

Single-use cameras

NEED TO KNOW

Digital cameras have shot up in popularity these past few years, but around 22 million single-use cameras are still sold in the UK every year, taking over half a billion photos. They're great for parties, the beach, or at weddings – places you might not want to risk damage to your expensive camera.

Single-use cameras are pretty cheap; most are under £10. Often, you can buy them with processing included, or in packs of two, three or more, making them better value.

For photos taken in good, bright conditions, it would be hard to tell the difference in picture quality between our Best Buy single-use cameras and Best Buy compact cameras.

ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY

Still often called 'disposable', single-use cameras have become more environmentally friendly. With most makes, after you've handed the camera in and the film is taken out for processing, the camera body and some parts, such as the viewfinder, lens and flash, are used again to make another camera. From time to time this recycling is noticeable – a small number of our samples had dirty or scratched viewfinders and lenses. We found that this didn't detract from the final picture quality, though.

TYPES OF SINGLE-USE CAMERA

Most single-use cameras have a flash. You can also get waterproof models, such as this Fujifilm or Boots (13) – the only two we tested – which are good for taking underwater pictures. If you fancy being artistic consider a single-use camera with black and white film. However, the Confetti (11), the only black and white camera on test, contains a rare film type and has to be sent away for special processing – it took us about a week and a half to get our photos back. The Kodak (4) is the first single-use camera we've seen with two switchable lenses, which create a zoom effect, although not a very powerful one.



BEST BUYS

The quality of single-use cameras varies widely. Our best camera, the waterproof Fujifilm (1), took excellent quality pictures, but our low-scoring cameras are definitely best avoided, as the pictures they took suffered from a lack of sharpness and inaccurate colours.

Fujifilm and Kodak cameras did well. All six of their cameras ended up in the upper half of our results table.

We made three single-use cameras Best Buys. Top of the table by some distance is the waterproof Fujifilm (1), £7.88 from Asda. It's the only camera to score a ★ for overall picture quality. It takes great underwater pictures but is also excellent for pictures on dry land. Its 800-speed film makes taking good snaps in low light easier, but it has no flash, so taking good pictures in darker conditions is very difficult.

There are a few minor niggles when using it. You use a shutter lever rather than a button to take pictures, and it needs a bit of finger strength to push it down. The exposure wind-on requires finger and thumb, and the small exposure counter display reflects light, meaning that it's hard to see from some angles.

The Kodak (2), £8.98 from Boots, also has 800-speed film. It takes good-quality pictures overall, including good flash pictures, aided by a fast flash recovery time of just four seconds.

It could be easier to use, though. The exposure counter is difficult to see, the flash button is hard to press, the exposure wind-on is stiff, and it lacks grips which would make the camera easier to hold steadily and securely.

The Boots (3) costs £5.99 and is available from most Boots stores. The colour differentiation is excellent. If you take a picture of a landscape with many subtly different shades of green, the camera produces a print with the different shades clearly visible. With a lesser camera, there might be no differentiation, with the greens merging into one shade. It's easy to use overall, with finger recesses helping you to hold it steady, although the exposure wind-on is stiff. It comes with 400-speed film, but the flash isn't great.

If you particularly want to take pictures at a party or in other dark conditions, pick the Kodak (2). Alternatively, the Jessops (7) was





BEST CONDITIONS

The ideal situation for single-use cameras is outside in good sunlight. In dull conditions they're more prone to lack of sharpness and colour inaccuracies, as their lenses are cheap and not particularly high quality. If you plan to use your camera in dull conditions, look for one with a film speed of 800, such as this Fujifilm. Film with a speed of 800 is twice as sensitive to light as 400-speed film, improving your chances of a good shot in poorer light or when you don't want to use flash – although prints from faster films will have a more grainy appearance.



FLASH RANGE

The flash range of a camera is the distance at which you can take a decent photo using the flash. For example, this Kodak has a flash range of 1.2m to 3.5m. When using flash with this camera, make sure your subject is somewhere between 1.2m and 3.5m from you. If it's any closer than 1.2m, the subject will appear too bright in the photo. If it's further than 3.5m, the subject will be too dark.



the only camera that scored ★ for flash pictures, although it's not a Best Buy.

