

Vercel vs Netlify vs Cloudflare Pages: where the hosting bill actually comes from

All three deploy a frontend from a Git push, but they price it in three different ways, and the difference only shows up when your traffic does. Cloudflare Pages serves bandwidth free and meters builds, Vercel meters bandwidth per GB, and Netlify moved to a credit pool in 2026. Here is what each one really costs, and which to pick for a static site, a Next.js app, or a high-traffic frontend.

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Vercel, Netlify and Cloudflare Pages all do the same visible thing: connect a Git repository, push, and your frontend is live on a global network with previews and HTTPS handled for you. The reason people still argue about which to use is that they price that identical outcome in three genuinely different ways, and the difference is invisible until your traffic grows. Pick on the free tier alone and you can be surprised by the bill the month a post lands.

Three platforms, three pricing models

The single most important thing to understand is what each one charges you for. Cloudflare Pages charges for builds and leaves bandwidth free. Vercel charges for bandwidth by the GB. Netlify, since its 2026 change, charges a pool of credits that your bandwidth, builds and requests all draw from. Those are three different bets about where your cost will come from, and which one suits you depends entirely on your own traffic and deploy pattern.

Cloudflare Pages: unlimited bandwidth, metered builds

Cloudflare's pitch is the simplest to state: every Pages plan, including the free one, includes unlimited requests and unlimited bandwidth for the assets you serve. You do not pay more because a page went viral. The limits sit on the build side instead: the free plan allows 500 builds per month and 1 build at a time, up to 20,000 files per site, and a 25 MiB maximum single file size. The Pro plan lifts those to 5,000 builds per month, 5 concurrent builds and 100,000 files. Anything dynamic, server-side rendering or an API route, runs on Cloudflare Workers, which is metered on requests: 100,000 per day on the free plan, or 10 million per month included on the 5 dollar Workers Paid plan, then 0.30 dollar per additional million. So a static or mostly-static site is effectively free to serve at any traffic level, and your only real question is whether 500 builds a month is enough.

Vercel: the best developer experience, with a bandwidth meter

Vercel is the platform that makes Next.js, and it shows: its preview deployments, framework integration and edge functions are the most polished of the three, which is a large part of why teams pick it. The cost model is a straight bandwidth meter. The free Hobby tier, aimed at personal projects, includes 100 GB of fast data transfer and 1 million function invocations a month. The Pro plan is 20 dollars per user per month and includes 1 TB of fast data transfer, with overage from 0.15 dollar per GB. That per-GB line is where a Vercel bill grows: serve 2 TB in a busy month on Pro and you are at roughly 170 dollars (20 dollars plus 1,000 GB over the included TB at 0.15 dollar) before other usage. For a Next.js app with steady, moderate traffic that can be perfectly reasonable; for a content site that occasionally spikes, the meter is the risk.

The Vercel line the bandwidth story misses: image optimization

Bandwidth is not the only Vercel meter, and on a Next.js app the one that surprises people is image optimization. If you serve images through next/image, Vercel optimizes each one on the fly and bills it as a separate line: 0.05 dollar per 1,000 image transformations, plus 0.40 dollar per million image cache reads and 4 dollars per million cache writes, and the optimized image still costs bandwidth to deliver on top of that. The Hobby tier includes 5,000 transformations a month, but Hobby is restricted to non-commercial personal use under Vercel's fair-use policy, so a real business is on Pro and paying the meter. The part that catches people out is what counts as one transformation: every unique combination of width, quality and format is its own transformation and its own charge. Serve a single hero image responsively at six widths, in both WebP and AVIF, and that one source file is up to twelve transformations, not one. A gallery or a product catalogue multiplies that fast, and because a transformation is billed on a cache miss, a wave of first-time visitors hitting fresh image variants bills at the same time as the bandwidth those images cost to serve. It is a real second meter on exactly the image-heavy Next.js sites Vercel is best at, so price your images, not just your bytes, before you decide bandwidth is the whole Vercel story.

