

AWS vs. Azure vs. Google Cloud: The Enterprise TCO Nobody Computes Honestly

Unvarnished Reviews Research

This report synthesizes data from verified user reviews and practitioner community posts collected from G2, TrustRadius, PeerSpot, Spiceworks, Reddit practitioner communities including r/aws, r/azure, r/googlecloud, r/devops, and r/sysadmin, Stack Overflow cloud infrastructure threads, and the FinOps community. Pricing data reflects vendor pricing pages, CloudZero 2025 analysis, Backblaze 2025 survey data, and independent enterprise procurement analysis current as of June 2026. Full research methodology at unvarnishedreviews.com/methodology. Research Notes available on request at editorial@unvarnishedreviews.com.

The Verdict Up Front

Amazon Web Services is the market leader with approximately 28% global cloud share, \$115 billion in FY2025 revenue, and the broadest service catalog in the category, 200+ services across 38 geographic regions. It is also the most complex to cost-model accurately, the most dependent on FinOps expertise to manage well, and the provider generating the most billing surprise complaints in practitioner communities. Its Trainium3 AI training instances (launched Q1 2026) are 3x faster than Trainium2, repositioning AWS as a credible AI infrastructure competitor to GCP.

Microsoft Azure is the natural choice for Microsoft 365 organizations, where Azure Hybrid Benefit, EA contract bundling, and exclusive OpenAI enterprise access (GPT-5 natively integrated across Azure enterprise services as of Q1 2026) deliver advantages that no independent pricing comparison captures. Azure grew 25% year-over-year in FY2025 and now holds approximately 21% global market share.

Google Cloud Platform grew 28% year-over-year in FY2025, the fastest of the three, and now holds approximately 14% market share, up from 12%. GCP's March 2026 completion of the \$32 billion Wiz acquisition, the largest in Google's history, materially changes its enterprise security positioning. Wiz continues to support all major clouds, but its integration into GCP gives Google a cloud security platform with multi-cloud visibility that AWS and Azure cannot replicate natively.

The central finding across all sources: **95% of IT leaders report unexpected cloud charges that disrupted budgets, slowed projects, or restricted operations**, according to the Backblaze 2025 survey of enterprise cloud buyers. The published pricing page is the entry point. Egress fees, support tier costs, reserved instance strategy, idle compute, and service sprawl determine 60%-80% of enterprise cloud TCO.

Market Position: The Shift Accelerating

Provider	Market Share	FY2025 Revenue	Growth Rate
AWS	~28%	~\$115B	18% YoY
Azure	~21%	~\$100B	25% YoY
GCP	~14%	~\$48B	28% YoY

AWS is the market leader losing ground in growth rate to both competitors. Azure is gaining share driven by OpenAI exclusivity and Microsoft enterprise relationships. GCP is gaining share fastest, driven by AI workload demand and the Wiz acquisition positioning it as the multicloud security platform.

Multi-cloud adoption hit 89% among enterprises in 2026, up from 76% in 2024. The question for most organizations is no longer which single provider to choose, it is how to allocate workloads intelligently and manage the egress costs that multi-cloud architectures generate.

The Finding That Changes Every Cloud Cost Discussion

95% of IT leaders have encountered unexpected cloud charges that disrupted budgets, slowed projects, or restricted operations, Backblaze 2025 survey.

This is not an edge case. It is the defining operational reality of enterprise cloud economics. The charges that produce this finding are consistent across all three providers:

Egress fees, the most impactful hidden cost. Data leaving a cloud provider's network is billable. Data entering is free. This asymmetry is deliberate, it creates switching costs and lock-in while generating revenue that doesn't appear on the headline pricing page.

Current egress rates (June 2026):

- AWS: \$0.09/GB after 100GB free/month
- Azure: \$0.087/GB
- GCP: \$0.08-\$0.12/GB (100GB free/month)

CloudZero's 2025 analysis of enterprise cloud bills finds egress fees account for 6%-12% of typical cloud bills, and significantly more for data-heavy workloads. A team serving 75TB per month pays over \$6,700 per month in egress fees alone. A media company serving 100TB monthly from AWS S3 faces over \$9,000 in monthly egress charges separate from storage costs.

The NAT Gateway double-billing trap. AWS NAT Gateways charge per GB processed in addition to the egress fee on whatever leaves through the gateway. Workloads pulling from public APIs, container registries, or package repositories all flow through these gateways. NAT Gateway processing fees alone can exceed \$2,000 per month on accounts that never notice them, and they appear on a separate line item from egress.

