

# The Samsung S9 has a great camera - just like other phones

March 8 2018, by Anick Jesdanun

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This combo shows photos of a sunset along the Hudson River, taken in New York with a view of New Jersey, on Tuesday, March 6, 2018. Starting at the top left and going clockwise, the phones used are Samsung's Galaxy S9, Apple's iPhone X, Google's Pixel 2 XL and Samsung's Galaxy Note 8. All top-end phones take decent photos, even in challenging low-light conditions, though there are some color variations. (AP Photo/Nick Jesdanun)

Samsung says its new Galaxy S9 phone features a "reimagined" camera, and it is indeed pretty darned good. But you might not want to shell out \$720 or more for one just yet unless your current phone is already close to death.

That's because other high-end phone cameras—nowadays, one of the major differentiators between phones—are also pretty darned good. If your phone is recent, it probably already has a decent camera. Technology has improved to the point that it's really hard to tell the difference between them.

In many of our test shots, the S9 outperformed the best of its rivals—Apple's iPhone X, Google's Pixel 2 XL and Samsung's own Galaxy Note 8. Photos had more detail and less distortion. But unless you magnify images for closer inspection, usually there's little obvious difference beyond color variation, which comes down to personal preference. In a few cases, the S9 performed worse than all three.

The phone comes out March 16 with a U.S. starting price of \$720 through Samsung and T-Mobile and nearly \$800 through other major U.S. carriers. Here's a look at what the S9 offers.

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## SEE THE LIGHT

In a first for a major smartphone, the S9 camera has an adjustable aperture, or lens opening, to let in more or less light. Low-light shots are also improved with software tricks that automatically take 12 shots in quick succession and blend the best of each.



This combo shows photos of the Bethesda Fountain in New York's Central Park taken on Saturday, March 3, 2018. Starting at the top left and going clockwise, the phones used are Samsung's Galaxy S9, Apple's iPhone X, Google's Pixel 2 XL and Samsung's Galaxy Note 8. All top-end phones take decent photos, even in challenging low-light conditions, though there are some color variations. (AP Photo/Nick Jesdanun)

These changes produce small improvements in shots: The evening sky tends to be darker, with less distortion. A statue of Abraham Lincoln doesn't look as grainy. Many S9 shots also have better contrast between

dark and light areas.

But these differences are very subtle. What's more likely to affect picture quality is the steadiness of your hands.

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## FREEZING MOTION



This combo shows photos of office buildings in the Hudson Yards section of

Manhattan taken on Tuesday, March 6, 2018. Starting at the top left and going clockwise, the phones used are Samsung's Galaxy S9, Apple's iPhone X, Google's Pixel 2 XL and Samsung's Galaxy Note 8. All top-end phones take decent photos, even in challenging low-light conditions, though there are some color variations. (AP Photo/Nick Jesdanun)

The most distinctive feature in Samsung's new camera is super-slow-mo video. People appear frozen as they jump. Waterfalls seem at peace as drops trickle down. The feature offers a fresh perspective on that time-honored prank of having fake snakes pop out of a can—not so scary when the snakes float in thin air.

It's a gimmick, but loads of fun.

The camera can process only a fifth of a second of video at a time—stretched into six seconds when viewing—so auto detection is key to capturing the right moment. It's fun to see people jump up at this speed, but less so when the super-slow-mo part doesn't kick in until they're almost back on the ground. There's a lot of trial and error involved.

And compared with still images and regular video, super-slow-mo video tends to be darker and blurrier, particularly with close-ups. The feature is at its best outdoors, when lighting is good and the subject in motion is far enough away.



In this Feb. 21, 2018, file photo, the Bixby virtual assistant software of a Samsung Galaxy S9 Plus mobile phone translates a foreign language sign during a product preview in New York. The Galaxy S9 phones will be available March 16. (AP Photo/Richard Drew, File)

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## SAY WHAT?

Samsung's Bixby digital assistant taps the camera for instant translations. Just point the phone at a sign and see it in English (or your chosen language) with similar fonts and colors.

Bixby was more reliable at picking up text than a similar Google Lens feature on Pixel phones. But stop signs in Thai, Portuguese and French were translated as "first," "shield," and "crazy." Bixby got Indonesian

right, though. And it can deal with long passages in posters and documents.



