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[Nokia N81 8GB Review](#)

Powerful multimedia-oriented device



The new member of Nokia's Nseries, Nokia N81 8GB, is obviously a multimedia-oriented device. We all have great expectations from Nokia high-end line-up, and the Nseries has always offered a wide range of devices that can fulfill even the most fastidious user needs. Nokia N81 targets youngsters looking for a device that can offer them many hours of gaming and music, but also to those that loved the N95, but didn't have the money to acquire one. At first glance, Nokia N81 8GB can be considered the handset that will make the transition to the first Nokia mobile phone to feature a touch UI. Nokia N81 8GB was announced in August 2007 and officially launched on the market in October, the same year. The phone can be acquired for about \$450 USD, which is pretty low for an Nseries device. The simple version (without the 8GB of internal memory) can be bought for only \$400 USD.

Design Nokia has made several strange choices regarding the design of N81. While the phone's look is that of an ordinary Nokia slider, the material used for manufacture makes it stand out of the crowd. The shiny, polished plastic will definitely make you believe the device features touch controls; alas, Nokia N81's keys are ordinary. Still, the feeling is strong and gives users the impression of oneness. On the negative side, the slider is very heavy, weighing 140 grams (including battery), and bulky (102 x 50 x 17.9 mm). Those looking for a lightweight mobile phone that could fit in a pocket should look elsewhere, as this device is way over the charts in terms of size and weight. Even if it's not bigger and heavier than most of these days PDA's, compared with other Nseries handsets, Nokia N81 can be considered one of the heaviest. The front part of the slider looks flat with no keys apparently bulging outside the cover. The layout of the external keys has nothing innovative except for the two Accept and Reject calls keys, which (sadly) have been placed at the far edges of the device making it very hard to use. The other 'exception' is the silver Multimedia key, specific to Symbian phones, which is now placed between the D-pad and the red Reject calls keys. The key area of the slider also includes two soft keys, the Menu key and the C (delete) key. The big D-pad in the middle of the area has been surrounded by a silver frame, which can be used to navigate through the menu. The center of the D-pad is VERY hard to push and the 4-side of the D-pad are equally hard to press. Pity, but the big button has been awkwardly built and offers little to no tactile feedback. Still, there's one feature that no other Nokia handset will offer you, and that is the Navi wheel navigation. When the function is active, it enables the use of the D-pad like a touch sensitive control key. Unfortunately, this function is only limited to gallery, music player and multimedia menu; thus, you won't be able to experience it when simply browsing the menus. This will probably make those that own the slider to use gallery, music player and multimedia menu more frequently than usual just to feel the experience of the Navi wheel navigation. Above the 2.4 inch display, there is a small secondary camera, which can be used for video-calls, but also for taking pictures (self portraits) or recording clips. The in-call speaker has been placed on a curious, yet unique 4-side plate. The plate can be pressed, as it features two buttons that can be used as controls in various mobile games. The buttons are invisible when not used, but will immediately become available when in-game and will be back lighted when used in darker environments. The slider features dual stereo speaker, so you'll be able to notice these on the left and right sides of the phone. Moreover, on the right side of the handset, there are a dual volume key and a small camera dedicated button. At the bottom of the phone, there are the usual small charger port and a microUSB port, which seems to become standard for the latest Nokia handsets. On top of the device, another unique item has been included: a locking/unlocking key that enables the use of the phone even when it

is closed. The Power and a 3.5mm jack port have also been placed on the top. The backside of the phone looks simple, with only a 2 Megapixel camera with flash and the Nokia Nseries logo. When slid up, the phone reveals large keypad, which seems to be the peek of flatness that this device has been blessed with. Even if the numerical keys may be considered large, there are no perceivable lines separating the keys, thus making them hard to use for texting reasons. Moreover, they are hard to press and there's no tactile feedback, so you'll have to keep your eyes on them while texting. This may be considered the second disappointment of the slider, following the 2 Megapixel camera. Overall, Nokia N81 looks sturdy and bulky, solid enough for the most active youngsters. Still, there's the weight problem, which can be 'insurmountable' for some of the Nseries fans.

