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How to Integrate Your iPhone with a Windows PC or Chromebook

9-11 minutes



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The iPhone was designed to work best with Macs, iCloud, and other Apple technologies. However, it can be a great companion for a Windows PC or Chromebook, too. It's all about finding the right tools to bridge the gap.

So, What's the Problem?

Apple isn't just selling a device; it's selling a whole family of devices, and an ecosystem to go with them. Given this, if you forego the wider Apple ecosystem, you're also foregoing some of the reasons many people choose an iPhone in the first place.

This includes features like Continuity and Handoff, which make it easy to pick up where you left off when switching devices. iCloud support is also baked-in to most first-party apps, allowing Safari to sync tabs and Photos to store your images on the cloud. If you want to cast video from your iPhone to a TV, AirPlay is the default choice.

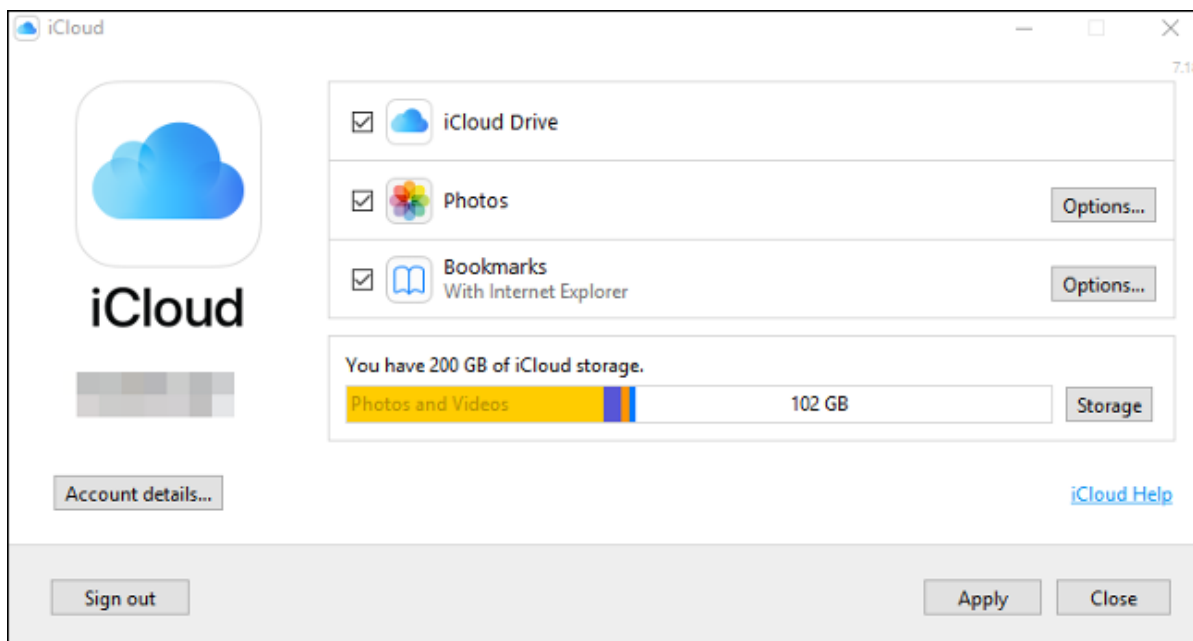
The [Your Phone app on Windows 10](#) also works best with Android phones. Apple doesn't allow Microsoft or other developers to integrate as deeply with the iPhone's iOS as it does.

So, what do you do if you use Windows or another operating system?

Integrating iCloud with Windows

For the best possible integration, download and install Apple's [iCloud for Windows](#). This software provides access to iCloud Drive and iCloud Photos right from your Windows desktop. You'll also be able to sync email, contacts, calendars, and tasks with Outlook, and Safari bookmarks with Internet Explorer, Chrome and Firefox.

After you install iCloud for Windows, launch it and log in with your Apple ID credentials. Click "Options" next to "Photos" and "Bookmarks" to change additional settings. These include which browser you want to sync with, and whether you want photos and videos to download automatically.



