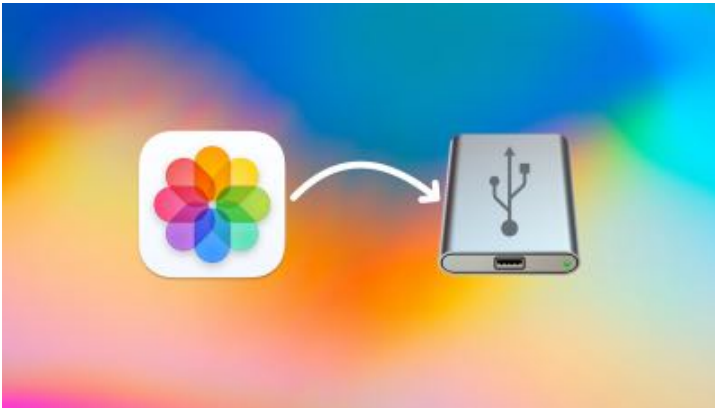


### Summary

Backing up iCloud photos to an external hard drive is recommended for data security. While Apple's official export method is reliable, it can be inconvenient for frequent backups. Third-party apps like Parachute Backup for Mac and BackiGo for iPhone offer more convenient and automated backup solutions.

Pranay Parab August 13, 2025

How to keep an offline copy of online photo backups.

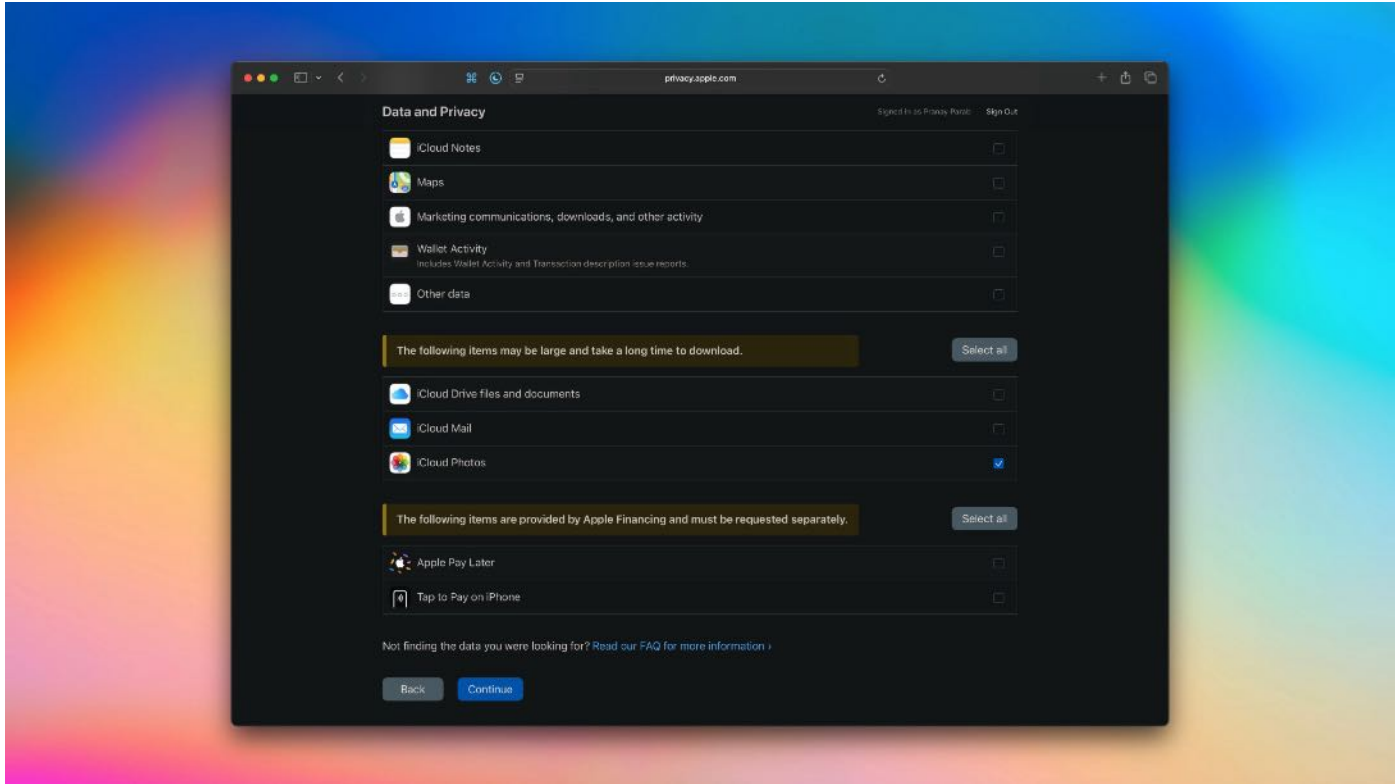


Credit: Icons: Apple

If you've backed up your iPhone photos to iCloud, you're already doing better than most people. Keeping an online backup of your photos means it's easy to retrieve them if something happens to your phone. But even then, it shouldn't be your only solution. Photos stored in the cloud can come and go more easily than you think—for example, if you delete a synced photo on any one Apple device, it's also deleted from your iCloud account.

