

Review: Glitzy iPhone X aside, the iPhone 8 is fine for most

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In this Sept. 15, 2017, photo, the iPhone 8 Plus rests on a wireless charger in New York. (AP Photo/Mark Lennihan)

The difference between Apple's new iPhone models is a bit like flying first class compared with coach. We envy first class, but coach gets us there without breaking the budget.

The iPhone 8 will do just fine for \$300 less than the glitzy iPhone X ,

even though it won't make your friends and colleagues jealous. It's also available much sooner—this Friday—starting at almost \$700. The X (read as the numeral 10) won't be out until November.

Still, the iPhone 8 remains a fairly straightforward update of the iPhone 7, which itself was a fairly straightforward update of the iPhone 6S. Then again, no one expects much different from a coach seat.

WHAT YOU'RE NOT GETTING

It's hard to talk about the iPhone 8 without comparing it to my 15 minutes with the iPhone X last Tuesday.

The X wowed with a fancy new display that flows to the edges of the phone. The phone is compact, yet features a screen slightly larger than the one on the supersized iPhone 8 Plus. The X also features facial recognition that lets you unlock the phone with a glance; you can also create animated emojis that match your facial expressions.

The 8 has none of that, although it does share other new goodies the X is getting, including wireless charging. The 8 and the X both have faster processors and sensors to enhance graphics in augmented reality, a blending of the virtual and physical worlds, though older iPhones will also run AR apps with a software update Tuesday.

WIRELESS CHARGING

Apple is embracing wireless-charging technology that Android phones have had for years. It's a rare case in which Apple isn't going its own way; instead, it's adopting an existing standard called Qi (pronounced chee). That means the iPhone gets all the technical advancements from the consortium behind Qi—and can take immediate advantage of a slew of public wireless-charging stations.

It worked perfectly for me while waiting for a connecting flight in Los Angeles—no need to rummage through my backpack for a charging cord.

Apple says the wireless system should charge as quickly as the wall adapter included with iPhones. But I found wireless slower in testing, using a Belkin charger with the same power output as the iPhone charger.

Wireless charging is largely about convenience; it's terrific if you can just drop your phone on a charging pad overnight or during the day at your desk. Apple says it will boost wireless-charging power by 50 percent in coming months, which will speed things up further. But those in a rush should consider a wall charger that comes with the iPad, which will still be even faster.

In a way, wireless charging makes up for Apple's earlier decision to ditch the headphone jack in the iPhone 7, which made people share the Lightning port with both charging cords and wired headphones. You can now charge and use wired headphones at the same time.



In this Sept. 15, 2017, photo, the camera, upper left, of an iPhone 8 Plus is displayed in New York. (AP Photo/Mark Lennihan)

DISPLAY

Colors on the 8's screen adapt to lighting in the room. It's noticeable in my apartment at night, as artificial lighting tends to be warmer and more yellowish. The screen adapts by making whites more like beige and yellow even yellower. It's softer on the eyes and mimics how light glows on white paper, though it can make images appear less natural. You can turn this feature off.

Resolution isn't as sharp as what the X and many rival Android phones offer. The Plus offers enough pixels for high-definition video at the highest quality, 1080p, while the regular model is comparable to the lesser 720p.

CAMERA

New color filters produce truer and richer colors without looking fake, while a new flash technique tries to light the foreground and background more evenly. You have to know to look, as the iPhone 7 already had a great camera. Differences in test shots taken while sightseeing in Poland were subtle, but noticeable—more so on the iPhone 8 screen than on last year's Mac.

The iPhone 8 also offers additional video options, including recording of ultra-high definition, or 4K, at 60 frames per second, twice the previous rate. (The phone's display, though, isn't sharp enough for 4K.)

A second lens in the 7 Plus and 8 Plus models lets the camera gauge depth and blur backgrounds in portrait shots, something once limited to full-featured SLR cameras. Samsung adopted that feature in this year's Note 8 .

Coming to the 8 Plus are filters to mimic studio and other lighting conditions. My favorite, stage light, highlights the subject's face and darkens the background. Some of these filters make images look fake—Apple has slapped a "beta" test tag to signal it's not flawless. You can try them out and undo any changes you don't like.

DESIGN

To make wireless charging work, the 8 features a glass back, something last seen in the iPhone 4S in 2011. Aesthetic considerations aside, this gives you another sheet of glass to break.

Apple says custom glass from Corning makes the phone stronger. Even so, consider a service plan and get a case. Wireless charging works with most cases, as long as there's no metal or magnets. I found the phone

charged just as fast with the case on.

ABOUT THAT PRICE TAG

The iPhone 8 is about \$50 more than what the iPhone 7 cost at launch. Samsung has similarly increased the prices of its flagship Galaxy phones, and the S8 still outsold last year's S7. Consumers seem willing to pay.

You do get double the storage—64 gigabytes—at that price, a value considering that iPhone storage boosts typically cost \$100. You'll need that extra storage for video, apps and fancy features such as AR and animated photos.

Nonetheless, I would have preferred the option of a cheaper, lower-storage version. For that, you need an older model , such as the \$549 iPhone 7 and the \$449 6S. There's also the smaller iPhone SE for \$349.

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