Inter-AZ traffic. AWS charges \$0.01/GB each direction (\$0.02/GB round-trip) for traffic crossing availability zones within the same region. In multi-AZ Kubernetes deployments where service mesh traffic crosses availability zones continuously, inter-AZ fees accumulate significantly and are almost never modeled at architecture design time.

What changed in 2025 on egress:

- AWS expanded its free egress tier from 1GB to 100GB per month, providing more breathing room for small-scale workloads
- AWS now waives egress fees for customers migrating data off AWS to another cloud or on-premises, in response to regulatory pressure
- The EU Data Act (effective early 2025) forced all hyperscalers to waive egress fees for customers fully exiting their cloud

- US-based routine operational egress remains fully billable, the EU Data Act provides no relief for domestic US operations
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The Three Major 2026 Developments

1. Google Completes \$32 Billion Wiz Acquisition (March 2026)

Google closed its acquisition of Wiz on March 11, 2026, the largest acquisition in Google's history. Wiz is the leading cloud security platform, providing cloud-native application protection across all major cloud environments.

What this means for enterprise buyers:

Wiz continues to support AWS, Azure, GCP, and Oracle Cloud, it is not being made GCP-exclusive. However, integration depth will be deepest on GCP over time. Wiz's AI Application Protection Platform, announced at Google Cloud Next 2026, supports AWS AgentCore, Azure Copilot Studio, Salesforce Agentforce, and Databricks alongside Gemini Enterprise.

The strategic positioning: Google is explicitly marketing GCP as "the multicloud enabler", using Wiz's multi-cloud security roots to appeal to organizations running workloads across multiple clouds who want a single security visibility layer. This is a credible differentiator. AWS and Azure do not have an equivalent multi-cloud security platform with Wiz's breadth and market reputation.

The competitive implication: Organizations evaluating GCP in 2026 should include Wiz integration in the evaluation, it is a meaningful security capability addition that was not present 12 months ago.

2. Azure Integrates GPT-5 Natively (Q1 2026)

Microsoft integrated GPT-5 natively across Azure enterprise services in Q1 2026, extending its exclusive OpenAI enterprise partnership. For organizations where AI inference on GPT models is a workload, customer service, document processing, code generation, Azure's exclusive access to OpenAI's most capable commercial models is a genuine differentiator.

GCP's Gemini Enterprise and Gemini 3 (launched December 2025) are the primary competition. Google's Ironwood TPU (7th generation, 10x performance improvement over predecessor) and the announced TPU 8 provide GCP with AI hardware infrastructure advantages for model training.

3. AWS Trainium3 Launch (Q1 2026)

AWS launched Trainium3 instances in Q1 2026, 3x faster than Trainium2 for AI training workloads. Combined with Amazon Bedrock's foundation model marketplace, AWS is repositioning itself as a serious AI infrastructure competitor to GCP's established TPU advantage.

Where Each Provider Genuinely Wins

AWS: Wins on Breadth and Ecosystem Maturity

AWS's 200+ services, 38 geographic regions, and the largest community of certified engineers represent infrastructure depth that Azure and GCP have not matched.

AWS genuinely leads on:

- Service breadth and instance type variety, the most compute configurations available
- Largest talent pool, more AWS-certified engineers available to hire than Azure or GCP combined
- Partner ecosystem, the deepest third-party tooling and managed service provider network
- Graviton processors, AWS Graviton3 delivers 15%-25% better price/performance than comparable x86 instances
- Serverless and container maturity, Lambda, ECS, EKS are the most widely deployed managed services in their categories

AWS genuine limitations:

- Highest pricing complexity, more service types means more billing variables and more surprise charges
- Most expensive support tiers, Enterprise On-Ramp at \$5,500/month minimum, Enterprise at \$15,000/month minimum
- Highest egress pricing at \$0.09/GB baseline
- Steepest FinOps learning curve, dedicated cost management expertise is effectively mandatory at enterprise scale

Azure: Wins for Microsoft-Stack Enterprises

Azure's single most important competitive advantage is the Microsoft enterprise relationship, not a technical capability.

