Drone Buying GUIDE

The ultimate guide to buying a DJI drone based on your specific requirements

droneybee.com

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Introduction and what this guide is about

This guide is to help you make an intelligent buying decision for a capable photography/videography based drone. It is meant for you if you have some beginner level flying experience with a hobby or toy grade drone and want to move up a notch and get a drone capable of doing photo and video capture.

This guide progresses from the casual user who wants to capture some decent aerial photos and videos of their day to day lives all the way to the expert professional drone user who wants to work in the field of capturing high quality videos and pictures of action sports.

What is not included in this guide is a selection of drones for those who have never tried flying a drone before. If you fall into this category, we recommend you read our article on levelling up your drone skills. There are some good recommendations for drones for you in that article.

However, if you still think you'll do okay with flying drones, we recommend that you stick to the recommendation in the casual user category of this guide.

This guide is also not for you if you want drones for precision agriculture. It is purely for those who want to make an intelligent buying decision in the photography/videography drone category.

The drones are classified and labelled for one or more of the following groups of people:

- The casual user who wants a drone capable of capturing photos and videos of their day to day lives, their traveling adventures etc. If you fall into this category, it can frankly be overkill/waste of money to buy something that costs more than $600, especially if you won't be using the drone all the time.
- The aspiring professional who wants to break into the drone industry and make some money with drones/ build a drone business.
- The established drone pilot who has some years of flying under his/her belt and wants to move into more advanced areas of drone photography and videography like action sports or high level cinematography.

Note: If you are someone who wants to learn how to make money with a drone and establish a drone business, we recommend you read our guide here.

DJI Spark: Best drone for the casual user

Recommended for: The casual user and people who want to test the waters with part time drone gigs, like the ones on dronebase.com

Main specification highlights

- Dimensions: 143x143x55 mm (LxWxH)
- Weight: 300g
- Max Flight Time: 16 minutes
- Max Speed: 50 kph (S - mode)
  21 kph (P – mode)
- Intelligent flight modes: Advanced Gesture, QuickShot, ActiveTrack, TapFly, Tripod
- Max Video Resolution: 1080 p

Max Photo Resolution: 12 MP
- Forward obstacle sensing

If you get the fly more combo for additional flight time and **a controller** then the DJI Spark really kicks ass. Sure, it will cost about $200 more, but it is definitely worth it!

Another tip: If possible, get the red version of the Spark. We have found that they will have increased visibility up in the sky.

Who should buy this drone?

This drone is for casual folks who want to spend as little as possible on a drone. It is also an extremely portable drone that you can carry around easily. This is great if you are someone who loves to travel.

If you are a casual user or someone who wants to test the waters with doing little part time drone gigs before venturing into building your own drone media business, go for the DJI Spark. You won't regret it!

Pros and cons

Pros

- Cheapest of the lot
- Extremely portable – The form factor is smaller than that of an average cell phone!
- Capable of capturing good photos and videos if you are a casual user
- Flies pretty well, even in windy conditions
- Can fly indoors + has forward object sensing capability

Cons

- No 4K capture (Max 1080p).
- Only JPEG images. No DNG (RAW) images.
- The camera does not pan
- The gesture controls seem pretty cool at first glance, but can be gimmicky. It might not work all the time and frankly, it can be much easier to control the drone with the app/controller than with gestures.

- Does not come with flight modes such as course lock, waypoints, homelock and point of interest.

Alternatives

- **DJI Phantom 3 SE:**

This drone can capture 4K videos, has better flight times (25 minutes) than is relatively more stable in the wind. It also comes with flight modes like point of interest, course lock, home lock and waypoints.
The Phantom 3 SE is definitely going to capture better photos and videos compared to the Spark. This is great if you want a cheap, entry level drone that can help you get into doing some part-time drone gigs or lower level drone photography/videography jobs. You can also capture DNG (RAW) images with the Phantom 3 SE, unlike the DJI Spark.
However, you lose the portability that comes with the DJI Spark. The Phantom 3 standard is rather massive, compared to the Spark. You lose the ability to carry it around easily and fly it indoors. It also does not have the forward obstacle sensing

feature that the DJI Spark has.

DJI Mavic Pro

Recommended for: The casual user who does not mind spending a bit more for a drone that has better features than drones like the DJI Spark. Also ideal for the aspiring drone pilot who wants to start his/her own drone business.

Main specification highlights

- Dimensions: Folded:
  198×83×83 mm (L×W×H)
  Unfolded:
  305×244×85 mm (L×W×H)
- Weight : 734 g
- Max Flight Time: 27 minutes
- Max Speed:
  65 kph (S - mode)

36 kph (P – mode)
- Intelligent flight modes: ActiveTrack, Tripod Mode, Gesture Mode, Cinematic Mode, Fixed-Wing Mode, TapFly, Terrian Follow, Point of Interest, Couse Lock, Waypoints, Home Lock
- Max Video Resolution: 4K @30 fps
  Max Photo Resolution: 12 MP
- Forward obstacle sensing

Who should buy this drone?

If you want a highly portable drone that is also capable of high performance (way better than the DJI Spark), go for the Mavic Pro. It also comes with 4k video capture capabilities at 30 fps.

Of course, it'll cost you almost double the price but is it worth the money? The answer is that it depends. It can certainly be overkill/waste of money if you are a casual user who will only use the drone every once in a while.

However, if you are someone who is addicted to capturing high quality video or if you are an aspiring drone pilot who wants to break into the drone photography/videography industry, then the DJI Mavic Pro is certainly worth getting.

Pros and cons

Pros

- 4K video capture
- Can capture DNG (RAW) images
- Portable/foldable
- Excellent flight times (27 minutes)
- Almost every flight mode imaginable
- High maximum speed
- Flies extremely well and can capture extremely stable video even at high winds
- Comes with forward object sensing
- Fixed wing mode!