Of the other non-Best Buys, it's worth noting that the Kodak (4) and Kodak (6) operate in a strange way. After you turn the flash on and take your photo, the flash stays on for about a day. So if you take some photos at a night-time party with the flash, followed by some outside the next day in sunny weather, for example, this could be a problem because the unwanted flash in the sunshine might make your photos too bright. On the other hand, if you're taking the whole film at the party, there's no need to keep pressing the button to turn the flash on after every shot, which is handy. After about a day when the flash switches itself off, your next picture will have no flash. However, pressing the shutter button for this shot will reactivate the flash for subsequent shots, before again turning itself off for a day or so.



DON'T BUY

Avoid the Boots (12), the waterproof Boots (13), the Wow! (14), Superdrug (15), Solaris (16) and Numark (17).

Pictures taken with these cameras suffered from a lack of sharpness in the final print and poor colour balance. For example, some prints that we developed from the Solaris

showed a grey sky instead of a blue sky, which the better single-use cameras accurately recorded.

The Solaris and Numark were the worst single-use cameras overall, both scoring ● for flash pictures and overall picture quality. These were very poor.



12 Boots



13 Boots



14 Wow!



15 Superdrug



16 Solaris



17 Numark

TABLE NOTES

We tested the latest models from the leading brands.

Specification

Price Lowest high-street price.

Exposures How many pictures you'll get. **Speed** The film's light sensitivity. 800 speed is better for low light. **Recyclable** Whether components can be reused.

Performance

Technical Includes tests for closest focusing distance and sharpness.

Flash recovery How quickly the flash resets, ranging from four to nine seconds. Cameras with 'n/a' have no flash. **Ease of use** Includes viewfinder quality and accuracy, suitability for people who wear glasses, portability and ergonomics.

KEY



SCORE

Ignores price and is based on:
Picture quality 60%
Technical tests 20%
Ease of use 20%

Single-use cameras

MODEL

	Specification				Performance					Score (%)
	Price (£)	Exposures	Speed (ISO)	Recyclable	Technical	Flash photos	Flash recovery	Picture quality	Ease of use	
1 Fujifilm Quicksnap Marine	7.88	27	800	✓	☆	n/a	n/a	★	○	73
2 Kodak Fun Flash	8.98	27	800		☆	☆	★	☆	●	65
3 Boots Essentials with flash	5.99	27	400	✓	○	●	○	☆	☆	59
4 Kodak Ultra Compact	7.99	27	800	✓	○	○	☆	☆	○	58
5 Fujifilm Quicksnap Superia	5.96	27	800	✓	☆	☆	★	○	○	55
6 Kodak Ultra Zoom	7.99	27	800	✓	★	○	☆	○	●	54
7 Jessops Once single-use camera	5.99 ^a	27	400	✓	☆	★	★	○	○	53
8 Fujifilm Cherry with flash	4.95	39	800	✓	☆	●	★	○	☆	51
9 Konica Film-in Mini	9.99 ^b	27	400	✓	○	○	★	○	☆	51
10 Confetti Stars	5.99	24	400		○	●	☆	○	○	48
11 Confetti Smile	5.99	24	400		☆	☆	☆	●	○	45
12 Boots Single-use camera with flash	7.99	27	400	✓	○	☆	○	●	☆	39
13 Boots TUFF sports	8.99	27	400	✓	○	n/a	n/a	●	☆	37
14 Wow! 35mm single-use camera	5.99	27	400	✓	☆	○	★	●	○	36
15 Superdrug Single-use camera with flash	7.99	27	400	✓	○	○	○	●	○	35
16 Solaris i-Click with flash	6.59	37	800	✓	○	●	☆	●	○	25
17 Numark Single-use camera	4.99	27	800	✓	○	●	☆	●	○	18

^a Price for one. Sold in packs of two ^b Price for one. Sold in packs of three