

Gadgets



Insta360 Nano: all around the world

Nowadays, 360-degree photos are where it's at. Facebook tells me this and YouTube agrees; both started supporting the format over the last year or so, with Facebook also launching an in-app 360-degree camera function in August. So you've probably started noticing more of those photos where you can move around in the picture by tilting your phone or swiping your finger.

The big brother to panoramic photos, 360-degree pics are also the gateway drug to virtual reality (VR) experiences. Not that long ago, the technology needed to take these photos was out of reach of most people, but, like so many things, tech has got cheaper and lighter, very quickly.

Take the Insta360 Nano, which makes it super-easy to take 360-degree pics and videos and share them on social media, or stream them live. The Nano slots into an iPhone 6 or above, and you operate it via the Insta360 app — which is meant to turn your phone's display upside down, so don't panic! Alternatively, if, like me, you don't have an iPhone 6 or up, you can use it with a microSD, although you really don't get the full app and sharing experience, and have to hack about with the desktop software, which in places hasn't been translated from Chinese yet.

Nevertheless, the camera itself is super-nifty. You can pretty much pick it up and get going — there are few fiddly settings, which is what always puts me off serious photography. The fish-eye lenses take some getting used to, though, so not really my best-ever selfies!

The image stabilisation is great. It definitely beats trying to follow the arrow when taking panoramas and 360s on an iPhone. I was walking pretty fast and holding the device fairly casually and the images and videos are quite steady.

It was a windy day, so the sound was not great, but the built-in mike does seem to do a pretty good job of picking up your voice.

Somewhat cat-like, I was quite excited by the box the Nano comes in, which doubles as a VR headset you can slide your phone into. And demonstrates just how accessible and easy to produce VR experiences are.

Android users don't feel left out, the Insta360 Air retails at R2 599, while the Nano is R3 999.

For more, visit: 360cams.co.za.

By Vanessa Clark



Explainer

Virtual Reality Therapy: inner space — the final frontier

Hmmm...so not only are the machines taking our jobs, they're going to provide us with counselling afterwards? I don't know whether to laugh or cry.

Not quite. Virtual Reality Therapy (VRT) uses virtual reality as a tool in psychological and physical treatments, for instance, helping stroke patients learn how to walk again.

What, you mean those ridiculous goggles have a purpose beyond making gamers look ridiculous?

Yup. And it's not just what you see. VRT uses haptic feedback to help stroke patients regain their fine motor skills. And sight, sound and smell are combined to recreate battlefield scenarios to help veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

That sounds a bit mean.

VRT is typically used as part of a treatment plan by a medical professional, and in the case of the battlefield, one of the benefits is that the simulations are convincing, but are also safe and controllable. Early trials are very promising and could indicate that VRT is more effective than alternatives and has longer-lasting effects. For instance, when teaching self-compassion to treat depression, patients are less resistant to treatment compared to non-VR situations, including with therapists.

It looks like VRT might also be helpful for treating phobias, addiction, eating disorders and body dysmorphic disorder, as well as helping people with autism learn social skills.

So the machines are giving us a helping hand?

As well as the therapies themselves, VRT should make these treatments more accessible and affordable, helping more people.