Cons

- Video capture maxed at 30 fps
- Photo capture maxed at 12 MP
- No rear/side object sensing
- Expensive compared to drones like the DJI Phantom 3 SE which also boasts 4K video capture with similar flight times.

Alternatives

- **DJI Mavic Pro Platinum:**

Pay around an additional $100 and get a drone that can fly longer and makes less

noise relative to the DJI Mavic Pro. The Platinum also comes in shiny, silver color that looks a bit more professional and elegant than the regular Mavic Pro.

- **DJI Phantom 3 SE:**

  Pay significantly less but get more or less the same video/camera features. You lose the portability aspect and the forward object sensing capabilities, however. You also lose flight modes like Gesture Mode, ActiveTrack, Cinematic Mode, Fixed Wing mode, Terrain Flow, Tap fly etc.

DJI Phantom 4 Pro (The aspiring professional drone)

Recommended for: The DJI Phantom 4 Pro is our #1 recommendation to anybody who is serious about starting their own drone business in this day and age. Not only does it boast excellent quality camera features, it also comes with flight capabilities that will no doubt make your purchase future proof for at least 2 years from now.

Main specification highlights

- Dimensions: 289.5 × 289.5 × 196 mm (L×W×H)
- Weight: 1388g
- Max Flight Time: 30 minutes
- Max Speed:
  72 kph (S - mode)

50 kph (P – mode)

- Intelligent flight modes: ActiveTrack, Tapfly, Tripod Mode, Gesture Mode, Point of Interest, Course Lock, Home Lock, Follow me, Waypoints
- Max Video Resolution: 4K @60 fps
  4k @60 fps
  Max Image Size: 20 MP
- Forward, backward and side object sensing

Who should buy this drone?

Are you an aspiring drone pilot who wants to break into the drone industry and start your own drone photography/videography based business? Then look no further. If you can afford the DJI Phantom 4 Pro, we seriously recommend you get it. It is the best investment you'll make.

Sure, you lose the portability factor that comes with the Mavic Pro, but you gain the capability to take 4K video @ 60 fps. The difference is huge. Not only this, the picture quality is a significant upgrade compared to the Mavic Pro (20MP vs 12MP). If you want to be competitive and offer good service, the DJI Phantom 4 Pro will facilitate you better than the Mavic Pro.

Pros and cons

Pros

- 4K video capture @ 60 fps
- Can capture DNG (RAW) images
- All the necessary flight modes
- High maximum speed
- Can fly extremely and take stable video well even in high wind conditions
- Comes with forward, backward and side object sensing to avoid collision

Cons

- Costs way more than the Mavic Pro or the Phantom 3 SE
- Not as portable as the Mavic Pro or Spark
- You lose some flight modes like the cinematic mode and fixed wing mode if

you go for this over the Mavic Pro

Alternatives

- **DJI Phantom 4 Advanced (Highly recommended if you want to save up):** Pay less (about $300 less) and get the same quality camera and flight features as that of the DJI Phantom 4. You lose the backward and side object sensing capabilities however.

DJI Inspire 2

Recommended for: Seasoned drone pilots who wants to get into cinematography and/or get into drone jobs that involve action sports, moving vehicles etc. The inspire series is certainly not recommended for the beginner/intermediate drone pilots. You'll be spending a LOT more for this and it is certainly a waste of cash if you are not going to be using it for its full potential.

Main specification highlights

- Weight: 7.58 lbs
- Max flight time: 27 minutes (With Zenmuse X4S)
- Max speed: 94 Kph (sport mode)
- Object sensing

- Camera quality: Depends on the camera you install (can cost you anywhere from an additional $500 to $2700, depending on the quality
- Multiple intelligent flight modes (also comes with the Spotlight Pro, giving even single pilots to create complex and dramatic shots).
- Upgraded dual frequency and dual channel which enables streaming video from an onboard FPV camera and the main camera simultaneously. This allows for excellent collaboration between the camera operator and the drone pilot

Who should buy this drone?

This is for seasoned drone cinematographers only. Most of the high level captures done on the Inspire series are done by collaboration. That is, unlike the DJI Phantom series, or the Mavic Pro for example, the Inspire allows dual operator control. This enables the pilot to focus on flying the drone and the camera operator to control the gimbal/camera angle to capture the best possible shots.

Again, if you are not into advanced cinematography or something like action sports, this drone is certainly an overkill and completely unnecessary.

Pros and cons

Pros

- Comes with every feature that the other DJI drones have PLUS extra flight capabilities that will enable it to do high quality cinematography and capture high speed action.
- Dual operator mode

Cons

- Expensive
- Only for seasoned drone cinematographers
- Large, bulky and not very portable

Alternatives

You could get the Inspire 1 or Inspire 1 Pro (with the Zenmuse X5 camera) as an alternative, which will be cheaper than getting the Inspire 2 but frankly, if you are serious about cinematography and can spend more than $3000 for the Inspire 1 Pro, you will be better off spending the additional money and get the Inspire 2 instead.

Other relevant resources and guides

- Recommended drone accessories: http://www.droneybee.com/best-drone-accessories/
- Best indoor drones: http://www.droneybee.com/best-indoor-drones/
- Master flying drones step-by-step: http://www.droneybee.com/how-to-fly-a-quadcopter/
- Monster collection of drone aerial photography tips: http://www.droneybee.com/drone-aerial-photography/
- Learn how to take care of your LiPo batteries: http://www.droneybee.com/lipo-battery-tutorial/
- How to travel with a drone: http://www.droneybee.com/travel-with-a-drone/