

Google Pixel Fold review: the slick phone-tablet hybrid with killer camera

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Google's first folding phone-tablet hybrid is finally here to give Samsung's leading Z Fold a run for its money, with different ideas of how such a cutting-edge device should work and a serious camera upgrade. The Pixel Fold costs a colossal £1,749 (\$1,799), which is £100 more than the already eye-wateringly expensive rival from Samsung, and more than twice the price of Google's top regular phone, the £849 Pixel 7 Pro. That puts the Pixel Fold in the rarefied company of ultra-premium gadgets, best thought of as the Ferraris or Bentleys of the phone world. Four years on from Samsung's launch of the first phone that unfolded like a book to become a tablet, the form of these cutting-edge devices is still evolving at a rapid pace. Google's first try is wider and shorter when closed compared with Samsung's version, which means apps fit properly and the keyboard is full size on the excellent outside screen. It works so well, you might spend most of your time with the phone closed except for specific tasks – such as viewing media or working on a spreadsheet – that need the large inner screen. The phone is significantly thinner than rivals, closing fully with no gap between the screens when shut. Its aluminium, glass and stainless steel body looks and feels as premium as the high price dictates, but it weighs about 70g more than a regular large phone. The Pixel's fantastic inner 7.6in screen opens like a book into landscape orientation – wider than it is tall. The crease down the middle where it folds isn't generally noticeable when the screen is on, but is still visible when the display is off or in reflections, as with all folders. The hinge opens smoothly, holding the screen open at a wide variety of angles, and is rated for at least 200,000 folds. The screen has a shallow bezel around the outside, which makes for a good handle. A small gap between the outer layer of the screen and the edge collects dust like a gutter, which proved to be problematic for another reviewer, causing the screen to break. I haven't had that particular issue, but folding devices are simply not as durable as traditional phones as the screen has to be made from softer materials so it can bend. Specifications Main screen: 7.6in 120Hz OLED (380ppi) Cover screen: 5.8in FHD+ 120Hz OLED (408ppi) Processor: Google Tensor G2 RAM: 12GB Storage: 256 or 512GB Operating system: Android 13 Camera: 48MP wide, 10.8MP ultrawide, 10.8MP 5x telephoto; 9.5MP and 8MP selfie cameras Connectivity: 5G, dual sim, esim, USB-C, wifi 6E, NFC, Bluetooth 5.2, UWB Water resistance: IPX8 (1.5 metres for 30 minutes) Dimensions folded: 139.7 x 79.5 x 12.1mm Dimensions unfolded: 139.7 x 158.7 x 5.8mm Weight: 283g Tensor G2 chip with 32-hour battery life The Pixel Fold has Google's Tensor G2 chip from its Pixel 7 series with 12GB of RAM, which is plenty for running multiple apps at a time. It feels snappy and responsive, but does get noticeably warmer in operation than rivals with more efficient Qualcomm chips. After almost two weeks of testing, the battery life averaged about 32 hours between charges, which is enough for a day's use but lags Samsung's Z Fold 4,

