

They are, however, useful in other ways – namely when it comes to lower-level, more mundane sorts of tasks where context, judgment, and a lack of flat-out fabricating aren't required.

Here are 21 simple ways Gemini can be useful and worth using on Android.



Gemini can set a reminder for you without interrupting what you're doing.

NOTES AND MEMORY WITH GEMINI ON ANDROID

1. In a reminder that the simplest features are often the most practical of all, Gemini can remind you of anything, anytime – just like Google Assistant could before it. Simply fire it up and say "Remind me [whatever] at [whenever – day and/or time]" and you're done.

It may not be flashy, but I'd be willing to wager you'll rely on that much more often than the on-demand image generation or 'creative thought partner' poppycock Google and every other AI-obsessed company is pushing with these things these days.

2. Basic reminders aside, Gemini is great at remembering specific information and then recalling it for you later. Try telling the service something like "Remember that the door code is 90210" and whenever you need to

recall the number, just ask: "What's the door code".

3. The next time you need to make a more extensive note to yourself, tell Gemini to Create a note that says whatever you've got on your mind. It'll save it into the Google Keep Android app for easy future finding.

PLACES AND EVENTS WITH GEMINI ON ANDROID

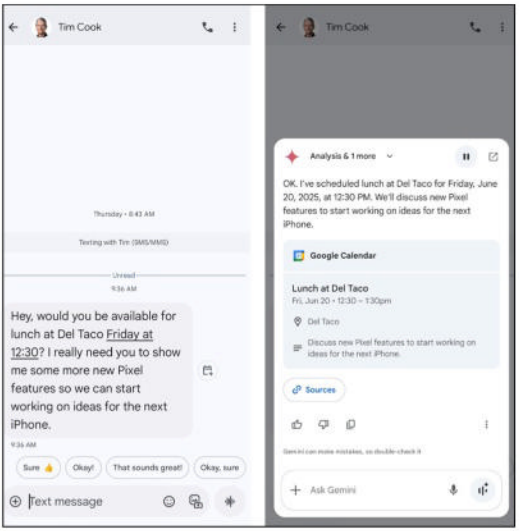
4. If you're ever feeling lost – or maybe you're at a location you want to track down again in the future – fire up Gemini on your phone and ask: Where am I?" Gemini will give you the nearest address in return. And then…

5. After you've asked Gemini for your current location, try saying "Remember that location as…" followed by some sort of description you might use in the future. You can then later ask Gemini where that place is, and it should serve back up the very same spot.

6. Gemini can help you get from point A to B, too. In addition to asking it to give directions to a particular place, you can ask it questions like: "How long would it take me to get a pizza, right now?"

7. Just like Assistant before it, Gemini is great at helping you check your calendar. Ask it, for example, "What's on my agenda for today?" for a quick and easy way to see what you've got ahead.

8. You don't have to stop with calendar check-ins: Gemini can also make new appointments for you in some especially useful ways. In addition to simply asking it to "Create a new calendar appointment for [whatever] on [whatever day and time]", you can summon Gemini anytime you've got information about an event on your screen – in an email, on a website, within a text or Slack thread, or whatever – then tap the

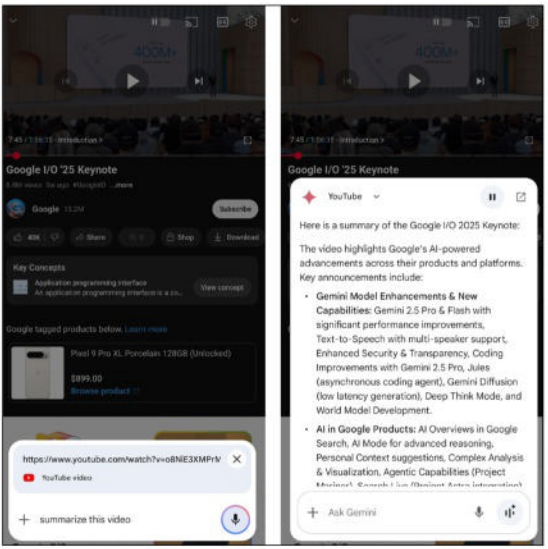


Creating calendar events is especially easy with Gemini's assistance.