In this Feb. 25, 2018, file photo, a woman holds the new Galaxy S9 and S9 plus during the Samsung Galaxy Unpacked 2018 event on the eve of the Mobile World Congress wireless show in Barcelona, Spain. The Galaxy S9 phones will be available March 16. (AP Photo/Manu Fernandez, File)

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## YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT

Point the camera at food for nutritional information. It gave me close-enough calorie counts for a burger and onion rings, but a roast beef sandwich was misidentified as either a pastrami or a cubano sandwich, depending on the angle.

All counts are based on single servings, which isn't as useful as Bixby telling me the mac and cheese I had was actually three servings, or triple the calories. Unreported calories don't contribute to weight gain, right?



In this Feb. 21, 2018, file photo, the dual camera lens of the Samsung Galaxy S9 Plus mobile phone is shown in this photo during a product preview in New York. The Galaxy S9 phones will be available March 16. (AP Photo/Richard Drew)

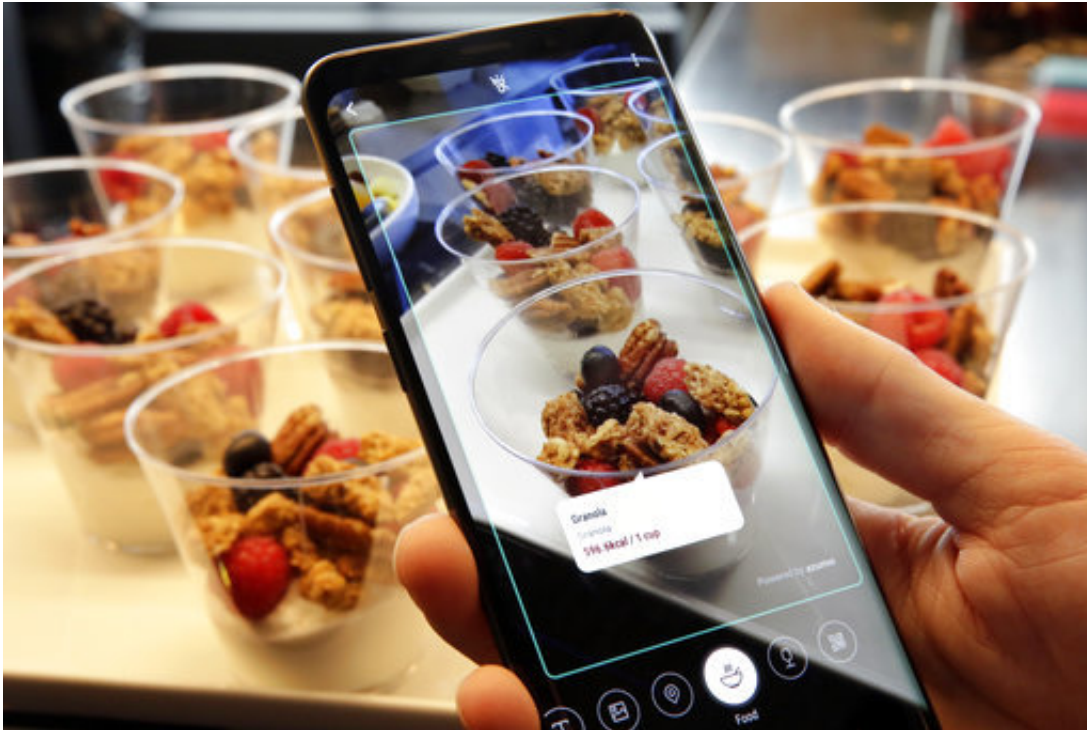
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## WHAT ELSE

The larger S9 Plus model has a second lens with twice the magnification. Though I didn't test this model, a similar feature in other phones is essential for producing better close-ups.



Both S9 models have a feature for turning selfies into personal emojis for sharing in messages. Some people will love this; I found no use for it. Next!



In this Feb. 21, 2018, file photo the Bixby virtual assistant software of a Samsung Galaxy S9 Plus mobile phone identifies food and displays its calorie content during a product preview in New York. The Galaxy S9 phones will be available March 16. (AP Photo/Richard Drew)

The new phone is easier to unlock by looking at it. Past Samsung phones scan your iris, but they don't work reliably in bright sunlight. The S9 supplements that with facial recognition, which isn't as secure. For that reason, Samsung won't let banking and other sensitive apps use just the face, but it's OK for unlocking the phone (you can disable it if you're concerned). In any case, glasses can still be challenging, but there's a

fingerprint sensor on the back as a backup. It's moved slightly to reduce smudges on the camera lens.

Beyond that, the phone's design hasn't changed much from last year's S8. But that's OK. No need to fix what isn't broken. What matters is what the phone does—and shoots.

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