Smartphone cameras have evolved from just being convenient to powerful enough to toss your point and shoot. But hardware doesn't tell the whole story. Phone owners have the flexibility to choose from a wide array of camera apps, with features such as multiple shot modes, composition overlays, steady shot helpers, editing tools, and post-processing special effects. A quality camera app can compensate for less-than-ideal shooting conditions or help make a halfway-decent photo more Facebook or Instagram-worthy.

10 Great iPhone Camera Apps

by Wesley Fenlon

Even celebrities love their iPhone cameras. Here, Rosario Dawson snaps a self portrait at an event in Germany in January 2012.
©2012 Mathis Wienand/Getty Images

10 Great iPhone Camera Apps

Point-and-shoot cameras are on the way out. Smartphone cameras are just too convenient -- and too good -- for dedicated entry-level cameras to last forever. The iPhone helped kick off the smartphone boom in 2007, and the camera on the iPhone 4S -- released in 2011 -- is easily one of the best on the market as of mid 2012. The high resolution, 8-megapixel sensor helps, but other camera elements are more important. The backside-illuminated sensor captures lots of light, which is important for shooting at night. The f2.4 aperture lets more light reach the sensor. A five-element lens increases image sharpness. And 1080p video shooting is just the icing on the cake.

Apple released a service called iCloud alongside the iPhone 4S. One of iCloud's features, Photo Stream, syncs photos snapped on the iPhone to cloud storage, as well as to a Mac or PC, streamlining the process of backing up photos or sharing them with friends. It's another convenience that makes smartphones killer pocket cameras. And they get better still: In addition to the iPhone's default camera software, there are tons of camera apps on the App Store that add the features and options of pricier dedicated cameras.

Here are 10 great iPhone camera apps you should check out if you like shooting pictures and video with your phone. Want to shoot a stop motion video? Love the idea of combining photography and social networking? Feel like doing some photo editing on the go and want something more complex than Apple's Photos software? Read on.

10: Camera Genius

CameraGenius has been around since 2009 -- a long time in the app world. The developers of this $3 camera app have updated it again and again over its life, hitting version 4.3 in February of 2012. Camera Genius is a jack of all trades. It adds additional shooting options, like a full-screen shutter button and time
stamping. It adds sharing tools like quick uploading to Facebook, Flickr, Tumblr, Twitter and Picasa. And it offers editing options: A simple cropping tool sits alongside tons of color filters for styling up photographs.

The app is popular enough to have accrued more than 1.5 million downloads in its lifetime. While some of its features, like burst shooting and anti-shake, have been made redundant by updates to Apple's basic camera app, Camera Genius is a simple tool that provides a lot of functionality in an amateur-friendly interface.

Mattebox touts itself as having the soul of a luxury point and shoot camera.

Screencap by HowStuffWorks

9: Mattebox

The $4 Mattebox app looks simple, but it's actually a photo app built for photographers who are used to shooting with fancy DSLRs. The user interface is modeled after a famous camera made in the 1990s, the Konika Hexar, and it uses that camera's viewfinder as inspiration. Mattebox displays information pro photographers expect to see at a glance: ISO, white balance, shutter speed and focal distance. Only white balance can be manually controlled due to the iPhone hardware, but all that information is on display for photographers to keep in mind while shooting.

One of the app's coolest features is a dual-stage shutter button, or slider. By holding down the button, you can lock exposure and focus, then adjust your framing before sliding the button down and snapping a shot. Mattebox also offers some basic editing tools for cropping, color, exposure, gamma and saturation tweaking, but the unique viewfinder is its primary draw.

If you want filters, check out the next app: Camerabag.

8: Camerabag

Camerabag is a $2 filter app. Like the more famous Instagram, Camerabag lets you apply all sorts of stylized filters to an image, transforming a digital photo into an '80s Polaroid replica or a warm silver take on black-and-white aesthetics. Like Camera Genius, Camerabag has been around for years. And while newer apps have passed it by in terms of popularity, Camerabag still has its supporters, thanks to a simple interface and a selective range of filters. "Instant," "1974," "Cinema," and "Colorcross" are a few of the 14 filtering options.

