

Macworld Which iPhone has the best camera?

Want the iPhone with the best camera? We look at the iPhone camera tech and features that mean even professional photographers use iPhones and let you know which iPhone camera is best.

By Jason Cross and Karen Haslam JAN 1, 2025 3:30 am PST



Image: Dominik Tomaszewski / Foundry

Every year without fail, the new iPhone delivers one of the best cameras on any smartphone. Basically, any iPhone you buy—even the previous year's model—will snap excellent photos and record videos in stellar quality.

It's that consistency, along with the popularity of Macs among [photo](#) and [video](#) professionals, that makes the iPhone so popular among photographers and videographers. Whether you're a pro or just

an enthusiast, the iPhone that is best for photography is almost always the newest one—but that also tends to be the most expensive option, so is that the model you should buy?

While the top of the range [iPhone 16 Pro](#) and [iPhone 16 Pro Max](#) both offer advanced cameras and impressive technologies that will result in professional-looking photographs, the other iPhones still take excellent photos and are worthy of consideration.

We will run through the current iPhones that Apple is selling now, along with some iPhones from the past few years. This way we can advise on the best iPhone for photography that fits within your budget.

You may also like to read our [iPhone buying guide](#) and our [iPhone comparison](#).

How the iPhone cameras compare

Every year, with each new iPhone, Apple improves the camera and video features of its iPhones. We'll begin with an overview of the camera specs for the current iPhone models, before going on to look at the camera features that Apple has introduced over the years.

With the iPhone 16 line, the iPhone 16 Pro and Pro Max have the same camera hardware, while the Pro models that launched a year earlier in 2023 had different telephoto cameras. The Pro models differentiate themselves from the non-Pro models

with the third camera – telephoto (as usual) and a sharper 48 megapixel ultra-wide camera.

iPhone	Main camera	Ultra Wide	Telephoto	Optical Zoom
iPhone 16 Pro/Max	48MP, f/1.78	48MP, f/2.2	12MP, f/2.8	0.5, 1, 2, 5x
iPhone 16 Pro	48MP, f/1.78	48MP, f/2.2	12MP, f/2.8	0.5, 1, 2, 5x
iPhone 16 Plus	48MP, f/1.78	12MP, f/2.2		0.5, 1, 2x
iPhone 16	48MP, f/1.78	12MP, f/2.2		0.5, 1, 2x
<i>iPhone 15 Pro Max</i>	<i>48MP, f/1.78</i>	<i>12MP, f/2.2</i>	<i>12MP f/2.8</i>	<i>0.5, 1, 2, 5x</i>
<i>iPhone 15 Pro</i>	<i>48MP, f/1.78</i>	<i>12MP, f/2.2</i>	<i>12MP f/2.8</i>	<i>0.5, 1, 2, 3x</i>
iPhone 15 Plus	48MP, f/1.6	12MP, f/2.4		0.5, 1, 2x
iPhone 15	48MP, f/1.6	12MP, f/2.4		0.5, 1, 2x
<i>iPhone 14 Pro Max</i>	<i>48MP, f/1.78</i>	<i>12MP, f/2.2</i>	<i>12MP, f/2.8</i>	<i>0.5, 1, 2, 3x</i>
<i>iPhone 14 Pro</i>	<i>48MP, f/1.78</i>	<i>12MP, f/2.2</i>	<i>12MP, f/2.8</i>	<i>0.5, 1, 2, 3x</i>
iPhone 14 Plus	12MP, f/1.5	12MP, f/2.4		0.5, 1x
iPhone 14	12MP, f/1.5	12MP, f/2.4		0.5, 1x
iPhone SE	12MP, f/1.8			0.5, 1x

Recent handsets that are no longer sold by Apple are shown in italics, you may still be able to buy one of these models.



“Hidden Gem” (water bead in leaf) by Jirasak Panpiansin (@joez19). Macro photograph, shot on iPhone 13 Pro Max. Apple

Looking at the specs sheet you wouldn't think the iPhone 16 offered an improvement over the iPhone 15, but its Ultra Wide camera now supports macro photography, which is very popular. The cameras can now shoot spatial photos and video for the [Vision Pro](#), too.

The apertures are also a significant variation across iPhones, changing practically every generation as Apple tries to design an iPhone capable of even better low-light photography. An *f/1.6* aperture on the iPhone 15 will take in more light than the *f/1.8* aperture on the iPhone SE, for

example. You may therefore be wondering if the *f/1.6* aperture would match the *f/1.5* aperture in the iPhone 14, but the aperture is only part of the story. In each generation,

Apple also improves the camera sensor, image pipeline, and processing software. The iPhone 14 Pro gained a quad-pixel sensor that combines every four pixels into one large quad-pixel equivalent to 2.44 µm, and this is retained in more recent iPhones.

