

What's the best drone?



There you are. The DJI Inspire 2 is, in my opinion, the best drone currently available. Even if I were to spend six grand on a drone this is not the drone I would buy. Sure, it's the best out there but for my needs it would be both cumbersome and overwhelming. A drone is not a one size fits all kind of product. When purchasing a drone the question should not be "what is the best drone" but rather "what is the best drone for me?"

That "for me" is an important distinction when considering your next drone. Where do you plan on using your drone? What is your budget? How experienced are you with drones? What do you plan on filming or photographing with your drone? Do you plan on using the camera at all or do you just plan on having some fun flying it in your local park? These and many more are important questions to consider when searching for a drone.

I'll start out by telling you why that DJI Inspire 2 is such a great drone, this will give you some insight as to the top-end capability of today's drones.

27 Minutes of flight time

58 MPH

Up to 5K Camera Video Resolution

7 Kilometers of Remote Control Range

Full 1080P Live View on the Controller

30M of Obstacle Avoidance Range

In addition to all that the inspire one comes with two controllers and a removable micro 4/3s camera.

Now if you're not familiar with what all that means don't worry. If you do know what all that means don't get ahead of yourself, this drone still probably isn't the one you want.

So, let's say you're ready to spend six thousand on a drone and you're convinced you want a DJI Inspire 2. Here's why I would urge you to reconsider. The DJI Inspire 2 is one of the largest "consumer" drones on the market. I use the word consumer but everything about this drone is made for pros. One reason for the large size is that the drone can go almost 60mph. This insane speed is needed for things like Hollywood chase scenes. How in the world can you fly a drone at 60mph and control the camera at the same time you may ask? Well that's where the second controller comes in. Unlike most drones this camera has 360-degree camera movement rather than one with a fixed direction. This allows the pilot and camera operator to move independently of one another. This makes the drone that much more capable but with that capability comes more user involvement. Considering the larger size, higher user involvement, and price tag that is why I don't recommend the "best drone" for most users.

I may use my drone for professional work but when I did my research I considered many of the things you guys should consider.

Where do you plan on using your drone?

I'm an active guy and regularly find myself on top of some mountain, building, or other precarious place. With that in mind I want a drone that can be as flexible as I am. Size is a very important factor to consider because even if two drones are about the same size if one drone has folding legs or propellers you'll be able to fit it into a much smaller case or backpack.

Smaller drones often come with smaller batteries though. Battery life is another thing to consider when considering where you plan on using your drone. For me, I often bring my drone camping and one twenty some minute flight just won't cut it. So, do I find a drone with better battery life or just buy more batteries? The extra batteries will require more room in the case, this is all something to consider.

What features are important to me?

Today's drones have come a long way from just a few years ago. Now they have obstacle avoidance, flight modes, and gesture modes. I want to preface this by saying yes, I'm sure you all want obstacle avoidance. Obstacle avoidance is fantastic piece of mind that your drone will be safe. This does not mean it's essential. Federal law and my own personal experience says that you must also have line of sight with your drone. So, although obstacle avoidance is helpful is it makes or breaks a purchase keep that in mind.

So, what features are important? For me the flight modes are essential. I don't need the Inspire 2 but when I'm filming houses it makes everything so much easier to simply tell the drone beforehand where it needs to go while so that I can be free to control the camera.

Gesture modes seem a bit gimmicky to me. Yes, they work but they are finicky and I just don't trust drones enough to use gesture modes. This is something that I'm sure people will disagree on.

What is your budget?

An obvious consideration but if you're looking for a great drone with a camera and most features expect to spend \$899-\$1599.

How experienced are you with drones?

If you have no flying experience don't be scared. These things are crazy easy now-a-days. I have two tips when it comes to experience and drones. The first is just spend some time in an open field with your drone. The biggest problem when flying drones is orientation. With a drone, you can quickly get turned around and confused as to whether up on the joystick is forward or if it's now backwards.

What do you plan on filming or photographing with your drone?

Features:

Battery Life – On most drones you can expect between 20 – 30 minutes of battery life.

Speed – Traditionally drones were capable of speeds in the 20MPH range. Now drones can go up to 50MPH. The speed (for the most part) is irrelevant for many users. Just consider what you're planning on doing with the drone.

Control Range – For consumer drones most have ranges that far surpass what any user will need. But if you are looking in the sub \$800 range be sure to find a drone with at least 1 mile control range. This is because overcast weather and cell towers can impact range so although you may never fly your drone a mile away it's better to be safe than sorry.

Video Range and Live View Resolution – Video range is how far the controller can be from the drone and still get a live video feed. This is important as many people navigate their drone in a first-person view style from the controller. Live view resolution is important for professionals or those with poor eyesight. A higher live view resolution will help better distinguish that telephone wire you're about to crash into.

Gimbal – A gimbal is a motorized stabilizer that counteracts the movements of the drone to help stabilize the video or photo. A two-axis gimbal will, as you guessed, stabilize two axis. For full cinematic grade footage, a three-axis gimbal is what you want. This is why I asked what kind

of stuff you want to film/photograph with the drone. If you are doing mostly photographs the level of stabilization won't matter nearly as much.

Video Quality – I'm sure most of you are familiar with video quality. The important thing to consider when purchasing a drone is 4K or Full HD. Even if you don't have a 4K TV I recommend 4K for a few reasons. The first is because with a drone if you are four hundred feet above some trees that higher resolution will make those trees look like trees rather than a sea of undefined green. The second reason I advocate for 4K is because it's a more flexible medium. 4K video is equivalent to 8 megapixel stills. That means you can screenshot your 4K video and retain quite a high amount of quality. The third reason is memory. Memory these days is cheap so don't let that aspect of 4K scare you away.

Obstacle Avoidance – Obstacle avoidance is awesome. Drones can come with frontal, front and rear, full 360, or no obstacle avoidance at all. If I were to buy a drone and I really wanted obstacle avoidance I would spend the extra cash and get the full obstacle avoidance. The problem with having obstacle avoidance only in the front is the orientation issue I was talking about. Obstacle avoidance instills a sense of protection and although that protection is real a user can be deceived into thinking their drone is recognizing obstacles. This happens when a user forgets the current orientation of their drone. If the drone is turned around the user no longer has obstacle avoidance and may get themselves into trouble by thinking they are protected when they are not.

Recommendations:

Fair warning* I no longer sell drones and am not in the market for one so my product knowledge is not as up to date as it could be. With that said I love DJI products I've owned their drones and their handheld gimbals and have been very happy. If I were to purchase a drone today I would look at DJI.

DJI Mavic – Well rounded travel ready little drone.

- No obstacle avoidance
- Foldable. Absolutely tiny!
- 4K video
- Tripod mode. (super stable cinematic shots)
- Starts at \$999

GoPro Karma – All in one package. The Karma offers a beginner's intro to all things video and photo. It gives you a GoPro, a handheld gimbal, and a drone.

- All in one package
- Foldable but not as small as Mavic
- Limited range
- 4K video
- No phone required. (nice feature for adventure uses)
- Starts at \$799

DJI Phantom 4 Pro – Every feature you could want at a competitive price point.

- 1 inch sensor from Sony. Breathtaking quality for both photo and video.
- 30-minute battery life. Longest of the three
- Sport mode for up to 40MPH
- 5 direction obstacle avoidance.
- Color options
- Starts at \$1499

Again, these suggestions may be outdated and are limited by what I was interested in at the time. I will however recommend any DJI product as I've been happy with everyone I've used.