'Ask about screen' button and say "Create a calendar appointment for this". Gemini will interpret the visible information and format it into a full event on your calendar in a single step.

INTELLIGENT INTERACTIONS WITH GEMINI ON ANDROID

9. When you're looking at a web page, a document, or any other type of text on your Android device and you aren't in a position to read it with your own two eyes, get Gemini, tap that same 'Ask about screen' button, and say "Read this out loud".



Get a simple text summary of any long video in seconds with Gemini by your side.

10. If, on the other hand, you want a summarized version of something on your screen, follow those same steps from the previous tip but this time say Summarize this. Gemini will start to speak a simple summary of the info aloud to you (provided you spoke aloud to it), or you can press the pause button and read its streamlined overview yourself if you'd rather.

11. Speaking of summarizing, Gemini's condensing powers also extend to YouTube – where a quick and simple summary can be useful. Use that same 'Ask about screen' button again while you've got a video in front of you and say "Summarize this video".

12. No matter what you're doing on your device, you can call up Gemini and ask it to "Summarize my most recent incoming emails". As long as you've got the Gemini Gmail/Google Workspace integration active, Gemini will give you a bird's eye view of what's awaiting in your inbox at that very moment.

13. Trying to identify something you see on your screen, such as a landmark, plant or flower? Press the 'Ask about

screen' button while it's visible and ask exactly what you want to know and Gemini will give you an answer in the blink of an eye.

BASIC DEVICE FUNCTIONS WITH GEMINI ON ANDROID

14. Check up on your phone's power in by asking "What's my battery level?"

15. Snap a screenshot of anything on your screen simply by asking Gemini to "Take a screenshot".

16. You can review your captured screenshots by asking Gemini to "Show my screenshots".

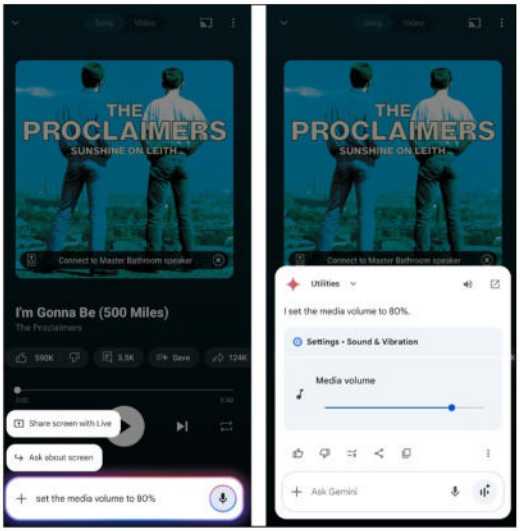
17. It may seem obvious, but Gemini can send text messages on your behalf. Just say "Send a text message to…" followed by the name of the person you've got in mind (and, optionally, the entire message, too, if you want to save yourself a second step).

18. Similarly, Gemini can place a call via the command "Call…" followed by the name of the contact or number you're needing.

19. Set your sound volume by asking Gemini to "Set the media volume" – or call, ring, notification or alarm volume – either on a one to 10 scale or to a specific percent value.

20. You can also rely on Gemini to adjust all sorts of system settings – for instance, asking it to "Turn Do Not Disturb on (or off)", "Turn the torch on (or off)" or "Turn Bluetooth on (or off".

21. Gemini can get you where you need to be within your Android system settings without any of the usual hunting. Tell it to "Open up the Accessibility settings" – or any other area or specific option – and watch it fly you over where you need to be.



Adjusting any system volume level is never more than a spoken command away.

Opinion: I was wrong to upgrade to Android 16

Don't make the same mistake I did. ANYRON COPEMAN reports

As someone who uses Android every single day, the arrival of a new major version is always an exciting moment for me.