Another benefit of the newer iPhone cameras is second-generation sensor-shift optical image stabilization, which was a new feature of the iPhone 14 Pro and Pro Max, and is now only available in the iPhone 15 Pro and Pro Max. This enhances the sensor-shift optical image stabilization found on the iPhone 15, 14 and the 13-series.

Explore frequently asked questions



How the zooms compare: iPhone 14 Pro Max vs. iPhone 15 Pro Max. Simon Lohmann

The 5x zoom introduced in the iPhone 15 Pro Max makes a huge difference in telephoto shots, and is retained in the iPhone 16 Pro and Pro Max.

However, if you don't require a telephoto lens and aren't interested in macro photography, there are good options for photography fans among Apple's less expensive iPhones.

What features do iPhone cameras have?

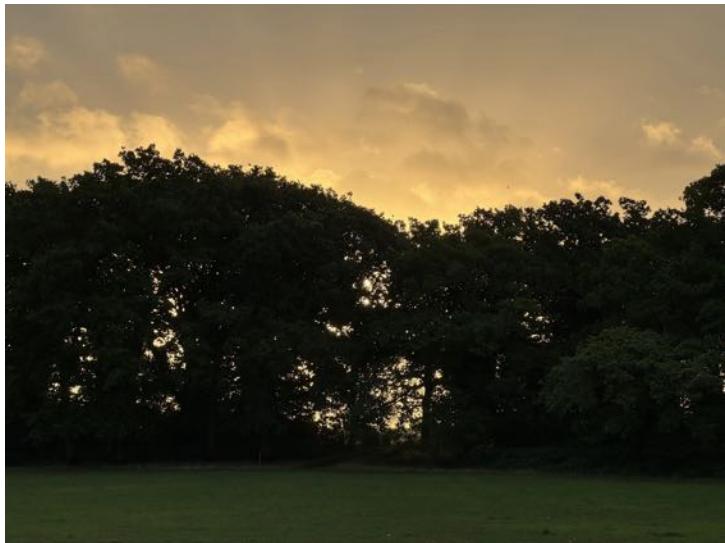
All iPhones can take good photographs thanks to Apple's innovations in photography software and the processing that runs in the background. The **Photonic Engine** (which arrived with the iPhone 14 range) is a computational photography technology that can make low-light photos look better, among other things.

The Photonic Engine builds on the **Deep Fusion** software, which arrived with the iPhone 11. The Deep Fusion process involves the camera taking multiple shots with different exposures and combining them using AI to produce better images that the tiny sensors in a smartphone would otherwise be capable of.

Photographic Styles arrived with the iPhone 13 and also features on the iPhone SE (3rd generation). These are preset styles that are applied when you take a photograph, rather than adding a filter after the photo is taken. The benefit is that adjustments are applied to the right elements of an image—maintaining skin tones, etc—rather than to the whole image. The five presets are Standard, Rich Contrast, Vibrant, Warm and Cool and you can adjust Tone and Warmth for each. If you find a Photographic Styles

you are happy with you can set it so your iPhone always uses it, saving you editing time later. You can of course edit your photos later using the filters in the Photos app.

New to the iPhone 16 line are **second-generation Photographic Styles**, which offer greater control over color and tone mapping with an easier interface. They can also be applied non-destructively after the shot is taken, and even changed, while the first Photographic Styles had to be applied as you took the photo. It's a really big deal—proper application of the new Photographic Styles can allow you to produce iPhone shots that look a little more natural, contrast-y, and less over-saturated.



A low-light photo taken with the iPhone 15 Pro.
Jim Martin / Foundry

With every generation, Apple seeks to improve low-light photography. This is no more apparent than in the automatic **Night Mode** settings that arrived in the iPhone 11 and have improved over the generations since. A **Night Mode Portrait** setting arrived with the iPhone 12 Pro and iPhone 12 Pro Max, and is available in all Pro models since.

Speaking of portraits, **Portrait Mode** is available in iPhone SE (2nd generation) and later, iPhone X and later, and the iPhone 7 Plus and iPhone 8 Plus. There is also a **Portrait Lighting** feature in the iPhone X and 8 Plus and later that allows

you to select one of five effects to 'light' your portrait. You can adjust the depth of field for these portraits to create more or less background blur. Since the iPhone 15, you have been able to take regular shots and apply the portrait effect later if you wish, as they record depth information as well.

The Portrait Mode also inspires **Cinematic Mode** for making videos on the iPhone. With this setting the camera can record video with a shallow depth of field, so that there is more focus on the subject. Cinematic Mode is available on the iPhone 13-series and later.

Another video mode that arrived recently is **Action Mode**. A feature that arrived with the iPhone 14-series, Action Mode lets you capture smooth video when you're moving.

Smart HDR has been around since the iPhone XS and XR in 2018, but, since the 15th-generation iPhone, it's now Smart HDR 5.