If a photo doesn't come out quite right, double-tapping will re-apply a filter and change how it looks. That's about as simple as photo editing can get.

Want more control over your photo manipulation? Then it's time to download a dedicated editing app.
To help newcomers to iPhone photography, Snapseed’s gallery page shows off the effects that come with the app and how they can be used to enhance pictures.

Screencap by HowStuffWorks

7: Snapseed

There are bigger names in the photo editing world than Snapseed, like Adobe Photoshop, but Adobe's iPhone-focused Photoshop Express can't match Snapseed with features or reviewer praise. The editing suite features adjustable brightness, contrast, color, sharpening and saturation. And instead of simple filters, Snapseed supports special effects like tilt shift and adjustable texturing. Filters aren't just on or off: You can customize how strong they are. Center focus even allows you to add some post-shot depth of field.

Basics like cropping and adding borders are also included. The original photos are never overwritten, so you won't have to worry about accidentally saving a bunch of edits over a pristine photo. And with social tools for Flickr, Facebook and Twitter, you can share edited photos as easily in Snapseed as you can in most other photo apps. At $5, it's one of the most expensive apps on this list, but that's still a bargain for the best-reviewed editing app on the market.

6: Camera Awesome

If the name alone doesn't intrigue you, here's the gist of Camera Awesome: It's a free app that's racked up more than 4 million downloads in the first half of 2012 by offering a simple "awesomize" button to auto-adjust images. Camera Awesome does more than that: It offers quick tap controls for independently adjusting exposure and focus, 36 presets, filters, frames, crop and rotate tools, and compositional aids for framing shots. The video recording app even starts working before you press the shutter button to capture the previous five seconds of action. Useful, if you're a tad slow on the draw.

So how does Camera Awesome make money? In-app purchases. They offer loads of additional filters in packs of nine for $1, or all 250-plus filters for $10. Filters can be mixed and matched to create different visual effects. Camera Awesome's sharing center features all the usual suspects of social sharing, including Instagram, and by picking a favorite service, you can automate the process to get photos on the Web as quickly as possible.

The gridlines in the Camera+ interface (which can be turned off, if you prefer) help you line up your shots and position your subject for optimal interest.

Screencap by HowStuffWorks

5: Camera+

Like Camera Awesome, Camera+'s name implies a twist on the basic features offered by Apple's default photo-taking app. With more than 7 million downloads, Camera+ has become the go-to photo-taking app that fulfills the jack-of-all-trades slot once owned by Camera Genius. The $2 app offers a range of shooting features, like constant
fill lighting from the LED, image stabilization, timer and burst modes, and a 6x digital zoom option. The range of editing tools is even greater, starting with a "clarity" feature that auto-tweaks images, much like Camera Awesome's "awesomizer."

Camera+ allows you to import photos taken in the default camera app and edit them with effects, filters and a digital "flash" that brightens overly dark images. Cropping, borders and sharing to Twitter, Facebook and Flickr round out the list of expected features.

4: SloPro

SloPro is a big divergence from the filters and editing tools of apps like Camera+ and Camera Awesome. SloPro is all about video. The free app can shoot 60 frames per second (fps) video on the iPhone 4S -- twice the frame rate of the standard 30 fps -- and then export that video at three different speeds: slow, slower and slowest. Shooting at 60 fps is important, since the app can then slow the video down without resulting in choppy playback. And with that, slow motion iPhone video capture is easy as can be.

One caveat: SloPro requires a $2 in-app purchase to remove a video watermark and export videos in slow motion or at 60 fps. Videos can also be uploaded to Facebook and Twitter.

Our next app isn’t quite so specialized, but it’s still all about video: FilMic Pro is the go-to choice for budding filmmakers with iPhones in their pockets.

FilMic Pro’s virtual slate doesn’t just look cute -- it lets filmmakers add meta data to their shots.

Screenshot by HowStuffWorks

3: FilMic Pro

The $3 FilMicPro app does its best to offer professional video functionality in a downloadable smartphone package. FilMic Pro offers three different options for controlling exposure and focus, adjustable frame rate from 1 to 25 frames per second (and the iPhone’s standard 30 fps), and an image flip option that supports add-on 35mm lenses. There are four bitrate options with a max of 48 mbps at 1080p, and framing overlays for various resolutions like 4:3, 16:9 and 2.35:1.