It's usually pretty easy to predict when it'll arrive, too. With a couple of exceptions, Google appeared to have settled into a consistent September/October release window.

Until now, that is. With Android 16, Google decided that 10 June was the most appropriate release date. June! Before summer officially started, and more than two months ahead of the expected launch of the Pixel 10 series.

As you can imagine, I was excited. As someone who's used the Pixel 9 Pro XL (one of the few currently compatible

devices) for months, I was ready to experience something new.

However, my experience with Android 16 so far couldn't have been more disappointing. A combination of missing features and broken functionality has left me regretting being among the early adopters.

MATERIAL NOT VERY EXPRESSIVE

Android 16 will bring lots of changes with it, but the most significant is 'Material 3 Expressive'. This new design language is a big change compared to the previous 'Material You' interface, using colour, shape and movement in an attempt to deliver an experience that feels more personal and interesting.

Based on official screenshots and Google's descriptions, I'm not convinced this will be a successful move, despite being part of the Gen Z target demographic. But I am very excited to give it a try, and open to changing my mind.

Sadly, unless I download the beta, I won't get a chance any time soon. Material 3 Expressive won't actually be available until the QPR1 update, with rumours suggesting its launch could coincide with the Pixel 10 on 20 August. At the time of writing, that's seven weeks away! The current version is disappointingly familiar.

My question is: why? Why launch 'Android 16' as a half-baked version without its headline changes? Why not wait until later in the year when Material 3 Expressive is actually available? And why pretend that people are getting Android 16, when it's really just a rehashed Android 15 for now?

The version of Android 16 I'm currently using isn't totally devoid of changes, with a new VIP widget, support for custom stickers and real-time photography tips all being added. But none of these would convince anyone to upgrade – I certainly wouldn't have bothered if I'd known.

Material 3 Expressive is nowhere to be seen yet.

IT'S REALLY BUGGING ME

However, Android 16 has a much bigger problem than the lack of new features. It's a buggy mess right now, at least in my experience.

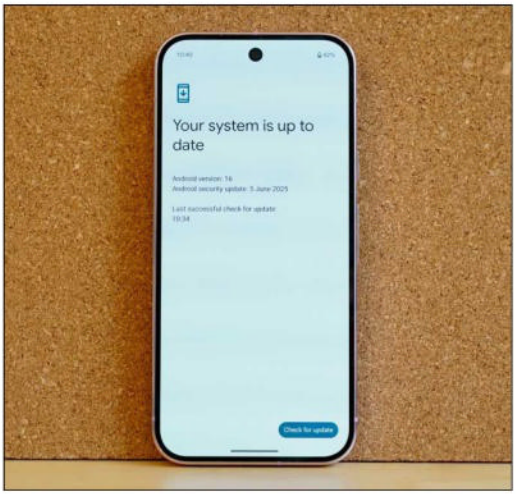
Here are all the issues I've run into since getting Android 16 just a couple of weeks ago: app crashes on a daily basis; unresponsive apps several times a week; parts of one app incorrectly overlaid on another on multiple occasions; 10 pop-ups, three seconds apart, asking me if I wanted to close the 'unresponsive' WhatsApp or wait (it was working just fine).

Oh, and one time where the phone just switched itself off and wouldn't respond for several minutes, despite having plenty of charge. It eventually came back to life after plugging in and intermittently holding down the power button.

None of these are major issues in and of themselves (except maybe the unresponsive phone), but they are all very annoying. Combined, the bugs make for a clunky, frustrating experience that you just can't rely on.

As a result, the version of Android 16 on my Pixel 9 Pro XL is undoubtedly worse than Android 15. I wish I'd never upgraded (or downgraded, in this case), especially on my main phone, and I'd urge you to do the same, at least until most of the bugs are patched.

If not, you could be in for a few nasty surprises.



It's Android 16 in name only.