Display and CameraN81 slider features an excellent TFT display that supports up to 16M colors and 240 x 320 pixels resolution. Far superior to most of Sony Ericsson and Samsung latest handsets but on the same level with most of the Nseries screens, N81's display scored well in many of the benchmarks. With a high level of visibility even when used outdoors in strong sunlight, Nokia N81's display would've been almost the best in terms of quality if it had been a little bit larger. Compared with N95 8GB, which feature a 3 inch display, the N81 screen looks pretty small, especially when the handset is used for gaming or browsing the Internet. Anyway, the image quality displayed is astonishing and contributes to the excellent multimedia experience that it certainly offers.

The 2 Megapixel camera on the back of the phone features flash for night pictures, but may still be considered one of the main disadvantages of the slider. Such a multimedia-oriented device would've required at least a 3 megapixel camera with autofocus. The interface of the camera is almost similar to that of a Nokia N95 camera, but lacks certain features as it's much lower in quality. The maximum resolution that can be used to take pictures is 1600x1200 pixels, while they can be recorded in QVGA standard (15fps). Functions such as Scene modes (Auto, User defined, Portrait, Landscape, Night and Night Portrait), Flash (Red-eye), Color tone (Sepia, Black & white, Negative), White balance (Sunny, Incandescent, Fluorescent), ISO (Low, Medium, High) can be used when taking snapshots or recording videos. Movies can be saved either as MP4 files (better quality) or as 3gp (lower quality). Those that are expecting high quality pictures will be disappointed to find that the phone's 2 Megapixel camera doesn't have anything to do with the rest of the phone. Even if it snapshots are above average considering the 2 megapixel count number of the camera, there is still a long way to what a 3 megapixel camera can do. The samples below are relevant for the quality of the pictures taken with N81's module camera.

Menu and SoftwareNokia N81 slider runs Symbian operating system version 9.2 and is based on S60 3rd Edition Feature Pack 1. The Feature Pack 1 provides 3D graphics hardware support, over-the-air (OTA) firmware support, Bluetooth 2.0 with EDR support, Flash Lite 2.0, screen turning feature that permits the user to turn the screen to landscape or portrait mode (very useful for browsing the Internet), as well as a better organization of the file cache.

The Alarm clock function has been modified; thus, you are able to use multiple repeating alarms, while time limit for voice recording has been improved from one minute to one hour. Nokia N81 is one of the fastest and most stable Symbian phones, as it embeds the most powerful CPU used by Nokia onto its smartphones - ARM11 369 Mhz. If you are Symbian-freak, then you'll be happy to find that Nokia N81 won't freeze and it won't lag behind. Don't forget that you can use the Symbian menu key to open up the Task manager and close various applications. You only need to keep the key pressed for 3 seconds and then close the applications with the C (Delete) key. That will free up some memory in case you used lots of the phone's functions and forgot to close it. Unfortunately, there's one thing that you won't be able to close and that's the music player. Even if it shows as open when not in use, you won't be able to close it. It seems rather strange, but let's hope a future firmware will correct this (in case it's a bug).

Furthermore, the phone includes some specific productivity tools such as Clock, Converter, Maps, PDF reader, File manager, WidSets and Calculator. QuickOffice package will only let users read documents, but you won't be able to start your own documents unless you

upgrade the application (Word, Excel, PowerPoint) and that will cost you. The handset also features a Search tool which looks for the file searched on all the phone's memory (Messages, ToDo's, e-mails, calendar events, notes, contacts) and returns results very fast. The phonebook has almost an unlimited number of entries as all the contacts can be saved onto the phone's memory. Symbian OS and Java compatible third-party applications can be installed with ease on the phone through the USB connection; just check the requirements. Navigation on the Web can be a real joy because of the high-quality display and 3G connectivity. Let's not forget the unique gaming experience with the new N-Gage platform and the dedicated gaming keys placed above the display that the phone offers. Overall, the interface has a very low learning curve, even lower for heavy Symbian users.