For this reason, it's always a good idea to back up your photos to a second location, preferably offline. Apple doesn't make it very easy to do that, as I learned the hard way last year, when a close family member passed away. My family and I were trying to save a copy of their photos, and before we could even properly register our grief, we found ourselves juggling a bunch of different tools to save their important photos. Since then, I've learned a lot about exporting photos from iCloud to external hard drives, so you don't run into the same problems we did. Here are the best ways to back up your iCloud photos locally, including some methods that are way easier than the official Apple one.

## Using Apple's official export method to back up iCloud photos



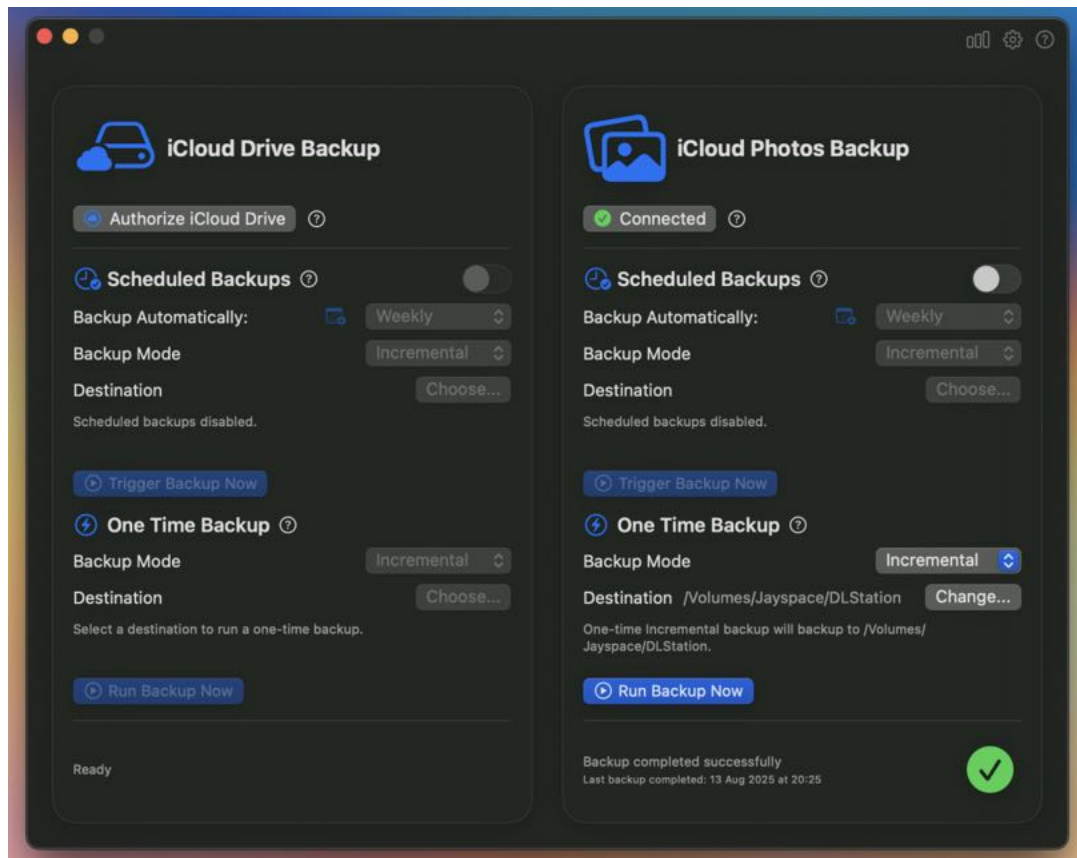
Credit: Pranay Parab

The first part of call here is Apple's official export method. There are two primary ways to do this—download your photos from [iCloud.com](https://www.icloud.com) or request a copy of your data from Apple's data privacy page. Downloading from iCloud is best for an immediate backup, but it only lets you download about 1,000 photos at a time, and these downloads can sometimes get stuck due to bandwidth. The more reliable method is to request Apple for a copy of all your photos, but you'll have to wait up to a week for Apple to send you a link to where you can download it. Here's how to make a data request for your iCloud photos:

1. Open [Apple's data & privacy website](https://www.apple.com/privacy) and sign in with your Apple Account.
2. Click Request a copy of your data.
3. Scroll down and choose **iCloud Photos** from the list. Click **Continue**.
4. On the next page, choose the maximum size for your backup files. Apple will divide your photos into downloads of the file size you pick. If you pick 1GB, then you'll have to download more files to complete the export, and if you pick 25GB, then each file will be larger, but you'll need to do fewer downloads overall.
5. Once you've chosen a file size, click **Complete request**.