Other guides, like bars for the rule of thirds and color bars for post production, are meant to help filmmakers frame and edit shots. Videos can easily be saved to the phone’s memory or uploaded to Web services like Facebook, Youtube, Dropbox or Tumblr.

Next, we’ll take a look at our last video app that focuses on a particular task, much like SloPro. It’s called Frameograph.
2: Frameographer

Frameographer is the iPhone app that will finally let you make that Gumby fan movie you've always dreamed of. Or maybe it's the sun setting over a city skyline that you've always wanted to capture in a beautiful time lapse. Frameographer has both styles covered. The $3 app focuses on creating stop motion movies and time-lapse videos with easy control over every frame in a project. For stop motion, the ability to duplicate frames or delete multiple frames at once makes it possible to edit a home movie in-app, rather than dumping a series of photographs and editing them together on a computer. The "onion skin" mode displays the most recently captured frame on screen, making it easy to line up a series of stop motion shots.

The app's interface couldn't be much simpler: It displays video frames, buttons for adding in music and exporting a finished project to the iPhone's camera roll, and a few other basic options. Time lapse allows you to snap photos as rapidly as one per second or as slowly as one every 10 minutes, and the final video can be output at a flexible framerate.

The Instagram account signup interface is quick -- you're up and running in just a few moments.

Screen cap by HowStuffWorks

1: Instagram

More than 30 million people use Instagram on iOS. In the world of iPhone camera apps, Instagram reigns supreme, thanks to its simplicity and perfect pricing (it's free, of course!). Because it's so popular, you probably know exactly what it does: Like CameraBag, Instagram allows photographers to slap filters onto their images to make them sepia tone or lo-fi. But what if you don't like filters? Well, Instagram is still a powerful camera app because of its social filters. Thirty million downloads can attest to that. Instagram's real draw is social networking and how easy it makes sharing photos.

Every photo gets a convenient Web link and its own page displaying comments, "likes" and the location where it was shot, if users choose to enable that feature. Instagram taps into Twitter's popularity with the ability to follow other users and see their photos. Best of all, the price is right. Instagram won't change how you take photos, but it will change how you share and consume them.

Lots More Information

Author's Note
Putting together a list of 10 iPhone camera apps gave me a chance to check out a few apps I'd heard good things about. Some of the popular choices, like Instagram, deserve spots on the list for obvious reasons. A lot of people love them. They're easy to use and help you share photographs with your friends. But my personal favorites are apps like Frameographer, which allow you to create genuinely cool stop motion videos for only a couple bucks. It's a natural extension of the game-changing convenience of smartphone cameras.
New features in Picasa 3.9

Picasa 3.9 lets you share directly to Google+ and offers a much richer selection of editing tools. Check out the Picasa 3.9 guide for more details about the latest Picasa version.

You can download Picasa at http://picasa.google.com.

Share to your Google+ circles -- If you've joined Google+, you can use Picasa 3.9 to share directly to the circles you've created in Google+. They'll see your photos and videos in their Google+ stream. People that don't use Google+ aren't left out. They'll get an email to view your album in Google+, and they don't have to join to do so.

Picasa name tags on Google+ -- If you've joined Google+, you may have noticed that name tags have become more social. With the release of Picasa 3.9, you can now upload and share your name tags on Google+. Note that if you choose not to join Google+, name tags won't change at all.

New photo editing effects -- We've added a plethora of new editing effects like Vignette, Duo-tone, Borders and more.

Side by side editing -- Compare two different photos side by side. Or compare the original and edited versions versions of the same photo simultaneously as you apply edits in Picasa. Learn how to edit side by side.
5 AREAS WHERE CAMERAS STILL BEAT SMARTPHONES IF YOU WANT GREAT PHOTO QUALITY

By Lea Shu    July 28, 2013

A few years back, Panasonic ran an ad campaign proclaiming, “If it has a ringtone, it’s not a camera.” That’s in defense, of course, against the growth and popularity of smartphone photography. In the early days, camera phones were more novel than useful, but by the time Panasonic unveiled its ads in 2010, camera phones — smartphones specifically — had evolved to become the main tool for photography, simply because they are convenient and connected — two features regular cameras can’t match.

