

Tech Review: Google pushes Pixel pre-orders

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If you're in the market for a new smartphone and have a need for the latest device, then the new Google Pixel may be for you, offered in standard and XL variants with "Very Silver," "Quite Black," and "Really Blue" color options. Before I add in my opinion about this release, here are the specifications for you, which are essentially the same between the two aside from battery and screen size/quality:

Pixel
Dimensions: 143.8 x 69.5 x 8.6 mm, 143 grams
Display: 5-inch Full HD AMOLED, 441 ppi, Gorilla Glass 4
Battery: 2,770 mAh, fast charging
Pixel XL

Dimensions: 154.7 x 75.7 x 8.6 mm, 168 grams
Display: 5.5-inch Quad HD AMOLED, 534 ppi, Gorilla Glass 4
Battery: 3,450 mAh, fast charging
Both Models
Processor: 2.15GHz Snapdragon 821 (quad-core, 64-bit)
RAM: 4GB
Storage: 32GB or 128GB
Camera: Rear – 12.3MP, f/2.0, 1.55um, OIS. Front – 8MP
Other features: fingerprint scanner, USB Type-C, NFC, 3.5 mm headphone jack
OS: Android 7.1

Unlike the previous generation, which included the Nexus 5X and 6P, the specifications for the small and large device are functionally the same, meaning that for most users the only major difference will be screen size. The extra screen space comes at a cost of \$120, however, with a base cost of \$650

for the Pixel. In addition, getting the 128GB storage model adds another \$100 to the cost, so for a maxed-out Pixel XL you would be paying just under \$900, which doesn't even include the insurance or the obvious carrier costs. On that note, Google struck a deal with Verizon Wireless on this one, meaning that Verizon will have their own edition of the Pixel devices, which is at their own discretion in terms of updates and the number of pre-installed applications. Those who remember the Galaxy Nexus will remember the last time Google allowed Verizon to have their own edition of a device, which turned out horribly, often making users miss out on some updates altogether. Verizon has claimed in the past week that they will not be holding back updates; however, concerned power users should know that the bootloader is not unlockable, so it's advised that they buy the Google Store version. I will be clear, though: this is an expensive device, but the cost is no different than what you'll see from the iPhone or Samsung Galaxy series. I don't agree with the expense, but I'm not especially surprised. As with the 5X and 6P, there is no carrier subsidization, so if you're currently pressed for cash, then you can opt for 24-month financing through Google, Verizon, or Best Buy. A pre-order of Pixel from Google nets you a promotional code for a free Google VR headset, while any purchase through Best Buy comes with a \$100 gift card and a Chromecast. So, what of the design?

What technology news sites and Google will generally tell you is that Pixel models are entirely Google-made, from the ground up, due to the line being branded solely with the "G" and "Made by Google" logos on the back. This is essentially half true, because the actual device builds are from HTC, who, aside from their own current phones, are the

makers of the first Android handset to hit the market and the designers of the 2010 Nexus One. Google is using HTC as an original device manufacturer (ODM) this time, which means that Google is the main designer, but HTC is the manufacturer. The only logo present on the device is Google's this time, versus the Nexus line, which would have logos from companies such as Samsung, LG, and Huawei on them alongside Google's. Logos aside, you can take to essentially any tech site or Facebook and find complaints about how this device looks, most notably things like "it looks like an iPhone" or "Pixel is Google's iPhone clone." On their own, these are flawed statements, but not entirely wrong. If we're talking ideologies alone, the self-branding alongside different sized devices with nearly identical hardware certainly make Pixel "Google's iPhone." To most, it will probably be a jarring device to look at due to the two-toned, multi-material backside. As it turns out, the glass upper part is not for show, but is rather meant to allow for better reception due to being a more penetrable surface. I've personally always had phones that were deemed "ugly" by other people, so I'm honestly quite indifferent about the physical look.