5 tech travel essentials I can't live without

Besides a smartphone, of course. ANYRON COPEMAN reports

Let's face it: travelling is stressful. So, whether you're going a few miles down the road or to the other side of the planet, it's crucial to prepare effectively.

I don't need to tell you to pack suitable clothes, sun protection or a passport if you're going abroad. And by reading this article, I'm going to assume you already have a reliable smartphone and travel adapters to charge your tech while you're away.

However, the focus of this article is on four items that I personally use almost every time I spend a night away from home. While a lot of my travel is for work, these gadgets have near-universal appeal.

1.

1. PORTABLE LAPTOP CHARGER

If you plan on taking your laptop with you while travelling, a portable charger is a must. The problem is, the portable phone charger you already own probably isn't powerful enough to charge your laptop, so you need one specifically designed for the job.

There are plenty of options out there, but the one I use is the Anker 737 PowerCore 24K, which combines a compact design with large 24,000mAh capacity. For context, that's enough to fully charge the Samsung Galaxy S24 Ultra almost five times over.

However, the important thing here is that it can fully charge almost any laptop and have capacity to spare. And with Power Delivery 3.1 support, it can reach speeds of 140-watt for both input and output.

My work laptop has terrible battery life, so this has saved me on more than one occasion. Without it, I simply couldn't have done my job.

2. NOISE-CANCELLING HEADPHONES

If you've ever been on a noisy train or plane, you'll know the value of noise-cancelling headphones. Being able to suppress the sound around me has been a godsend on multiple occasions. It's allowed me to focus on work when necessary, or get some much-needed rest.

I often wear them without any music playing, but noise cancelling helps deliver more immersive audio. You can connect via Bluetooth of course, but the 3.5mm jack means they're compatible with almost all in-flight entertainment systems.


2.

Personally, I use the PuroPro headphones that I reviewed a few years ago. They combine decent sound quality with solid noise cancellation, superb comfort and decent battery life.

However, for the best noise-cancelling experience, I'd recommend the Sony WH-1000XM5.

3. AN ESIM

Embedded SIM cards (aka eSIMs) are becoming very popular, especially for travelling and it's easy to see why. They are completely digital, most modern phones support eSIM and it can be set up before you even leave your house, avoiding the stress and time wasted looking round an airport for a local SIM card.

While major networks can offer you an eSIM, numerous dedicated providers have popped up, meaning there is plenty of choice for plan lengths, amount of data and competitive pricing without roaming fees or other extra charges for things like 5G speed and tethering.

I've used Airalo on a number of trips to the US and I'm likely to get an eSIM for any international travel now, whether it's a short work trip or a long holiday. Airalo even offers 1GB of free data for your first day.

4. E-READER

An e-reader is a useful gadget for any book lover, allowing you to store thousands of volumes on a single device. But its effects are magnified while travelling, where you don't have access to your bookshelves or local library for physical books.

I find reading to be a useful way to unwind before bed, but it can also help pass the time during long flights or any time you want a break from colour screens. The e-ink technology used on e-readers is known to be easier on your eyes.

My current e-reader of choice is the Kindle Paperwhite Signature Edition, which lasts for ages and supports audiobooks via Audible.

However, a Kobo might be a better pick for you, especially if you want to access e-books from your local library.

5. ALARM CLOCK

If you've read my article on my favourite piece of tech from the past few years, you'll know I'm a fan of a physical alarm clock. That remains the case while travelling, partly because I'm paranoid my phone will run out of battery and not wake me up. But of course, a mains-powered light alarm isn't suitable, so I use a small portable one instead.

This Tisaika model is cheap, fairly durable and powered by a single AA battery. Its hands glow in the dark, and crucially for me, it doesn't disturb me with a ticking sound.

With these four items in my bag, my travel experience is more enjoyable and less stressful than it otherwise would be.

5.

MACOS TAHOE: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Macworld

AUGUST 2025

A NEW LOOK AND NEW FEATURES
MAKES THE iPHONE BETTER THAN EVER

iOS 26

IT CHANGES EVERYTHING!


FOUNDRY