

Kinsta vs WP Engine vs Cloudways: which managed WordPress host fits

Kinsta and WP Engine price your site by monthly visits. Cloudways prices a server by the hour. That difference, not the sticker, decides which managed WordPress host is cheaper for you.

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Three managed WordPress hosts turn up on almost every shortlist: Kinsta, WP Engine and Cloudways. From the outside they look alike, fully managed WordPress with backups, staging and a CDN. But they charge for two completely different things, and that is the whole decision.

The one difference that decides it

Kinsta and WP Engine sell you a plan capped by monthly visits. Cloudways sells you a server measured in RAM and CPU, billed by the hour, with unlimited sites on it. So the real question is not which sticker is lower. It is whether your cost is driven by traffic or by the resources your site needs.

What each one actually costs

- Kinsta: the entry single-site plan is about 35 dollars a month, roughly 30 on annual billing, which saves about 70 dollars a year. One WordPress site with a monthly visit allowance, and 50 cents per 1,000 visits over the cap. Fully managed with premium support, priced by traffic.
- WP Engine: the Startup plan is 30 dollars a month billed annually, about 35 month to month, for one site, 25,000 visits and 10 GB, with overage around 2 dollars per 1,000 extra visits. Professional is 55 dollars a month annually for 3 sites and 75,000 visits. Also priced by traffic.
- Cloudways: a managed layer over cloud servers, from about 11 dollars a month for an entry DigitalOcean server, billed by the hour with no annual contract and no renewal hike. You can run unlimited sites on that one server until it runs out of resources. Priced by the server, not by visits.

Why we do not print a single winner

It is tempting to line up 35 against 30 against 11 and crown Cloudways. That comparison misleads, because the three prices buy different things. Kinsta and WP Engine bundle the hands-off management, the support and a visit allowance. Cloudways gives you a raw managed server that you size, watch and grow yourself, and its bill climbs when your site needs more RAM, not when it gets more visitors. A high-traffic brochure site can be cheapest on Cloudways; a resource-heavy store that outgrows a small server can be cheaper, and calmer, on Kinsta or WP Engine.

What actually counts as a visit

If two of the three price by visits, it is worth knowing what a visit even is, because the number that decides your bill is not the number in your analytics. On both Kinsta and WP Engine a billable visit is one unique IP address in a 24-hour period, so ten page views from the same person in one day count as a single visit, not ten. Both also strip bot traffic out of the billable count. WP Engine excludes known bot user agents and, since September 2025, suspected bots as well, and it never counts static files such as images, CSS and JavaScript. Kinsta likewise excludes traffic from clearly identifiable bots and crawlers, though it cautions that automated traffic it cannot confidently classify may still count. That gap matters more every year: automated traffic passed half of all web requests in 2024, so a raw visits figure that counts everything can sit well above what either host actually bills you for.

The practical lesson is to budget against the host billable definition, not the visits line in Google Analytics or a raw server log. Kinsta added a second option in late 2025: you can put a plan on a server-bandwidth allowance in gigabytes instead of a visit cap, at the same price (the WP 5 plan, for example, is either 125,000 visits or 65 GB a month), and switch an existing plan between the two measures, with bandwidth overage at 50 cents per gigabyte. If your traffic is heavy on large assets, or hard to pin to clean visit counts, the bandwidth meter can be the fairer one. Cloudways sidesteps the whole question, since it never meters visits at all; its bill tracks the server you rent, so this is a Kinsta and WP Engine decision only.

Which one fits

- Traffic is your variable and you want it hands-off: Kinsta or WP Engine. You pay for visits and get managed WordPress with support that owns the stack. Kinsta leans premium performance; WP Engine leans agency and developer workflows.
- You are comfortable sizing a server, or you want the lowest sticker and many small sites on one box: Cloudways. You take on more of the management in exchange for a server-priced bill and no visit meter.
- You are cost-sensitive and unsure: put your real traffic, your maintenance hours and your hourly rate into the calculator. The plan price is the smallest of the three lines, and the tool shows which host wins on the 12-month total, not the sticker.

None of these three run the introductory-then-renewal trap that budget shared hosts do, so the number you see is close to the number you keep paying. The variable that moves your bill is your own site: how much traffic it draws and how many resources it needs.

Frequently asked questions

Is Kinsta, WP Engine or Cloudways the cheapest?

There is no single cheapest, because they price different things. Kinsta and WP Engine charge by monthly visits, roughly 30 to 35 dollars a month for one site; Cloudways charges for a cloud server by the hour, from about 11 dollars a month, with unlimited sites on it. A high-traffic light site is often cheapest on Cloudways, while a resource-heavy site can be cheaper on Kinsta or WP Engine. Model your own traffic and hours to see which wins.

What is the real difference between Cloudways and Kinsta or WP Engine?

Cloudways is a managed layer over a cloud server you size yourself, billed by RAM and CPU with unlimited sites on the box. Kinsta and WP Engine are fully managed WordPress plans metered by monthly visits with premium support. Cloudways has the lower sticker but hands you more of the management; Kinsta and WP Engine cost more and own more of the stack.

Do these hosts charge overage fees?

Kinsta and WP Engine do, because they meter visits: Kinsta charges 50 cents per 1,000 visits over your plan, and WP Engine 2 dollars per 1,000. Cloudways has no visit meter, so there is no visit overage; your bill only rises if you move to a larger server.

What counts as a visit on Kinsta and WP Engine?

On both, a billable visit is one unique IP address in a 24-hour period, so repeat page views from the same person in a day count once, not once per page. Both exclude bot traffic from the billable count: WP Engine drops known bots and, since September 2025, suspected bots too, plus static files like images, CSS and JavaScript; Kinsta drops clearly identifiable bots and crawlers, though it warns that automated traffic it cannot confidently classify may still count. Because automated traffic is now more than half of all web requests, your billable visits are usually well below the visits figure in your analytics, so budget against the host definition. Kinsta also lets you switch a plan to a server-bandwidth allowance in gigabytes instead of a visit cap at the same price, which can be the fairer meter for asset-heavy sites.

Does managed hosting jump in price at renewal?

Not on these three. Kinsta, WP Engine and Cloudways price close to flat, so the first-year number is near the number you keep paying. The introductory-rate-then-expensive-renewal pattern is a budget shared-hosting habit, for example on SiteGround and Bluehost entry plans, which is a separate trap covered in our managed-hosting cost article.

How many sites can I host on each?

Kinsta and WP Engine tie site count to the plan: one site on the entry tiers, more on higher plans, with an extra site often about 20 dollars a month on WP Engine. Cloudways lets you host unlimited sites on a single server until it runs out of resources, which is why it can be cheap for several small sites and why you have to watch the server load yourself.

Model your own 12-month hosting cost

Free, no signup: agent.mue.app/tools/managed-hosting-cost-calculator

agent.mue.app/articles/kinsta-vs-wp-engine-vs-cloudways-managed-wordpress