Azure genuinely leads on:

- Windows workloads: Azure Hybrid Benefit reduces compute costs by up to 80% for organizations with existing Windows Server and SQL Server licenses. No other provider offers this.
- OpenAI exclusivity: GPT-5 native integration across Azure enterprise services, if OpenAI model inference is a workload, Azure is the only enterprise path
- Microsoft 365 integration: Native connectivity between Azure, Entra ID, Defender, Microsoft 365, and Dynamics 365
- Azure Arc: The most mature hybrid cloud management platform, extending Azure management to on-premises and multi-cloud resources
- AKS: Free cluster management fee (AWS EKS charges \$0.10/hour per cluster, \$876/year per cluster)

Azure genuine limitations:

- 8%-10% more expensive for equivalent compute configurations compared to AWS Graviton or GCP instances
- Documentation complexity spanning the full Microsoft stack creates navigation challenges
- Less breadth of services than AWS, deeper in Microsoft integration, thinner in other categories
- Support tier structure similar in cost to AWS at enterprise scale

GCP: Wins on AI/ML, Data, Security (Post-Wiz), and Pricing Transparency

Google Cloud has built a distinct market position: the platform for data-intensive workloads, AI/ML infrastructure, and, post-Wiz, multi-cloud security.

GCP genuinely leads on:

- BigQuery: The fastest and most scalable data warehouse available, consistent practitioner consensus across Stack Overflow, Reddit r/dataengineering, and TrustRadius

- AI/ML hardware: Ironwood TPU (7th generation, 10x performance over predecessor), TPU 8 announced, the deepest custom AI accelerator ecosystem
- Wiz integration: Post-March 2026 acquisition, GCP provides multi-cloud security visibility that AWS and Azure cannot match natively
- GKE: Google invented Kubernetes, GKE is consistently rated the most mature managed Kubernetes service
- Sustained Use Discounts: Automatic 30% discounts for sustained workloads with zero commitment, the best automatic discount structure available
- Pricing transparency: Simpler pricing model than AWS with fewer hidden line items; cut compute pricing 8% across all regions in Q1 2026

GCP genuine limitations:

- Smaller enterprise footprint and partner ecosystem than AWS
- Support tier costs, GCP Premium at \$12,500/month minimum or 4% of spend is expensive at enterprise scale
- Narrower service catalog than AWS, deep in AI/data/security, thinner elsewhere
- The Wiz acquisition introduces enterprise security pricing that Wiz's previous independence had kept separate from GCP's economics

Pricing Reality: What You Actually Pay

Compute: On-Demand vs. Committed (US East, Standard 4-vCPU/16GB)

Provider	On-Demand	1-Year Committed	3-Year Committed
AWS (m6a.xlarge)	~\$0.1728/hr	~40% off	~60% off
Azure (D4s v5)	~\$0.192/hr	~37% off	~66% off
GCP (n2-standard-4)	~\$0.1906/hr	~37% off	~55%-70% off (+ auto SUDs)

At on-demand, the three providers are within 10% of each other. The real differentiation is in commitment structures and workload-specific pricing:

- **Windows workloads:** Azure Hybrid Benefit makes Azure 40%-80% cheaper for organizations with existing Windows Server licenses, no comparison stands without this calculation
- **Sustained variable workloads:** GCP's automatic Sustained Use Discounts (no commitment required) frequently outperform AWS Savings Plans for unpredictable workloads
- **AI/ML training:** GCP remains 5%-10% cheaper than AWS and Azure on comparable GPU instances

Storage

Provider	Standard Object Storage	Archive
AWS S3 Standard	\$0.023/GB/month	\$0.004/GB/month
Azure Blob Hot	\$0.018/GB/month	\$0.00099/GB/month
GCP Cloud Storage Standard	\$0.020/GB/month	\$0.004/GB/month

Azure Blob Hot is 22% cheaper than AWS S3 per GB, for organizations storing 1PB, that's \$5,000/month cheaper. Azure Archive at \$0.00099/GB/month is the cheapest cold storage of the three.

Support Tiers (Enterprise Scale)

Provider	Mid-Tier	Enterprise Minimum
AWS Business	\$100/month or ~7% of spend	\$15,000/month (Enterprise)
Azure Professional Direct	\$1,000/month	Custom (Unified ~10% of spend)
GCP Enhanced	\$500/month or 3%	\$12,500/month (Premium)

For an organization spending \$1M/month on cloud, support adds \$70,000-\$150,000+ annually, a cost almost never included in initial business cases.

Managed Kubernetes (Annual, per Cluster)

- AWS EKS: \$876/year per cluster (\$0.10/hour)
- **Azure AKS: Free**, no cluster management fee
- GCP GKE: Free for one zonal cluster; \$876/year additional clusters

For organizations running many Kubernetes clusters, Azure AKS's zero cluster fee is a meaningful cost advantage.

