Samsung Galaxy S21 FE Review: Budget Flagship Alternative

Description

Samsung Galaxy S21 FE Review: A Budget-Friendly Flagship Alternative

The Samsung Galaxy S21 FE (Fan Edition) is a strategic release from the tech giant, designed to offer flagship-level performance at a more accessible price point. Launched in early 2022, the S21 FE retains many premium features of the Galaxy S21 series while making a few compromises to keep costs down. For users seeking a high-end smartphone experience without the premium price tag, the S21 FE presents a compelling option.

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This review explores the design, display, performance, camera capabilities, battery life, and overall value of the Galaxy S21 FE to help potential buyers determine if itâ??s the right choice for them.

Design and Build Quality

The Galaxy S21 FE follows Samsungâ??s modern design language, featuring a sleek, minimalist aesthetic with a contoured back and a centered punch-hole display. Unlike its more expensive siblings, the S21 FE uses a **polycarbonate (plastic) back** instead of glass, which helps reduce weight and cost while maintaining durability.

Key Design Features:

- **Dimensions & Weight:** The phone measures **155.7 x 74.5 x 7.9mm** and weighs **177g**, making it lightweight and comfortable to hold.
- **Colors:** Available in **Lavender, Graphite, Olive, and White**, offering a variety of stylish options.
- **IP68 Rating:** The device is **water and dust-resistant**, ensuring protection against accidental spills and splashes.
- **Display Cutout:** A small **centered punch-hole** houses the 32MP front camera, maximizing screen real estate.

While the plastic back may not feel as premium as glass, it resists smudges better and is less prone to shattering. The **Gorilla Glass Victus** on the front ensures scratch resistance, and the **aluminum frame** adds structural integrity.

Display: A Vibrant AMOLED Experience

One of the standout features of the Galaxy S21 FE is its **6.4-inch Dynamic AMOLED 2X display**, which delivers an immersive viewing experience.

Display Specifications:

- **Resolution: 2340 x 1080 (FHD+)** with a **20:9 aspect ratio**
- **Refresh Rate: 120Hz adaptive refresh rate** (adjusts between 10Hz and 120Hz for power efficiency)
- **Brightness: Up to 1,200 nits (peak brightness)** for excellent outdoor visibility
- **HDR10+ Support:** Enhances contrast and color accuracy in supported content
- **Always-On Display (AOD):** Customizable with various clock styles and notifications

The **120Hz refresh rate** makes scrolling, gaming, and animations exceptionally smooth, while the **AMOLED panel** ensures deep blacks and vibrant colors. The display is **bright enough for outdoor use**, though it may struggle in direct sunlight compared to higher-end flagships.

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Performance: Flagship Power at a Lower Price

Under the hood, the Galaxy S21 FE is powered by the **Qualcomm Snapdragon 888** (in the U.S. and some other regions) or **Samsungâ??s Exynos 2100** (in Europe and other markets). Both chipsets are **flagship-grade**, ensuring snappy performance for multitasking, gaming, and productivity.

Hardware Specifications:

- **Processor:**
- **Snapdragon 888 (5nm)** â?? Octa-core (1x 2.84GHz Cortex-X1, 3x 2.42GHz Cortex-A78, 4x 1.8GHz Cortex-A55)
- **Exynos 2100 (5nm)** â?? Octa-core (1x 2.9GHz Cortex-X1, 3x 2.8GHz Cortex-A78, 4x 2.2GHz Cortex-A55)
- **GPU: Adreno 660 (Snapdragon) / Mali-G78 MP14 (Exynos)**
- **RAM & Storage: 6GB/8GB RAM + 128GB/256GB storage** (no microSD expansion)
- **Software: Android 12 with One UI 4.1** (upgradable to **Android 14 with One UI 6.1**)

Real-World Performance:

- **Gaming:** The **Snapdragon 888/Exynos 2100** handles **graphically intensive games** like *Call of Duty: Mobile* and *Genshin Impact* at high settings with minimal lag. The **120Hz display** enhances the gaming experience.
- **Multitasking:** With **6GB/8GB of RAM**, the S21 FE manages multiple apps smoothly, though heavy users may notice slight slowdowns with **8GB RAM** being the better choice.
- **Thermal Management:** The phone can get warm during prolonged gaming sessions, but thermal throttling is minimal.

While the **Snapdragon 888** is slightly more efficient than the **Exynos 2100**, both variants deliver **flagship-level performance** for everyday use.

Camera System: Versatile and Reliable

The Galaxy S21 FE features a **triple-camera setup** that closely resembles the Galaxy S21, offering a **versatile photography experience** without the premium price.

