So long, small phones

Ever Googled for “Best Small Phones”? I’ll save you the click: the guides you’ll find feature phones that are old, underpowered, or simply *not small* to begin with.

I’ve long been a small phone guy. I loved my 2013 Moto X, with its 4.7-inch screen, and I’ve used a 5.4-inch iPhone Mini for years. But when Apple discontinued the Mini last month, I decided it was time to jump ship. I saved my money for the Pixel 8, figuring I’d eventually learn to live with a “new normal” of 6.2-inch handsets.

But for gadget enthusiasts like me, Google had other plans: it’s arbitrarily pushing buyers to the ginormous Pixel 8 Pro instead, bragging about how its larger handset can handle niftier features even though *both phones have the same cameras and chips*.

That’s why I began my hunt for the last good small phones — but gosh is it slim pickings.

For example, perhaps you’ve heard the Asus Zenfone 10 is a small phone because it has a 5.9-inch screen — smaller than 6.1, 6.5, or 6.7. But did you know the phone itself is almost identically sized to a “normal” Galaxy S23 or iPhone 15, not counting camera bumps?

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Some guides suggest the 2022 iPhone SE, perhaps because it’s got a 4.7-inch screen — even smaller than a 5.4-inch iPhone

Mini, right? Wrong:

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Pixel 6A and Pixel 7A? Absolutely nope — both are bigger than a standard Samsung or Apple phone. Even unlocking their under-display fingerprint sensor feels like a stretch for my average-sized hand.

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While *Android Police* calls the Sony Xperia 5 V “the compact flagship Android phone enthusiasts always wanted,” I think this size comparison speaks for itself:

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And if you think folding flip phones are small, well…

Opened, the Samsung Z Flip and Moto Razr are roughly as big as the Pixel 8 Pro or iPhone 15 Pro Max, two of the biggest flagship handsets out there.

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Closed, the Z Flip’s girth doubles, making it that much harder

to wrap a hand around — and it’s plenty wide, too. Plus, Samsung doesn’t actually let you use it like a small phone by default — you’ve gotta jump through hoops to use apps on the outer screen. Even with the Z Flip 5’s larger cover screen, it’s awkward.

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There is one company doggedly still pursuing small phones. It’s called Unihertz, and its Jelly line is tiny and has nifty features like a BlackBerry keyboard or programmable buttons and extra LEDs. But they’re also exceptionally budget, designed for minimalists, not those who want a great processor and a great camera like me.

Why isn’t someone building the iPhone Mini of Android, you might ask? They’re trying! But the latest dispatches from the Small Android Phone Project are… not great. The project hasn’t had a meaningful update in five months, and team leader Benjamin Bryant admits he had to pause to look for consulting work on the side.

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In some ways, they’re still at square one: the entire design revolves around the phone’s display, but display manufacturers don’t publicly offer the kind of small, high-end screen Bryant’s team is looking for — those are typically produced under contract to specific manufacturers.

“The problem is Apple has exclusive rights to [the iPhone Mini’s] display — so, even with the line being discontinued,

[Samsung Display] isn’t going to give us access,” he told supporters last month.

The situation has slightly improved since then: Bryant says his team just had its first real call with Samsung Display US. “Samsung Display US is willing to champion us; the challenge will be convincing the Korean HQ that we are a viable enough project for them to invest time and resources into,” Bryant tells me.

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