

Sony PS Vita gets world launch in Japan

December 17 2011, by Karyn Poupee



A couple show off their newly purchased PlayStation Vita portable game in Shibuya shopping district in Tokyo Saturday, Dec. 17, 2011. Sony's long-awaited PS Vita hit stores in Japan on Saturday, with the company predicting brisk sales even though the launch has missed much of the holiday shopping season. (AP Photo/Kyodo News) JAPAN OUT, MANDATORY CREDIT, NO LICENSING IN CHINA, FRANCE, HONG KONG, JAPAN AND SOUTH KOREA

Technology giant Sony on Saturday held the world launch of its next-generation PlayStation Vita handheld console in Japan, as the company aims to take a bite out of the growing smartphone games market.

Gaming fans in Japan, Sony's home country, flocked to the shops to get their hands on the device, which costs between 25,000 yen and 30,000 yen (\$320 to \$380).

It features a five-inch (12-centimetre) LED touch screen, two cameras and a GPS receiver, and comes in WiFi and 3G models.

By mid-morning hundreds were queuing at stores in Tokyo's Akihabara electronics district to buy the PS Vita, which hit Japanese shops in time for the end-of-year festivities.

It will be released in the United States and Europe in February 2012.

"It's actually quite fun. The waiting, the excitement. Lots of people are getting together and sharing this moment, it's a bit like a party," said Ken Iioka, who turned up at 5.30 am.

Sony mounted a major promotional effort: stands displaying the device were set up in the streets, and shop interiors were decorated in the PS Vita's wide range of bright colours.

"A number of the devices are already sold out, most customers had reserved them in advance," one salesman in Akihabara said.

"The first customers are mostly men between 20 and 30 years of age," he said, adding that the 20 games available to play on the PS Vita as of Saturday were also geared towards the same demographic.

Nintendo's Game Boy, released in 1989, led the handheld game market until the mid-2000s, when Sony's PSP cut into its share.

But the emergence of iPhone and Android games is threatening the existence of game-specific handheld devices.

Nintendo launched its 3DS portable game console about 10 months ago and it is gaining popularity.

"I already have the previous PSP model and a Nintendo 3DS, but I wanted at all costs to have the PS Vita too," said one male in his thirties, who was queuing up to buy a shopping basket full of accessories for his new gadget.

"It's a bit overbearing but still very attractive," another customer said about the device, playing with it for the first time.

But some came away empty-handed.

"I wanted to buy it, despite the price, but I was too late to reserve one and apparently there's no chance today," a disappointed customer said, playing on different device instead.

"I've got lots of games consoles because I love video games and not all games can be played on all models," he added.

"Pre-orders are very strong," Andrew House, head of Sony's games unit, told Kyodo News and other media in Tokyo earlier in the week.

Without giving precise figures he said the company was aiming for sales of the PS Vita to far outstrip the 73 million PlayStation Portable units sold around the world since 2004.

The PS Vita is between 10,000 and 15,000 yen (\$130-\$190) more expensive than the 3DS. House said one key difference was the device's compatibility with 3G networks.

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