To the camera companies’ credit, there are components that smartphones — functioning as cameras — still can’t match (at least for now, as technology is always evolving, after all). These parts are integral to producing excellent quality, and what helps differentiate a traditional camera from a smartphone. Here’s a look at areas where traditional cameras still have a strong upper hand.

Optical zoom

Smartphone cameras may let you zoom in on a subject, but it’s using software to achieve that close-up shot. The problem with digital zoom is that it isn’t a real zoom at all, rather an enlargement of a photo. When you increase a section of a photo on your computer beyond its actual size, you end up with a pixelated image — and that’s exactly what’s happening when “zoom” on your phone.

Smartphone makers may try to convince you on their enhanced digital zooms, but at the end of the day it’s no match for an optical zoom.

With an optical zoom, coupled with stronger image stabilizers, you are adjusting the lens, which will give you much better image quality. Most digital cameras offer an optical zoom, even budget models. Besides better-looking photos, digital cameras have very long zooms, as well. Smartphones, on the other hand, can’t utilize an optical zoom lens purely because of a size limitation. To accommodate such glass, a smartphone will bulk up, like Samsung’s new Galaxy S4Zoom (even internal zooming lenses like those found in rugged cameras require some room). As devices that highlight slim and sleek, adding a protruding lens doesn’t fit into the design.

Sensor

A camera sensor is what’s used to capture a photograph. Through small pixels, the sensor captures all the light and turns it into a digital signal. The more pixels a sensor has, the higher
the resolution. But the number of pixels alone does not guarantee a high-quality image. Size matters: A larger sensor means more light can be captured, which is also important for low-light shooting. Like an optical zoom lens, smartphones can’t accommodate large sensors due to real estate. After all, a smartphone has to pack a lot of non-camera parts while remaining slim and compact. High-end point-and-shoot and interchangeable lens cameras are bulky, but they have the room for large sensors.

As for smartphones, many of them have sensors closer or equivalent in size to those found in basic point-and-shoots. Nokia’s new Lumia 1020 and the older 808 PureView devices offer some of the largest sensors found in a smartphone (hence the protrusions in the bodies to accommodate the sensors), and the Lumia 1020’s sensor is the back-illuminated variety, which captures more light. But compared to APS-C, Micro Four-Thirds, and full-frame sensors, smartphone sensors can’t compete.

**Interchangeable lenses**: You can slap on doodads to enhance a smartphone’s camera, like adding an accessory that creates a fish-eye, zoom, macro, or wide-angle effect, but you’re still using the same lens. Interchangeable lens cameras like a **DSLR** or a mirrorless compact system camera (CSC) offer the flexibility of attaching real lenses that achieve the aforementioned effects with better picture quality. Of course, we’re talking about the difference between casual and “real” photography, but for the latter, you’re probably going to need to employ some serious glass to capture certain effects.

**Shutter speed**: If you want to capture some fast action sequences, you can put away that smartphone. You might get lucky and freeze something in motion, but a fast shutter speed is something that’s difficult to achieve, even with regular point-and-shoot cameras – it’s why you won’t see sports photographers carrying a pocket cam to shoot an event. Some smartphones offer a burst mode that you can use for capturing multiple sequential shots of a moving subject, but if you want to stop something in its tracks, and with sharp image quality, that’s a job for a fast camera with a good lens.

**Shooting modes, manual adjustments**

Like their basic point-and-shoot cousins, smartphones are automatic cameras. Yes, some will let you play with the ISO, aperture, and shutter settings, but if you want to take full control of a camera to create some breathtaking images, go with a **DSLR** or **CSC** that offers various shooting modes, or even one of the higher-end point-and-shoots. Other advantages include controls over white balance, autofocus, light metering, etc.

(Main image via [Rechitan Sorin](http://www.shutterstock.com) / Shutterstock)