Camera Specifications:

- **Main Camera: 12MP (f/1.8, 26mm, Dual Pixel PDAF, OIS)**
- **Ultrawide Camera: 12MP (f/2.2, 15mm, 123Â° FOV)**
- **Telephoto Camera: 8MP (f/2.4, 76mm, 3x optical zoom, OIS)**
- **Front Camera: 32MP (f/2.2, 26mm)**

Camera Performance:

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- **Daylight Photography:** The **12MP main sensor** captures **sharp, detailed images** with accurate colors. The **HDR processing** ensures balanced exposure in high-contrast scenes.
- **Ultrawide Shots:** The **12MP ultrawide lens** provides a **123Â° field of view**, useful for landscapes and group photos, though edge distortion is noticeable.
- **Zoom Capabilities:** The **3x optical zoom** is decent for mid-range shots, but digital zoom beyond 10x suffers from noise and loss of detail.
- **Night Mode: Nightography** improves low-light performance, but results are **not as impressive** as the Galaxy S23 series.
- **Video Recording:** Supports **4K@60fps** and **1080p@240fps (slow-motion)**. Stabilization is good, but not as refined as higher-end models.
- **Selfies:** The **32MP front camera** delivers **sharp, well-exposed selfies** with natural skin tones.

Camera Verdict:

The S21 FEâ??s camera system is **competent and reliable**, though it doesnâ??t match the **flagship-level processing** of the Galaxy S22 or S23 series. For casual photographers, it offers **great value**, but professionals may find it lacking in dynamic range and low-light performance.

Battery Life and Charging

The Galaxy S21 FE is equipped with a **4,500mAh battery**, which provides **solid all-day endurance** for moderate users.

Battery Performance:

- **Screen-on Time: 6-8 hours** with **120Hz enabled**, extending to **7-9 hours** with **60Hz**.
- **Standby Time:** Excellent, with minimal battery drain overnight.
- **Charging:**
- **Wired: 25W fast charging** (charger not included)

- **Wireless: 15W Qi wireless charging**
- **Reverse Wireless Charging:** Supports **PowerShare** for charging accessories

While the **25W charging** is not the fastest, it fully charges the phone in **around 1 hour and 10 minutes** . The **lack of a bundled charger** is a downside, but the **USB-C port** supports **USB Power Delivery (PD)** for universal compatibility.

Software and Updates

The Galaxy S21 FE launched with **Android 12 and One UI 4.1**, and Samsung has committed to **four years of major Android updates** and **five years of security patches**.

Software Features:

- **One UI 6.1 (Android 14):** Offers a **clean, intuitive interface** with **customization options**.
- **Samsung DeX:** Allows **desktop-like multitasking** when connected to a monitor.
- **Samsung Knox:** Provides **enterprise-grade security** for data protection.
- **Bixby & Google Assistant:** Both voice assistants are supported.

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Samsungâ??s **long-term software support** makes the S21 FE a **future-proof investment**, ensuring it remains relevant for years.

Connectivity and Extras

The Galaxy S21 FE includes **modern connectivity features** expected from a 2022 flagship:

- **5G Support:** Sub-6GHz and mmWave (in select regions)
- **Wi-Fi 6:** Faster and more stable wireless connectivity
- **Bluetooth 5.2:** Supports **LE Audio** and **aptX Adaptive**
- **NFC:** Enables **Samsung Pay** and **Google Pay**
- **USB-C 3.2:** Supports **fast data transfer** and **video output**
- **Stereo Speakers:** Tuned by **AKG**, offering **decent audio quality** (though not as immersive as dedicated speakers)

Missing Features:

- **No microSD slot** (storage is non-expandable)
- **No 3.5mm headphone jack** (wireless or USB-C required)

Price and Value Proposition

The Galaxy S21 FE was launched at **$699** (128GB) and **$769** (256GB), positioning it as a **budget-friendly flagship**. As of 2024, prices have dropped significantly, making it an even more attractive option.

Who Should Buy the Galaxy S21 FE?

â? **Budget-conscious buyers** who want flagship performance
â? **Gamers** who need a **120Hz AMOLED display**
â? **Photography enthusiasts** looking for a **versatile camera system**
â? **Users who prioritize software updates** (4 years of Android upgrades)

Who Should Avoid It?

â•? **Users who need the best low-light photography**
â•? **Those who want expandable storage**
â•? **Buyers who prefer a premium glass/metal build**

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Final Verdict: A Strong Budget Flagship

The **Samsung Galaxy S21 FE** successfully bridges the gap between **flagship performance** and **affordability**. While it makes **some compromises**â??such as a **plastic back, no microSD slot, and average battery life**â??it delivers **excellent value** with its **120Hz AMOLED display, flagship chipset, and versatile camera system**.

For users who donâ??t need the **absolute best in every category** but still want a **premium smartphone experience**, the S21 FE remains a **smart choice**, especially at its **reduced price point** in 2024. Itâ??s a **well-rounded device** that punches above its weight, making it one of the best **budget flagships** available.

Category

1. Uncategorized

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