and is short of Google's Pixel 7 Pro. It is more heavily affected by use of 5G than rivals running Qualcomm chips, and depends on how much you use the larger internal screen. Sustainability Google does not provide an expected lifespan for the battery, but it should last in excess of 500 full-charge cycles with at least 80% of its original capacity. The phone is repairable by Google and third-party shops. The outer screen costs £135 to replace, the inner screen costs £544, and the inner screen protective film costs £72. Genuine replacement parts will be made available from iFixit for DIY repair. The device is made with recycled aluminium, glass, plastic and other materials accounting for 17% of the device by weight. The company publishes environmental impact reports for some of its products. Google will recycle old devices free of charge. Android 13 is half phone, half tablet The Pixel Fold runs Android 13 and behaves the same as a Pixel phone when closed and a Pixel Tablet when open, which suits both forms well. Google's approach to the software complexities of the folding form are much simpler than Samsung's. You can only run two apps on the internal tablet screen at once, not the three-plus that Samsung allows. The app dock is revealed with a short swipe up from the bottom of the screen, not fixed as a permanent taskbar like a desktop computer. The first two pages of the phone-sized home screen are stitched together to form one page of the tablet-sized home screen. That means you can't have separate layouts for the outside and inside screens, as you can on a Samsung, which feels like a step backwards. All of Google's apps are well-optimised for the landscape tablet screen and look great, as do a growing number of third-party apps, including WhatsApp, Evernote and Spotify. However, others are just stretched-out phone apps, while some, such as Ring and Instagram, refuse to resize, appearing as smaller apps in the centre with big black bars either side, just as with the Pixel Tablet. Google still has its work cut out to get all these third-party developers to play ball. Overall, Google's software is simple and nice to use, but lacks the power-user approach of Samsung's One UI, which can turn its foldables into multitasking monsters, with all the added complexity that entails. Google will provide at least five years of software and security updates, including at least three major Android versions. Class-leading camera The camera on the Pixel Fold soundly beats the competition. On the back, you have a triple-camera system shooting 12-megapixel photos from a main, ultrawide and 5x optical zoom camera, which is a first for a folding phone. It isn't an exact match for the brilliant camera system on the Pixel 7 Pro, but it gets similar results. The main camera captures a great amount of detail, producing excellent shots across a range of lighting conditions. The ultrawide camera is solid but gets noticeably noisier in lower light conditions. The 5x optical zoom camera is the standout, offering meaningfully more reach to distant objects than the standard 2 or 3x, with digital zoom producing pretty good results on top, up to 10x and beyond. The Pixel Fold has two decent selfie cameras, one in each screen, which are most useful for video calls. The outside screen can be used as a view finder for shooting selfies with the main cameras when unfolded, which produces much better results. Google's low-light photography mode is best-in-class, while the folding modes are useful for propping up the phone to take pictures of the stars, group selfies and other interesting photos. It has no full manual mode, but has enough adjustments for most, and solid video capture, too. Price The Google Pixel Fold costs £1,749 (\$1,799) with 256GB of storage or £1,869 (\$1,919) with 512GB. For comparison, folding competitors include Samsung's Galaxy Z Fold 4 costing £1,649 and the Honor Magic v costing £1,399.99. Google's Pixel 7 Pro costs £849 and Pixel Tablet costs £599, while an Apple iPad mini costs £569. Verdict The Google Pixel Fold looks and feels like a mashup of all the folding tablets that have come before. Part Microsoft Surface Duo, part Galaxy Z Fold, with a pinch of the Oppo Find N2. The wider, shorter outside screen makes for a better phone, while the inside tablet screen is very similar to rivals, with a slightly less obvious crease down the middle but a little more glare. The thinner body, gapless fold and flatter bezels around the tablet display are more attractive but may prove less functional at protecting the screen. Only time will tell. Four years since the first folding tablet, it still feels like the future every time you unfold the Pixel. The camera is unrivalled on a foldable, with a 5x optical zoom similar to a regular Pixel 7 Pro, making it feel less like you are trading camera quality for the folding form than with rivals. The software is simple and works well, but lacks the raw power of rival Samsung's Z Fold, which just gives you more of everything. For a high-priced power gadget like this, it feels like a backward step in a few areas. The Pixel Fold is the best-looking foldable to date and finally provides Samsung with some much-needed competition. But the crease, the screen fragility, the heavy weight and high price are all big downsides compared with a regular phone. Folders get better with every iteration but it will be some time before the folding tablet has any chance of going mainstream. Pros: a phone and tablet in one, water resistance, simple, great outside screen, great tablet screen, good performance, class-leading cameras, gap-free when closed, attractive design. Cons: extremely expensive, much more fragile than a regular device, costly to repair, no dust resistance, heavy, software not as power-user as top rival, battery life could be longer.