CommunicationThe slider features 3G connectivity for those in need of fast data transfer speeds, but also EDGE and GPRS class 10 technologies as a much cheaper version of the UMTS. Even if results are below expectations, users will have no problems with either of the connectivities as data transfer speeds are within the parameters: 325 Kbit/s download and 92 Kbit/s upload with 3G and 131 Kbit/s download and 71 Kbit/s upload with EDGE. If you're not satisfied with these connectivity technologies or you simply want to cut down your expenses, there's always the Wi-Fi connection, which works flawlessly. The slider also includes Bluetooth 2.0 with A2DP support, but lacks Infrared connectivity. We managed to reach speeds of around 96 KB/s when sending files and 81 KB/s when N81 receives files, which is above the usual standard. The phone is fully compatible with POP3 and IMAP accounts and features T9 capabilities for those that are using text-based messages heavily. There are some dedicated editors for users such as: SMS Editor, MMS Editor and Audio Message Editor. The email client supports attachments and can view headers, as well as full content of the attachments. The quad-band phone has worldwide coverage and is GSM900 / GSM1800 / GSM1900 / GSM850 / UMTS network compatible. This will simply enlarge the market of the phone and will attract consumers all over the world. It has one the best in-call sound, but is a little bit weaker on 3G signal reception. **Processor and Memory** Nokia's N81 runs the best CPU ever embedded onto a Nokia handset - ARM11 family processor working at speeds up to 369 Mhz. Practically, this is the same CPU embedded in Nokia N93 model and Nokia E90 Communicator a little while ago. And that's another reason to believe that Nokia N81 is a real high-end series device through its performance. The slider comes with 96 MB SDRAM memory and 8 GB internal memory, which cannot be expanded as the device lacks microSD slot card. If you own the simple version that doesn't have 8GB internal memory, you'll be able to expand memory through a microSD slot card (up to 8GB) placed on the left side of the phone. Anyway, 8GB of internal memory is certainly more than enough to be able to storage a large music and games library, but also for a huge amount of pictures. **Multimedia**The 2 stereo external speakers placed on both sides of the phone are part of the trademark multimedia-oriented devices. The music experience is definitely superior to most Nseries device. While speakers are clearly under expectations, when using high quality headphones, the sound is improved considerably. I'd say better than Nokia's 5700 Xpress Music, when using 3.5mm headphone and not the ones coming with the phone, Nokia N81 is definitely a good choice for those looking for a music phone. Besides the standard equalizer (Bass booster, Classical, Jazz, Pop, Rock), audio settings include Balance and Stereo widening (for external speakers). The sound is exceptionally good and almost surpasses Nokia's 5700 model in terms of music quality. A little more bass when listening to the external loudspeakers would've made the handset one of the best music phones manufactured by Nokia. The standard music player can run MP3, M4A, AAC and eAAC+ file formats, as for the video player, it is compatible with 3GPP and MP4 files. The Stereo FM radio can memorize up to 50 radio stations and is compatible with Visual Radio service. Overall, multimedia features of N81 slider are among the best embedded in a Nokia mobile phone. **Battery**The handset includes a high capacity (Li-Polymer 1050 mAh) BP-6MT battery. The talk time that I found on Nokia's site says that it should last about four hours in talk time mode (GSM only) and about 17 days in standby

mode (GSM only). For a heavy user, this phone will need recharging every 2 days, while for a medium user one recharge in 4 days will be enough. The phone has great functionality, thus it can be used as an MP3 player (10-11 hours of autonomy) or camera, and this will drain the battery even faster. Nokia N81 is a medium "battery drainer", which means that it's less fit for business use.

Impressions If it hadn't had the bulky and standard design, Nokia N81 could've been more attractive for the multimedia phone market. The slider has great potential and it's a pleasant surprise for Nokia fans. Some positive innovations make it stand out from the wide range of Nseries devices.

The Good One of the best multimedia terminals, Nokia N81 8GB embeds the fastest and most stable operating system. There are two main targets that this phone will fully satisfy: Symbian freaks and music lovers. Internet fans will also love this handset, as it offers quite a good experience thanks to the very good display and UMTS connectivity. The high storage capacity (8GB), Wi-Fi support, excellent display, touch sensitive Navi wheel and 3G technologies are among the positive features included in Nokia N81 8GB.

The Bad The phone is too heavy and bulky to fit in a small pocket, which will certainly make its desirability lower. A better camera and a much easier to use keypad would've made a difference.

Sales Package Contents Nokia N81 8GB handset
Nokia Battery BP-6MT
Nokia Compact Travel Charger AC-5
Nokia Music Headset HS-45 with remote control AD-54
Nokia Connectivity Cable CA-101
User guide and quick guide.