At a price that is notably higher than the Nexus line of phones, what does the Pixel provide that other current smartphones don't? Well, honestly it does not bring a whole lot to the table in terms of hardware, and to be honest, phones like the OnePlus 3 I would suggest over it, especially at almost half the price unlocked (provided you aren't on Verizon like I am). I would say that where the hardware shines most looks to be the camera, which has been rated as the best smartphone camera on the market based on benchmarks by DxOMark Mobile, and features decent optical image

stabilization (OIS). Whether this justifies the cost of the Pixel vs the OnePlus 3 and similar devices, well, that's up to you. If that minor benefit is not enough for you, then it will come down to the software shipping with the Pixel. Exclusive to the device on release will be the integration of the new Google Assistant into the OS as a whole, replacing Now On Tap, Google's first context-sensitive search assistant. If you're familiar with any recent Android developments, Google has put its Allo app on the Play Store, which features a sandboxed Google Assistant that can interject with helpful tips based on your text conversation with someone else, such as directions or local restaurants. This will be function system-wide for Pixel's version of Android 7.1, and as of this writing there are already Android developers porting the feature to previous devices. In addition, the fingerprint sensor, called Pixel Imprint (previously Nexus Imprint) can be used to show notifications if you swipe down on it, which is interesting. One last nice feature is an included adapter which will allow you to transfer all your old device's data to your new Pixel via direct connection. This includes transferring from an iPhone that's using iMessage as well.

With the new Google Pixel, we're seeing high level specs, a few exclusive and nifty software additions, and a hefty price tag. If you have a device that is about two years old, it won't be a bad upgrade. If you have anything newer like a Nexus 5X or 6P, I would wait for the expected second generation of the Pixel series. However, as mentioned before, if this is a case of wanting the newest technology, then this device will not disappoint. According to Google, pre-orders will ship within the next four to five weeks.

Exploring Springfield, the often ignored capital of Illinois

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Many people don't realize that the capitol of the great state of Illinois is not the city of Chicago. Despite Chicago being the state's most vital economic powerhouse and tourist destination, the Governor of Illinois and the state legislature do not meet and work here, but rather in the much smaller town of Springfield. The town of Springfield, which is the sixth most populous city in the state, was chosen to be the state capitol due to its much more centralized location in the state than Chicago. Prior to Springfield, the state capital had been located in towns near the Mississippi river due to the river's easy access to other parts of the country. But with the advent of the railroad, the need for river access became much less of a concern for political leaders.

The choice to move the capital of the state to Springfield in 1839 was championed by several political leaders in Illinois, including future president Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln and his associates argued that the increasing industry near the Lake Michigan would become much more important to the state in the near future and that a capital closer to this region would be a wise move to make. This realization was proven to be correct, as a large portion of the population of Illinois live in Chicagoland as opposed to the rest of the state. Even many state political leaders have their official offices and residences in Chicago instead of the smaller capital city.

Regardless of the location preference of politicians for Chicago, the state capitol building still stands proud and tall in stark contrast to the small and humble town that surrounds it. Springfield is home to both the current and previous state capitol, both of which are open for the public to see. The older

capitol was the one used during the time of Abraham Lincoln, where he served as a state representative and which he would later use as a starting point for his run for the presidency as Barack Obama would do over a hundred years later. When the new, bigger capitol was completed in 1888, the old capitol was repurposed as the county courthouse, which it was until its closure and transformation into a museum in 1966. The museum is open daily from nine to five, and has free admission.

The newer capitol building is work of art in itself. The building was constructed in the French renaissance style of architecture and was meant to show the wealth and power of the state to all who bore witness. The elegant dome which tops the capitol is the tallest in the nation, surpassing every other state capitol dome and even the federal capitol dome in Washington D.C. by several feet. Inside, the walls and floors are covered in the finest marble the state could get its hands on and the ceilings

are covered in fresco paintings and gold leaf. Many of the structure's finest works are found in the chambers of the House and Senate, where stained glass ceilings and numerous crystal chandeliers hang for all to see. Despite strict security, tours of the building are given daily every half hour and are free for the general public.

These two magnificent and historically valuable sites are some of the greatest tourist attractions that state has to offer outside of Chicago. This is not all this surprising little city on the prairie has to offer, however. The next issue of TechNews will include look at the town's numerous ties to the 16th President of the United States: Abraham Lincoln, and the sites open to tourists which commemorate that man's significant impact on the state.



Photos by Steven Milan Moreno