

Google Pixel 7a review: the best mid-range phone gets even better

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Google's latest mid-range phone brings high-end features down to a reasonable price, including the firm's top chip and class-leading camera. The Pixel 7a costs £449 (€509/\$449) – £50 more than the initial price of last year's 6a but £150 cheaper than the Pixel 7 – while offering almost the same features. In fact, it looks almost identical to the 7, just ever so slightly smaller. It has a nice and bright 6.1in OLED screen with an upgraded 90Hz refresh rate to keep things smooth when scrolling. The phone is a good size and easy to fit in a pocket but with a big-enough screen for watching video on the commute. New for this year is face unlock for the phone as well as a fingerprint scanner. It is a good combination, adding the convenience of face recognition for unlocking the phone in good light while keeping the secure authentication via your fingerprint for banking apps and similar. The fingerprint scanner isn't the fastest on the market but generally works fine if you are precise with the initial scans of your finger during setup. Specifications Screen: 6.1in 90Hz FHD+ OLED (429ppi) Processor: Google Tensor G2 RAM: 8GB Storage: 128GB Operating system: Android 13 Camera: 64MP + 13MP ultrawide, 13MP selfie Connectivity: 5G, eSIM, wifi 6E, NFC, Bluetooth 5.3 and GNSS Water resistance: IP67 (1m for 30 minutes) Dimensions: 152.4 x 72.9 x 9mm Weight: 193g Top-end chip Google has stuck with the same recipe that made the Pixel 6a a winner last year. The new phone has the firm's top Tensor G2 chip from the Pixel 7 and the same amount of RAM and storage. That makes the 7a faster and more powerful than the mid-range competition and on-par with top-end phones. The battery lasts about 34 hours between charges, which is generally enough for the heaviest of days. It will need charging overnight, similar to its predecessor and the Pixel 7. 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 with genuine replacement parts available direct from iFixit. The Pixel 7a is made with recycled aluminium, glass and plastic, accounting for about 21% of the phone by weight. The company publishes environmental impact reports for some of its products. Google will recycle old devices free of charge. Android 13 The Pixel 7a runs the same version of Android 13 as the Pixel 7 Pro and Google's other smartphones. It is fast, well optimised and good-looking, and includes free access to Google's VPN, which is handy for securing your data while using public wifi networks. Google provides at least five years of software and security updates including at least three major Android versions. Samsung supports many of its phones for five years, while Fairphone is aiming for six years and Apple supports its iPhone for up to seven years. Class-leading camera On the back there are new 64 megapixel main and 13MP ultrawide cameras, which improve on the already great Pixel 6a and bring the phone into line with the more expensive Pixel 7. The main camera shoots really good, well-exposed and

dramatic images, with excellent levels of detail in good outdoor and dim indoor lighting. It does a particularly good job of capturing detail in portraits and photos of objects. The ultrawide camera is also one of the better options available, slightly weaker on detail and sharpness than the main camera, but managing high contrast and difficult scenes with aplomb. The 7a has no telephoto camera, instead relying on digital zoom, which is fine at 2x but starts to markedly degrade much beyond 3 or 4x zoom. The 13MP selfie camera is equally excellent, while video captured across all three cameras is good for the money. New for this year is a fun long-exposure mode for adding a bit of motion to photos and a significantly faster low-light mode, which can make near darkness look like daylight. Overall, the 7a is a step up over last year's 6a and about on a par with the more expensive Pixel 7. It totally trounces the mid-range competition anywhere near this price. Price The Pixel 7a costs £449 (€509/\$449). For comparison, the Pixel 7 costs from £599, the Pixel 6a now costs £349, the Samsung Galaxy A54 costs £449, the Nothing Phone 1 costs £349 and the Apple iPhone SE costs £449. Verdict The Pixel 7a is the best mid-range Android phone available. It squeezes even more of the premium smartphone experience into a smaller, cheaper model. Google's top chip, plenty of RAM and a decent amount of storage, make it faster than most competitors. Its great, bright screen has a 90Hz refresh rate to keep things smooth when scrolling, which is a major perk of high-end phones alongside wireless charging. Great software and five years of support mean you can keep using it for longer. The camera is class leading and then some, beating many phones twice the price and totally trouncing the competition in the mid-range. The back is plastic not glass, though most will put it in a case anyway. The 34-hour battery is solid enough for a good day but short of the best. But the 7a is so good for the money, I'm not sure why you'd pay an extra £150 for the Pixel 7. In fact, the 7a's biggest problem is that the Pixel 6a is still on sale from last year and is now reduced to £349, which is tremendous value. Pros: brilliant camera, excellent smaller screen, top performance, decent battery life, wireless charging, face and fingerprint unlock, water resistance, recycled aluminium and plastic, five years of security updates, Android 13, smart software features, competitively priced. Cons: no optical zoom or macro photo mode, face unlock option not as secure as some rivals, battery life short of best-in-class, fairly slow charging.