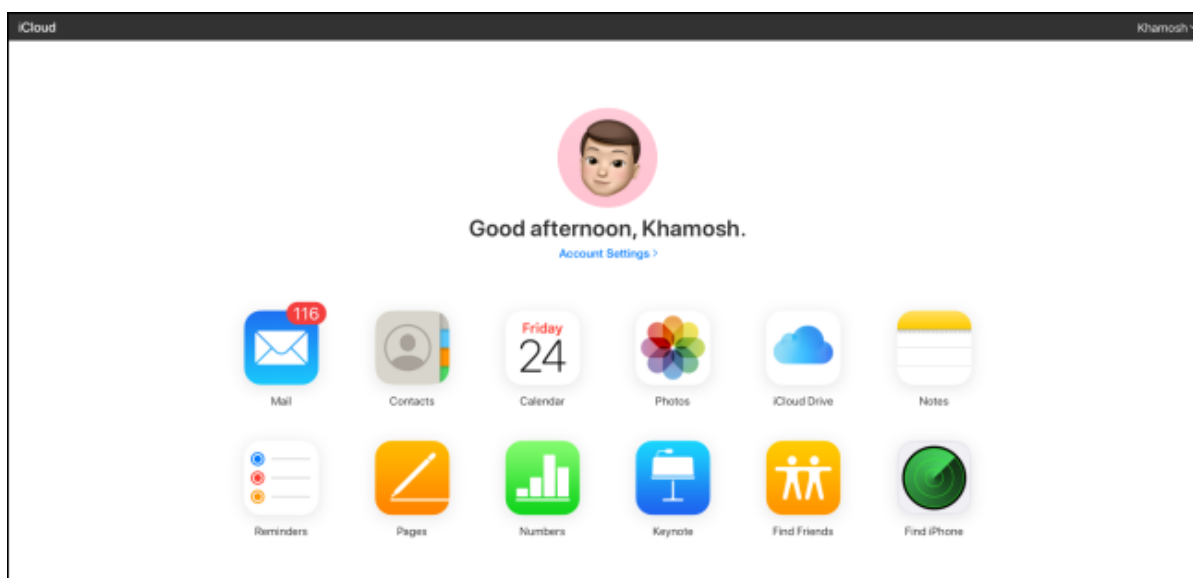
You can also enable “Photo Stream,” which will automatically download the last 30 days’ worth of photos to your device (no iCloud subscription required). You’ll find shortcuts to iCloud Photos via Quick access in Windows Explorer. Click “Download” to download any images you’ve stored in iCloud Photos, “Upload” to upload new photos, or “Shared” to access any shared albums. It’s not elegant but it works.

In our experience, iCloud Photos take a long time to show up on Windows. If your patience is wearing thin with storing images on iCloud, you might have better luck using the web-based control panel at [iCloud.com](https://www.icloud.com) instead.

Accessing iCloud in a Browser

Many iCloud services are also available in a browser. This is the only way to access your iCloud Notes, Calendar, Reminders, and other services on a Windows PC.

Simply point your browser to [iCloud.com](https://www.icloud.com) and log in. You’ll see a list of available iCloud services, including iCloud Drive and iCloud Photos. This interface works in any web browser, so you can use it on Chromebooks and Linux PCs, too.



Here, you can access most of the same services and features you can on a Mac or iPhone, albeit through your browser. These include the following:

- Browsing, organizing, and transferring files to and from iCloud Drive.

