Hetzner vs DigitalOcean vs Vultr: which cheap cloud VPS actually wins

The three most-shortlisted budget cloud VPS providers do not cost the same, and the gap is wider than most comparisons admit. Hetzner is the cheapest per core, DigitalOcean charges more but hands you a managed platform around the box, and Vultr sits between them with the widest choice of regions. Which one wins depends on price, bandwidth, and whether you want managed services or a bare box.

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The same spec, three very different prices

Take a plain shared instance at 2 vCPU and 4 GB of RAM, the size a lot of small apps run on. On Hetzner cost-optimized line that is around 4 euro a month (40 GB SSD, 20 TB of traffic included). On DigitalOcean the basic droplet at that spec is about 24 dollars a month (80 GB SSD). On Vultr the High Performance plan at 2 vCPU and 4 GB is about 24 dollars a month too (100 GB NVMe, 5 TB transfer). So for the same nominal CPU and RAM, Hetzner runs several times cheaper, while DigitalOcean and Vultr give you more and faster disk for the higher price. (List prices, checked July 2026, they move; Hetzner raised prices in April 2026 and adjusted again in June 2026.)

Hetzner: cheapest per core, most bandwidth, fewest frills

Hetzner whole reputation is price. A 2 vCPU and 4 GB shared server is around 4 euro a month, and every plan includes 20 TB of outbound traffic in its EU regions, far more than the others bundle, with overage around 1 euro per terabyte. The catch list is short but real: IPv4 is billed separately (about 0.60 euro a month per address), the managed-service menu is thinner than the others (raw compute, volumes, load balancers and networks, not a deep catalogue of managed databases), and until recently every datacenter was in Germany or Finland. Hetzner now runs US regions (Ashburn and Hillsboro), but those US plans include only 1 TB of traffic, not the 20 TB the EU plans get. If you are comfortable running the box yourself and your users are near its regions, nothing here undercuts it.

DigitalOcean: you pay more for the platform around the box

DigitalOcean costs multiples of Hetzner at the same spec, and what you buy for the difference is the ecosystem, not the raw compute. A basic droplet is about 6 dollars a month at 1 vCPU and 1 GB, 24 dollars at 2 vCPU and 4 GB, and 48 dollars at 4 vCPU and 8 GB (list, checked July 2026). Around those droplets sit managed PostgreSQL, MySQL and Valkey, the App Platform PaaS, Spaces object storage, managed Kubernetes and load balancers, plus the largest tutorial and community library of the three. Transfer is pooled: each droplet adds an allowance that starts at 500 GB and scales with the plan, shared across your fleet, overage 1 cent per GB, and a public IPv4 is included. If you would otherwise bolt a managed database and object storage onto a bare VPS, the higher sticker often buys back its own cost in saved setup.

Vultr: the widest map, NVMe on a budget

Vultr slots between the two on price and wins on geography. Its Regular Performance plans start at 2.50 dollars a month (IPv6 only; the cheapest plan with an IPv4 address is 3.50 dollars), and the High Performance line, on newer AMD or Intel silicon with NVMe storage, starts at 6 dollars a month for 1 vCPU and 1 GB. Bandwidth runs from about 2 TB on the smallest plan up to several TB higher up, overage 1 cent per GB. What sets Vultr apart is the number of datacenter locations, more than thirty worldwide, so if you need a server physically close to users in a region Hetzner and DigitalOcean do not cover, Vultr usually has one. Like the others it bills hourly, capped at 672 hours a month, so a month never costs more than the monthly rate.

The bandwidth line most comparisons skip

The sticker price is per core; the line that quietly separates these three is included traffic. Hetzner bundles 20 TB per plan in the EU, DigitalOcean pools a few hundred GB to a few TB depending on plan, and Vultr includes 2 to 6 TB per plan; all three charge about 1 cent per GB (roughly 10 dollars per terabyte) over the allowance, except Hetzner overage is nearer 1 euro per terabyte. For a normal site behind a CDN none of this matters. For anything that ships a lot of bytes (large downloads, video, a busy media API), Hetzner 20 TB allowance and cheap overage can be the deciding number, not the compute price.

So which one

- Cheapest, and you will run the box yourself: Hetzner, especially if you move real bandwidth or your users are in or near its EU and US regions.
- You want managed databases, object storage or a PaaS around the VPS, not just a bare server: DigitalOcean, where the higher price buys the platform.
- You need a datacenter in a specific region the other two lack, or NVMe disk on a small budget: Vultr.

None of that replaces sizing the box to your real peak first. A plan that is one tier too big wastes money on every provider, and the tier you need, not the brand, sets most of the bill. Put your traffic, peak concurrency, app type and database size into the calculator, get a recommended

spec and monthly cost band, then compare the three at that size. The sibling guide on whether you are overpaying for your server covers the tier decision that comes before the brand one.

Frequently asked questions

Which is cheaper, Hetzner, DigitalOcean or Vultr?
Hetzner, by a wide margin on raw compute. A 2 vCPU and 4 GB shared instance is around 4 euro a month on Hetzner versus about 24 dollars on DigitalOcean and Vultr at the same spec. DigitalOcean and Vultr charge more because you also get more storage, NVMe on Vultr, and a wider menu of managed services; Hetzner is the pick when price per core is what you are optimising. (List prices, checked July 2026, they move.)

Why is Hetzner so much cheaper than DigitalOcean?
Two reasons. Hetzner runs its own EU datacenters at low cost and passes it on, and it sells mostly raw compute rather than a large catalogue of managed services. DigitalOcean bundles managed databases, object storage, a PaaS and a big tutorial library around the droplet and charges for that platform. If you do not need those extras you are paying for them; if you do, DigitalOcean can buy back its own cost.

How much bandwidth do these VPS plans include?
Hetzner includes 20 TB of outbound traffic per plan in its EU regions (only 1 TB in its US regions), DigitalOcean pools an allowance that starts at 500 GB and scales with the plan across your droplets, and Vultr includes about 2 to 6 TB per plan. Overage is about 1 cent per GB on DigitalOcean and Vultr, and nearer 1 euro per terabyte on Hetzner. For bandwidth-heavy workloads the Hetzner allowance is the standout.

Does the cheapest plan come with an IPv4 address?
Not always. Vultr cheapest Regular Performance plan is IPv6 only at 2.50 dollars a month; adding an IPv4 address takes the minimum to about 3.50 dollars. Hetzner charges for IPv4 separately (about 0.60 euro a month per address). DigitalOcean includes a public IPv4 with every droplet. If you need a public IPv4, factor it in before comparing headline prices.

Which cloud VPS should I choose?
Match it to your case: Hetzner for the lowest price and the most included bandwidth if you will manage the box and are near its regions; DigitalOcean if you want managed databases, object storage or a PaaS around the VPS; Vultr if you need a datacenter in a specific region the other two lack. Size the box to your real peak first, since the tier, not the brand, sets most of the bill.

Size your workload before you shop

Free, no signup: agent.mue.app/tools/cloud-vps-dedicated-server-sizing-calculator

agent.mue.app/articles/hetzner-vs-digitalocean-vs-vultr-cloud-vps-pricing