

# iPhone 15 Pro Max review: Apple's superphone weighs less and zooms further

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Apple's latest, most expensive superphone is a big step forward for the iPhone. But despite a powerful new camera and USB-C port, the best feature is simply its lighter weight. That is because Apple's 6.7in iPhones have always been beasts in price and weight. But while this new iPhone 15 Pro Max is still wallet-crushingly expensive, starting at £1,199 (€1,449/\$1,199/A\$2,199), it is at least 19g lighter, making a huge difference in your hand and pockets. The new Max has titanium sides rather than stainless steel, which saves the 19g but also shifts the balance of the phone towards its centre, making it feel lighter than it is. The design otherwise sticks closely to that introduced with the iPhone 12 Pro Max in 2020, with just a little bit of softening around the edges and slimmer bezels around the screen. The screen is one of the very best on the market and can get super bright in sunlight, making it easier to read outdoors. New for this year is the action button, which replaces the mute switch that has been on every iPhone. It can still mute and unmute the phone by pressing and holding but if you leave your phone permanently silenced or are happy toggling mute in control centre, then you can remap it to do other things such as turn on "do not disturb", launch the camera, light the torch, record a voice memo as well as other features. Specifications Screen: 6.7in Super Retina XDR (OLED) (460ppi) Processor: Apple A17 Pro RAM: 8GB Storage: 256, 512GB or 1TB Operating system: iOS 17 Camera: 48MP main, 12MP UW and 12MP 5x zoom, 12MP front-facing camera Connectivity: 5G, wifi 6E, NFC, Bluetooth 5.3, Thread, USB-C, Satellite, UWB and GNSS Water resistance: IP68 (6 metres for 30 mins) Dimensions: 159.9 x 76.7 x 8.25mm Weight: 221g Out with Lightning, in with USB-C The second big new feature for the iPhone in 2023 is the switch from the Lightning port to USB-C for charging and accessories. How much of a difference that makes will depend on the number of Lightning accessories you have. For most it will be a simple cable switch for charging, one of which is included in the box. You can use your existing power adaptor and no longer have to buy costly Apple cables as any USB-C cable should work, including those used by every Android phone, PCs and Macs, iPads and other tablets. You can even charge other devices up to 4.5W from your iPhone, including AirPods, an Apple Watch or other phones if you are desperate. More interestingly, you can connect practically any USB-C accessory to the phone. I successfully hooked up various USB-C docks, game controllers, ethernet adaptors, flash drives, audio adapters, display cables and SD card readers, the later of which was particularly handy for a photographer. It also opens up the possibility of connecting game controllers and other devices, such as the USB-C version of the Backbone One. Note the 15 Pro and Pro Max support faster USB3 (10Gbps) transfer speeds but the cable in the box is only the slower USB2 (480Mbps). A17 Pro chip The 15 Pro and Pro Max are the first iPhones to ship with the A17 Pro chip, which is 10% faster with 20% more powerful graphics and

supports advanced ray tracing graphics, which should enable more realistic, console-quality games. Users reported the phone becoming very hot to the touch, which Apple addressed with the iOS 17.0.3 update. However, even before the patch the Max did not get any warmer than previous models or rivals in my testing, including when pushed via benchmarks and games. The phone lasts about 44 hours between charges, including actively using the screen for just shy of six hours. This was while primarily being used on wifi with a couple of hours of 5G browsing. That means charging it about every two days with moderate use. Even on the heaviest days of use out and about on 5G most of the time, using the camera and maps, the 15 Pro Max would still last a good 36 hours between charges. Sustainability Apple says the battery should last in excess of 500 full-charge cycles with at least 80% of its original capacity and can be replaced for £95. Out-of-warranty screen repairs cost £389. The iPhone 15 Pro Max adopts the same internal repair-friendly design introduced with the iPhone 14 but the phone was awarded only four out of 10 for repairability by the specialists iFixit because of Apple's use of software to restrict third-party repair. The phone contains recycled aluminium, cobalt, copper, gold, plastic, rare earth elements, tin and tungsten. The company breaks down the phone's environmental impact in its report. Apple offers trade-in and free recycling schemes, including for non-Apple products.

**Camera** The 15 Pro Max has Apple's most powerful camera yet. It shares the same general setup as last year's 14 Pro, including a 12-megapixel ultrawide camera, 48MP main camera and a 12MP telephoto camera, but with a couple of key differences. The telephoto camera on the Pro Max has a 5x optical zoom, up from 3x on the standard 15 Pro and previous models, which significantly closes the distance to objects and finally gives the iPhone meaningful magnification. The camera can then stretch up to 25x digital zoom with good results up to around 10-15x. The main camera now captures 24-megapixel photos by default – up from 12MP – and can shoot at three different focal lengths (24, 28 or 35mm), which will please keen photographers. It also keeps the useful 2x optical zoom from last year. Portrait photos are now captured automatically when the camera spots a person or pet without having to switch to the dedicated mode. You can then edit the photo and refocus it after the fact into a portrait, which is a much better system. It also means portraits can be shot with night mode for significantly better photos in dim light. The camera also shoots with a whole bunch of advanced video technology, most of which will only be used by videographers or film-makers, but for the amateur it means you get really great looking videos with very little effort. Overall, the camera on the 15 Pro Max is one of the very best in the industry and a reason to buy the biggest iPhone over the smaller 15 Pro, matching Google's Pixel and only out-zoomed by Samsung's S23 Ultra with its 10x optical zoom.

**Price** The iPhone 15 Pro Max costs from £1,199 (\$1,199/\$2,199) with 256GB of storage. For comparison, the iPhone 15 costs £799, the iPhone 15 Pro costs £999, the Samsung Galaxy S23 Ultra costs £1,249, the Galaxy Z Flip 5 costs £1,049, the Google Pixel 7 Pro costs £849 and the Fairphone 5 costs £649.

**Verdict** The 15 Pro Max is Apple's best big phone yet, offering more camera, more screen and longer battery life than other models. But it is the new titanium sides and decrease in weight that makes the biggest difference in day-to-day usage. The camera is genuinely great, with the new 5x optical zoom, which meaningfully closes the distance to objects, and the automatic portrait mode that makes fancy shots super simple. The screen is tremendous. The action button is handy. The USB-C port is very welcome, as is long battery life, fast chip and the larger 256GB of storage as standard. But it is still very much a superphone. Massive, colossally expensive and facing stiff competition with even greater zooms and more features. For iPhone buyers the 15 Pro Max is undoubtedly the pinnacle, if you have the hands and wallet capable of handling it.

**Pros:** lighter than predecessors, great cameras, 5x optical zoom, USB-C, new action button, long battery life, top performance, brilliant screen, 5G, long software support. **Cons:** very expensive, big frame despite reduced weight, more repairable design restricted by software locks.