Netlify: now a credit system

Netlify used to price like Vercel, with an included-bandwidth allowance and per-GB overage. In 2026 it moved to a single credit pool, which changes how you have to think about it. The Free plan gives 300 credits a month as a hard limit with no overage, so it simply stops when you run out. The Pro plan is 20 dollars a month with 3,000 credits and unlimited members. The catch is that everything spends from the same pool: bandwidth is 20 credits per GB, a production deploy is 15 credits, and web requests are 2 credits per 10,000. So your 3,000 Pro credits are not 3,000 credits of bandwidth; they are shared with every deploy you ship and every request you serve. A team that deploys often and gets a traffic bump can drain the pool from two directions at once, which makes the Netlify bill the hardest of the three to predict in advance.

Where the bill actually comes from: bandwidth at scale

Line the three up at a single busy month, say 2 TB of traffic over each one's base plan, and the models separate cleanly. On Cloudflare, bandwidth is free, so that 2 TB costs nothing to serve;

you pay only if you need Workers Paid for dynamic compute, and that is 5 dollars. On Vercel Pro, the first TB is included and the second is 1,000 GB of overage at 0.15 dollar, about 150 dollars on top of the 20 dollar base. On Netlify Pro, 2 TB is 40,000 credits of bandwidth alone (2,000 GB at 20 credits) against the 3,000 credits the 20 dollar plan includes, so you are buying tens of thousands of credits of overage before you count a single build or request. Same traffic, three very different outcomes, and the gap only widens as the traffic does. This is the whole reason the choice matters: for a low-traffic app the three are close to free and you should pick on developer experience, but the more bytes you serve, the more the pricing model, not the sticker, decides your bill.

So which should you pick

- A static or content-heavy site that can spike: Cloudflare Pages. Free unlimited bandwidth means a viral moment does not become an invoice, and the 500-build monthly limit is generous for a site you do not redeploy constantly.
- A Next.js app where developer experience is the priority: Vercel, at least until the bandwidth bill gets your attention. It makes the framework, its previews and integration are the tightest, and at moderate traffic the metered bandwidth is affordable.
- A team that wants one managed platform and predictable-ish billing: Netlify can fit, but budget in credits, not dollars, and watch that frequent deploys and traffic draw from the same pool. Model a busy month before you commit.
- High and predictable traffic where cost dominates: Cloudflare Pages for a managed answer, or the self-host route below if you would rather own the box and stop paying any per-unit meter at all.

The self-host escape hatch

If your bill turns out to be mostly bandwidth and your traffic is high and steady, the cheapest answer is often not any of the three managed platforms but a server you run yourself. A cheap VPS from Hetzner or DigitalOcean rents you a box with a large transfer allowance instead of charging per GB served, which can undercut a metered platform by a wide margin at scale. What you give up is the push-to-deploy convenience these platforms are built around: you now own deploys, scaling, patching and security. That is a real cost in time, so the VPS route pays off when traffic is high enough that the bandwidth savings clear the ops effort, and not before. Our guides on whether you are overpaying for your server and on Hetzner versus DigitalOcean versus Vultr pricing walk through when that switch is worth making.

See your own number

Because the three price on different axes, a feature-by-feature sticker comparison does not tell you much until you put your own traffic and deploy pattern against it. Estimate the bandwidth you actually serve and how often you deploy, then read each platform's model against those two numbers: free and unlimited bandwidth on Cloudflare, per-GB on Vercel, shared credits on Netlify. The managed hosting cost calculator lets you weigh a hosting choice over 12 months with maintenance and the value of faster load times factored in, so you compare the total cost

of a decision, not just the monthly headline.

Frequently asked questions

Which is cheapest, Vercel, Netlify or Cloudflare Pages?