Those are some of the standout features that have arrived in recent years, but there is so much more. For example, **Live Photos** let you take 3-second captures with each picture so you can pick the still image you want, create a Gif-like effect, or just keep the short clip. You can make a **QuickTake video** by holding the shutter button on the iPhone XS, iPhone XR, and later. And, of course, every iPhone can shoot time-lapse and slo-mo videos as well as square, Portrait, and pano photographs.

Are iPhones good for video?

All iPhones currently sold offer 4K video recording at 24 fps, 25 fps, 30 fps or 60 fps, 1080p HD video recording at 25 fps, 30 fps or 60 fps and Slo-mo video support for 1080p at 120 fps or 240 fps. New to the iPhone 16 Pro and Pro Max is 4K Dolby Vision video at up to 120fps.

The differences relate to features like Cinematic mode on the iPhone 13 and 14-series (but only in 4K HDR on the iPhone 14-series and up), ProRes and Macro video recording (only available on the Pro and Max iPhones, and HDR video recording, which is not available on the iPhone SE).

The video recording features of the iPhone 16 Pro and Pro Max are superior to the previous generation, with the addition of Log video recording and the Academy Color Encoding System. ProRes video recording up to 4K at 120 fps with external recording equipment for these models too.

An omission on the iPhone SE is Audio Zoom, which can help reduce background noise when recording – that feature is present on iPhones 11 and later.

Features like Action Mode and Cinematic mode, mentioned above, will no doubt prove useful to anyone making video with an iPhone.

Best iPhone Camera

1. Apple iPhone 16 Pro



Price When Reviewed: \$999

Best Prices Today:

Retailer

Price

Price comparison from over 24,000 stores worldwide

The iPhone 16 Pro and Pro Max have identical camera systems. They improve upon the iPhone 15 Pro Max with an upgraded 48 megapixel ultra wide camera, but the real improvements come from the addition of a new Camera Control button and improved software. The second-generation Photographic Styles are a big improvement over the

previous version of the feature, giving you more creative control over how your photos and videos look.

The Camera Control button can open your camera app (even third-party apps), acts like a shutter button, and can be tapped and swiped to adjust image controls like exposure or zoom.

If you're into video, you'll appreciate the improved microphones, higher 120fps 4K frame rate, and AI-powered audio mix feature that lets you quickly produce videos that sound great.

Read our full [Apple iPhone 16 Pro review](#)

2. Apple iPhone 16



Price When Reviewed: \$799

Best Prices Today:

Retailer

Price

Price comparison from over 24,000 stores worldwide

Even better than the older Pro models is this year's regular iPhone 16.

Sure, it lacks a dedicated telephoto camera and it doesn't shoot in ProRES video, but it can zoom in to a 2x optical image

using the main camera's 48 megapixel sensor. It supports the new Photographic Styles, has the Camera Control button, and now takes macro photos and video and Spatial video too.

Between the Camera Control button, features like Audio Mix, and the new photographic styles, we'd take the regular iPhone 16 over the iPhone 15 Pro.

Read our full [Apple iPhone 16 review](#)

3. Apple iPhone 15 Pro Max



Price When Reviewed: Was \$1,199 (Discontinued)

Best Prices Today:

Retailer

Price

Price comparison from over 24,000 stores worldwide

Apple has discontinued the iPhone 15 Pro Max, so you won't be able to buy one directly – unless it's from [Apple's Refurbished Store \(U.K\)](#) or [Apple's Refurbished Store \(U.S\)](#), but

you may find it on sale elsewhere. If you can find one to buy, the iPhone 15 Pro Max

model is much more than a big iPhone 15 Pro thanks to its a 5X zoom on the telephoto camera, which is a big increase over the 3x/77mm telephoto camera on the iPhone 15 Pro. The digital zoom also increases from 15X to 25X.

The ultra-wide camera offers an anti-glare lens coating and improved night mode quality compared to the previous generation.

You also get ProRes and Log color video recording plus the ability to shoot ProRAW photos.

Some people have found the Camera Control button on the newer iPhone 16 Pro Max awkward to use due to the size of the phone, so if you'd rather bypass that feature, the older model could be a good option.

Read our full [Apple iPhone 15 Pro Max review](#)

4. Apple iPhone 15



Price When Reviewed: From \$699 (Was \$799)

Best Prices Today:

Retailer

Price

Price comparison from over 24,000 stores worldwide

If you don't need all the bells and whistles of the iPhone 16 Pro and the iPhone 16 still sounds a little bit expensive to you, the iPhone 15 is still a great option if you are looking for a good iPhone for photography.

iPhone 15 has a dual-camera array with a wide-angle and ultra-wide camera, and, with this generation, Apple upped the main camera's megapixels from 12 to 48 with a quad-pixel sensor and 100 percent Focus Pixels for fast autofocus. Shots are saved in 24MP by default so it shouldn't fill up all your memory.

The iPhone 15 can take 2X telephoto shots despite not having a dedicated telephoto lens. If you aren't keen on the Camera Control button on the newer iPhones, this could be a good option.

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