The Five-Year TCO Reality

Most enterprises under-model cloud cost growth by 35%-60% over five years. The consistent sources of underestimation:

- 1. Egress not modeled at architecture design time.** Teams choose where to run workloads without calculating the network cost of those choices. The bill arrives monthly, grows with data volume, and is discovered quarterly rather than prevented at design.
 - 2. Support costs not in the initial business case.** Business-tier support at \$100,000-\$250,000+ annually for mid-enterprise deployments appears as a separate line item discovered after deployment.
 - 3. Idle compute is the largest waste category.** Forgotten test clusters, overprovisioned reserved instances, idle staging environments, all three providers bill for compute that is provisioned but unused. Switching cloud providers does not solve idle compute.
 - 4. Service sprawl adds cost without central governance.** Teams adopt managed databases, caches, queues, and AI services independently. Each addition is individually justified; the cumulative billing impact is discovered at the quarterly review.
 - 5. Data gravity creates compounding egress.** As data accumulates in a cloud provider's object storage, the egress cost of analytics, reporting, and inter-service data movement grows. Data gravity is the mechanism that makes multi-cloud strategies expensive and single-cloud exits painful.
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The Decision Framework

Choose AWS if:

- Service breadth and maximum flexibility are requirements

- Your engineering team has deep AWS expertise or you need the largest available talent pool
- You need the most mature serverless, container, and edge computing ecosystem
- You want AI infrastructure using Amazon Bedrock or Trainium3/Inferentia
- You have dedicated FinOps resources to manage AWS's pricing complexity

Choose Azure if:

- Your organization runs Microsoft 365, Windows Server, or SQL Server, Azure Hybrid Benefit changes the economics fundamentally
- You need exclusive enterprise access to OpenAI's GPT-5 for AI inference workloads
- Hybrid cloud (on-premises + cloud) is a significant architectural requirement, Azure Arc is the most mature solution
- You have an existing Microsoft Enterprise Agreement to bundle Azure into existing commercial relationships
- You need native integration between cloud infrastructure and Microsoft security (Defender, Entra ID, Purview)

Choose GCP if:

- Large-scale data analytics is a primary workload, BigQuery is the strongest platform in the category
- AI/ML training and inference are significant priorities, TPUs, Vertex AI, Gemini, and Ironwood provide genuine hardware advantages
- Multi-cloud security visibility is a priority, Wiz (now GCP) provides the broadest multi-cloud security platform available
- Kubernetes is central to your infrastructure, GKE is the most mature managed Kubernetes service
- Pricing transparency and automatic discounts without commitment lock-in are important

The FinOps checklist before signing any cloud contract:

1. Model egress explicitly, require your architecture team to estimate egress before any major deployment
2. Map NAT Gateway and inter-AZ traffic, the two most commonly missed line items
3. Negotiate support into the initial contract, cheaper than purchasing after go-live
4. Right-size before committing, commit to 70%-80% of expected utilization, not 100%
5. Get the 5-year TCO in writing, the 1-year business case underestimates 5-year cost by 35%-60%
6. For AWS: evaluate Graviton instances, 15%-25% better price/performance over x86 for most workloads
7. For GCP: model Sustained Use Discounts against AWS Savings Plans, GCP's automatic model often wins for variable workloads
8. For Azure: calculate Azure Hybrid Benefit before any compute comparison, the savings can be decisive

The Bottom Line

AWS, Azure, and GCP are all credible enterprise cloud platforms. The right choice is not primarily about which has the best services, it is about which aligns with your existing infrastructure investment, your workload profile, your AI requirements, and your cost management maturity.

AWS wins on service breadth, ecosystem maturity, and talent availability. It demands the most FinOps sophistication to control, and generates the most billing surprises for organizations without that sophistication.

Azure wins for Microsoft-stack organizations, where Hybrid Benefit, EA bundling, and exclusive OpenAI access change the economics in ways that no published pricing comparison reflects. GPT-5 native integration is the most material new Azure advantage in 2026.

GCP wins for data-intensive workloads, AI/ML infrastructure, and, post-Wiz acquisition, multi-cloud security. Its automatic Sustained Use Discounts, 8% Q1 2026 compute price cuts, and Ironwood TPU leadership make it the most competitively priced of the three for organizations that fit its strengths. The \$32 billion Wiz acquisition is the most strategically significant cloud industry event of 2025-2026, and its full impact on GCP's security positioning will become clearer through 2026.

The universal truth for all three: **95% of enterprises experience unexpected charges. The published pricing page is not the bill you will pay.** Egress costs, support tiers, idle compute, and service sprawl determine the real number. The organization that models these before signing will spend 35%-60% less over five years than the one that discovers them afterward.

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