

Gadgets: Amazon Fire HD 8 Tablet, prime choice

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The Amazon Fire HD 8 Tablet with Alexa is a great little tablet, especially combined with an Amazon Prime membership.

Since I'm a longtime iPad owner, I'm familiar with the Apple app store, and I was happy to see the Amazon app store works much the same and just as easy. I downloaded a few apps that I use on my iPad to see if they worked the same, and they do.

The Fire comes preloaded with a great selection of Amazon apps to play, shop, read, listen to, and watch. You can purchase music, videos, books, games, all through the preloaded apps on Amazon and with a Prime Membership you'll have lots of free options.

The tablet has a built in web browser (Silk), parental controls (FreeTime) and apps for photos, calendar, camera, documents, contacts, maps, clock, weather, and email. There's also a Shop Amazon, and an Amazon Offers app as well as Alexa which lets you ask the tablet questions and get answers without having to type or search yourself.

Reading is my thing, so I started with the Kindle Books app. If you already have some ebooks, they can be loaded, but since I am new to the Fire, I just went to the Prime Reading menu and found hundreds of free books to choose from in the Prime Bookstore and even more available to purchase.

Movies, TV shows, music, and games work the same way, with many available for free with Prime and others available for purchase.

I used the tablet to read books and watch videos on a 4-hour flight and barely made a dent in the battery power. It is rated for 12 hours of battery life, has a vibrant 8-inch HD display, a 1.3 GHz quad-core processor, 1.5 GB of RAM, and Dolby Audio.

The Fire is available with 16 or 32 GB of internal storage and has a microSD slot for adding up to 256 GB of expandable storage. It is available in black, yellow, red, or blue.

www.Amazon.com 16GB - \$79.99, 32GB - \$109.99

Creative's Sound BlasterX Katana multi-channel gaming [sound](#) bar sound system is marketed for gamers, but after hearing the sound quality, I'd use it for gaming, music, TV, movies or anything you want to hear in great quality and room filling sound.

If you're not familiar with sound bars, they are a speaker built with a long slim profile. The five-driver Katana is 23.6-inches long, 2.40-inches high and just 3.1 inches deep, making it perfect to keep under a computer monitor or even attach to some TV wall mounting brackets. Regardless of where you chose to keep it, the sound will be nothing short of outstanding.

A black front facing grill covers two up-firing mid-bass drivers and two high-excursion tweeters. On the back are your connections, including USB, MicroUSB, 3.5 mm, optical or use it wirelessly with Bluetooth 4.2.

What makes it a complete system is the subwoofer, which houses the fifth driver, referred to as one long-throw. The subwoofer (5.1-by-11.8-by-13.1 inches) can sit in full view or hidden behind furniture, either way, you'll get the boom-boom sound effect.

As for the sound, this system goes to head-banging loud levels and while I'm not one to blast my music, during testing I had this cranked up. Beware, if you're in an apartment, your neighbors won't be happy if you crank it up to the highest volume levels.

I'm not a gamer, so I tested the sound with different presets on my receiver ranging from theater to gaming to surround sound, with each one, I had a different tone. There's no right or wrong; it's whatever is comfortable to your ears. I like a deep bass so it took some tweaking, which is how great sounding audio should be achieved.

The included wireless remote comes in handy for volume control, song selections

A genuinely cool feature is the 49 programmable LED lights from end to end on the bottom/front of the speaker. With a combination of 16.8 million color combinations, you can customize the light show to your liking or use some of the presents. While the lights have no bearing on the sound, they are captivating.

I've been a sound bar fan for some time, and the Katana has shot up to the top of my list with great sound, looks, versatility and ease of use.

us.creative.com \$299.99

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