Afterwards, Apple will send you an email confirming your data request, and you'll have to wait up to a week to receive a download link. Once it arrives, you'll be able to download all your photos and videos directly to your external hard drives. This method is perfect for completing a one-time backup of all your data, but if you want to keep backing up every new photo you make to an external hard drive, you'll have to manually download them off iCloud each time. That is quite inconvenient, but there is a simpler way to do it.

## Use a Mac app to back up your iCloud Photos



Credit: Pranay Parab

If you don't want to wait before downloading your iCloud Photos, you can use third-party apps to back up your data. One of my favorites is [Parachute Backup](#) (\$5), which supports backing up iCloud Photos and iCloud Drive files to your Mac, external hard drives, or even network-connected storage such as a NAS.

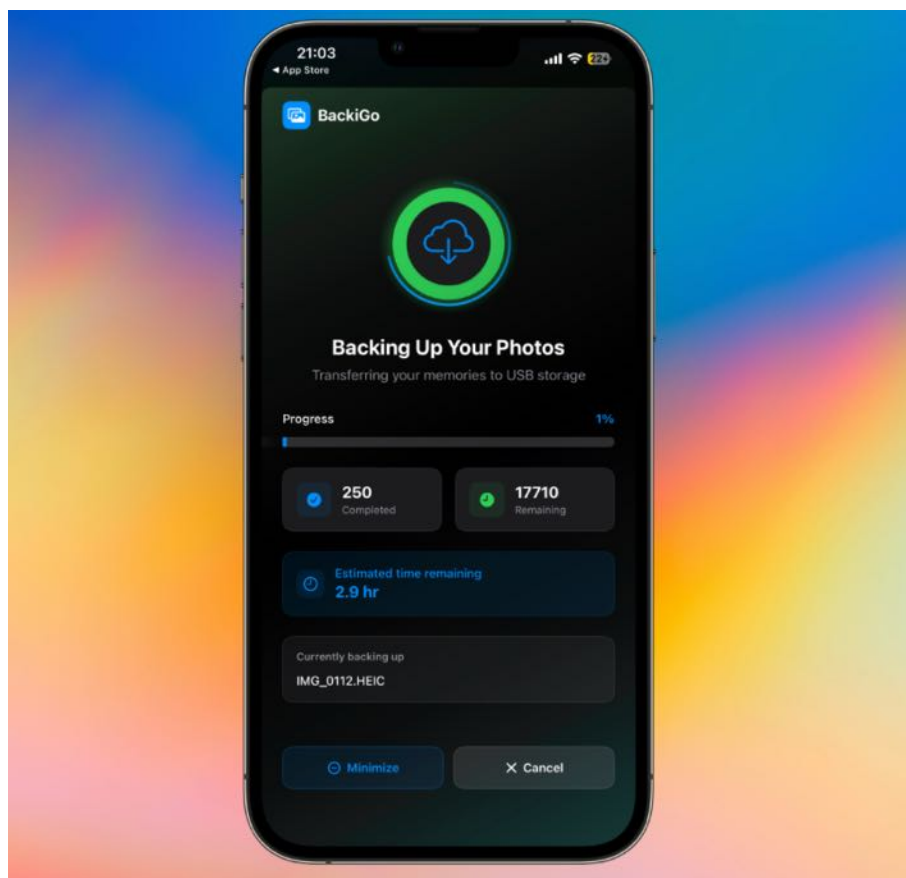
Parachute Backup is quite easy to use and supports incremental backups, which means that you don't have to keep backing up photos manually every time you take a new one. Instead, this app can detect when you have a new photo and copy it over to your designated external hard drive in an instant, without redownloading older pictures that have already been backed up. The app also supports full backups, too,

which is great in case you want to copy over all of your photos to a second external drive.

...

Here's how to get started. When you first open Parachute Backup, you'll see two sections—iCloud Drive and iCloud Photos. Just click the Authorize button under iCloud Photos, grant access to the app, and click **Run Backup Now**. The app will handle the rest. You can also configure sync scheduling on the same page to ensure that the app backs up your new photos when you want, whether that's right away or at set times.

## Use an iPhone app for iCloud Photos backups



Credit: Pranay Parab

For users on mobile, BackiGo is an iPhone app that can fetch your photos off iCloud and save them to an external hard drive. You can either connect an external drive to your iPhone's USB-C port, or add network-connected storage to the Files app, and use [BackiGo](#) to save photos to those locations. The app does a pretty good job moving iCloud Photos to external drives, and I like to use it to make backups of iCloud photos, then delete them off my phone to save space.

The default setting enables incremental backups, which ensures that after the first backup is completed, only new photos are backed up to the external hard drive. You can get started with BackiGo for free, and the app can back up 500 photos for you without requiring you to pay. After that limit, you have multiple payment options: \$1/month, \$7/year, or a one-time payment of \$15 to unlock all features.



## **Pranay Parab**

Pranay Parab is an independent tech journalist based in Mumbai, India. He covers tech for Lifehacker, and specializes in tutorials and in-depth features.