Cloudflare Pages, for almost any traffic profile, because it serves bandwidth free and unlimited on every plan including the free one. Its free tier's real limit is builds (500 per month), not traffic, so a static site that gets a spike does not generate a bandwidth bill. Vercel and Netlify both meter bandwidth, so their cost climbs with how much you serve. The catch is that cheapest on price is not always the best fit: Vercel makes Next.js and has the tightest developer experience, which can be worth paying the metered bandwidth for.

Does Cloudflare Pages really have unlimited free bandwidth?

Yes. Cloudflare states that all Pages plans, including the free one, include unlimited requests and unlimited bandwidth for the assets you serve. The limits are elsewhere: 500 builds per month and 1 concurrent build on the free plan (5,000 builds and 5 concurrent on Pro), up to 20,000 files per site on free (100,000 on paid), and a 25 MiB maximum single file size. Dynamic server-side code runs on Cloudflare Workers, which has its own request limits: 100,000 requests per day free, or 10 million per month included on the 5 dollar Workers Paid plan, then 0.30 dollar per additional million.

What does Vercel cost beyond the free tier?

Vercel's free Hobby tier, aimed at personal projects, includes 100 GB of fast data transfer and 1 million function invocations per month. The Pro plan is 20 dollars per user per month and includes 1 TB of fast data transfer, with overage from 0.15 dollar per GB. So a Pro site that serves 2 TB in a month costs roughly 20 dollars plus 1,000 GB over the included TB at 0.15 dollar, about 170 dollars, before counting function and other usage. Bandwidth is the biggest line that moves your Vercel bill, but not the only one: image optimization is a separate meter, covered below.

Does Vercel charge extra for images on top of bandwidth?

Yes. If you use next/image, Vercel's image optimization is a separate meter from bandwidth: 0.05 dollar per 1,000 image transformations, 0.40 dollar per million image cache reads, and 4 dollars per million cache writes, and the optimized image still costs bandwidth to deliver on top. The Hobby tier includes 5,000 transformations a month but is limited to non-commercial use, so a business runs on Pro and pays the meter. What makes it grow is that every unique combination of width, quality and format is its own transformation, so one image served at several responsive sizes in both WebP and AVIF counts as many. A site with lots of images should price this line separately rather than assume bandwidth is the only Vercel cost that moves.

How does Netlify's credit system work in 2026?

Netlify moved to a single credit pool. The Free plan gives 300 credits per month as a hard limit with no overage, and the Pro plan is 20 dollars per month with 3,000 credits and unlimited members. Everything draws from the same pool: bandwidth costs 20 credits per GB, a production deploy costs 15 credits, and web requests cost 2 credits per 10,000. That means one number funds your traffic, your builds and your requests at once, so a busy deploy schedule and a traffic spike compete for the same credits, which makes the bill harder to

predict than a flat per-GB price.

When is Vercel worth paying more for?

When developer experience and framework fit matter more than the bandwidth line. Vercel builds Next.js, so its preview deployments, edge functions and framework integration are the tightest of the three, and for a Next.js app with modest traffic that polish can be worth the metered bandwidth. Where it stops being worth it is a high-traffic static or content site, where you are mostly paying to serve bytes: there Cloudflare's free bandwidth usually wins by a wide margin, and the developer-experience gap has narrowed.

Can I lower the bill by self-hosting instead?

Yes, if you are willing to run a server. A cheap VPS from Hetzner or DigitalOcean gives you far more bandwidth per euro than any metered platform, because you are renting a box with a generous transfer allowance rather than paying per GB served. The trade is that you now own deploys, scaling, patching and security, which the managed platforms handle for you. Cloudflare Pages is the middle ground: no server to run and free bandwidth, in exchange for a barer platform than Vercel. Price your own traffic before assuming the platform bill is the one to cut.

Compare the true 12-month cost of a hosting choice

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

agent.mue.app/articles/vercel-vs-netlify-vs-cloudflare-pages-cost