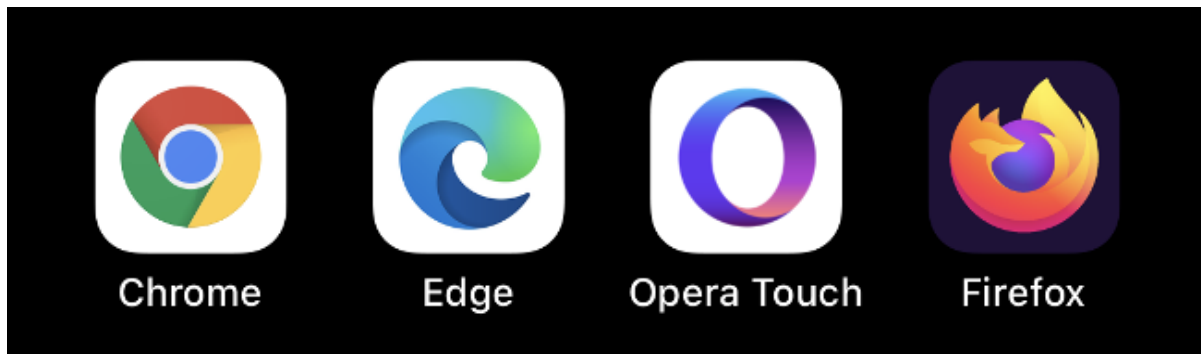
- Viewing, downloading, and uploading images and videos via Photos.
- Taking Notes and creating Reminders via web-based versions of those apps.
- Accessing and editing contact information in Contacts.
- Viewing your iCloud email account in Mail.
- Using web-based versions of Pages, Numbers, and Keynote.

You can also access your Apple ID account settings, view information about your available iCloud storage, trace devices with Apple's handy Find My app, and recover deleted cloud-based files.

Consider Avoiding Safari on Your iPhone

Safari is a capable browser, but its tab and history syncing features only work with other versions of Safari, and the desktop version is only available on a Mac.

Fortunately, plenty of other browsers offer session- and history-syncing, including [Google Chrome](#), [Microsoft Edge](#), [Opera Touch](#), and [Mozilla Firefox](#). You'll get the best possible web-browser syncing between your computer and iPhone if you use a browser that natively runs on both.



If you use Chrome, check out the [Chrome Remote Desktop app](#) for iPhone. It allows you to access just about any machine that's [accessible remotely](#) from your iPhone.

Sync Photos via Google Photos, OneDrive, or Dropbox

iCloud Photos is an optional service that stores all your photos and videos on the cloud, so you can access them on virtually any device. Unfortunately, there isn't an app for Chromebook or Linux, and Windows functionality isn't the best. If you use anything other than macOS, it might be best to avoid iCloud Photos altogether.

[Google Photos](#) is a viable alternative. It offers unlimited storage if you allow Google to compress your images to 16 megapixels (that is, 4,920p x 3,264p) and your videos to 1,080p. If you want to keep the originals, then you'll need sufficient room on your Google Drive.

Google provides 15 GB of storage space for free, but after you reach that, you'll have to purchase more. Once your images are uploaded, you can access them via your browser or a dedicated native app for iOS and Android.

Another option is to use an app like OneDrive or Dropbox to sync your photos to a computer. Both support background uploads, so your media will be backed up automatically. These probably aren't as reliable as the native Photos app in terms of consistently updating in the background; however, they do provide workable alternatives to iCloud.

Microsoft and Google Make Excellent iOS Apps

Microsoft and Google both produce some of the best third-party apps on Apple's platform. If you already use a prominent Microsoft or Google service, there's a good chance there's an iOS companion app for it.

On Windows, [Microsoft Edge](#) is the obvious choice for a browser. It will sync your information, including tabs and Cortana preferences. [OneDrive](#) is Microsoft's answer to iCloud and Google Drive. It works just fine on an iPhone and offers 5 GB of free space (or 1 TB, if you're a Microsoft 365 subscriber).

You can take notes and access them on the go with [OneNote](#), and grab native versions of [Office](#), [Word](#), [Excel](#), [PowerPoint](#), and [Teams](#) to get work done. There's even a free version of [Outlook](#) you can use instead of Apple Mail.

While Google has its own mobile platform in Android, the company produces a [large number of iOS apps](#), too, and they're some of the best third-party apps available on the service. These include the aforementioned [Chrome](#) browser and [Chrome Remote Desktop](#) apps, which are ideal if you use a Chromebook.

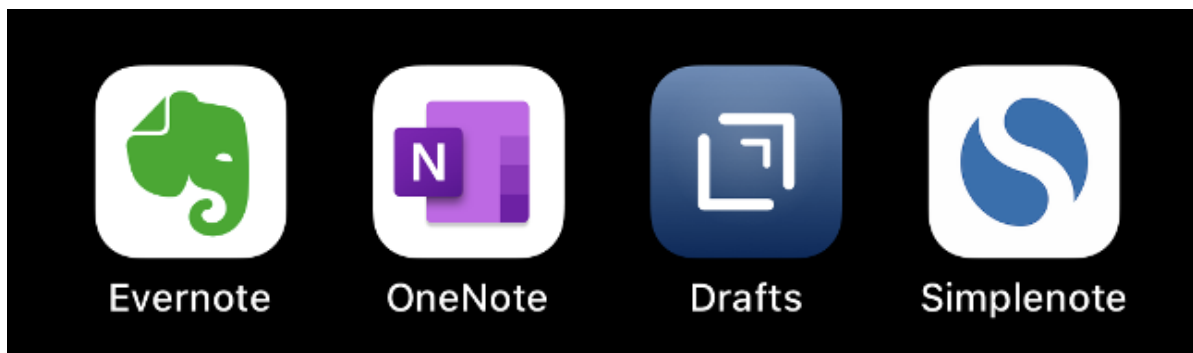
The rest of Google's core services are also eminently accessible on iPhone. The [Gmail](#) app is the best way to interact with a Google email account. [Google Maps](#) is still leaps and bounds above Apple Maps, and there are individual apps for [Docs](#), [Sheets](#), and [Slides](#). You can also keep using [Google Calendar](#), sync to your [Google Drive](#), and chat with friends on [Hangouts](#).

It's not possible to change default apps on the iPhone because that's how Apple designed iOS. However, some [Google apps allow you to choose](#) how you want to open links, which email addresses you want to use, and more.

Some third-party apps give you similar choices, as well.

Use Third-Party Productivity Apps

Just like Photos, Apple's productivity apps are also less than ideal for non-Mac owners. You can access apps like Notes and Reminders via [iCloud.com](#), but they're nowhere near as useful as they are on a Mac. You won't get desktop alerts or the ability to natively create new reminders outside of a browser.



For this reason, you're probably best passing these duties on to a third-party app or service with a native app. For notes, [Evernote](#), [OneNote](#), [Drafts](#), and [Simplenote](#) are three of the best alternatives to Apple Notes. However, there are [plenty of others](#).

The same can be said for Reminders. There are many [excellent to-do list apps](#), including [Microsoft To Do](#), [Google Keep](#), and [Any.Do](#).

While not all of these alternatives offer native apps for every platform, they've been designed to work well with a broad range of non-Apple devices.

Alternatives to AirPlay

AirPlay is a proprietary wireless audio- and video-casting technology on Apple TV, HomePod, and some third-party speaker systems. If you use Windows or a Chromebook, you probably don't have any AirPlay receivers in your home.



Google

Fortunately, you can use Chromecast for many similar tasks via the [Google Home](#) app for iPhone. Once you set it up, you can cast video to your TV in apps like YouTube and Chrome, as well as third-party streaming services, like Netflix and HBO.

Back Up Locally to iTunes for Windows

Apple ditched iTunes on the Mac in 2019, but on Windows, you still have to use iTunes if you want to back up your iPhone (or iPad) locally. You can download iTunes for Windows, connect your iPhone via Lightning cable, and then select it in the app. Click “Back Up Now” to make a local backup on your Windows machine.

This backup will include all your photos and videos, app data, messages, contacts, and preferences. Anything unique to you will be included. Also, if you check the box to encrypt your backup, you can save your Wi-Fi credentials and other login information.

Local iPhone backups are perfect if you need to upgrade your iPhone and want to quickly copy its contents from one device to another. We still recommend you purchase a small amount of iCloud storage to [enable iCloud backups](#), as well. These occur automatically whenever your phone is plugged in, connected to Wi-Fi, and locked.

Unfortunately, if you’re on a Chromebook, there isn’t a version of iTunes you can use to back up locally—you’ll have to rely on iCloud.