

# The wait is over for 'Pokemon Go' fans in Japan

July 22 2016, by Ken Moritsugu And Satoshi Sugiyama

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People gaze at their smartphones as they play "Pokemon Go" at Akihabara district in Tokyo, Friday, July 22, 2016. The wait is over for "Pokemon Go" fans in Japan. Users began tweeting it was available Friday morning, and the Pokemon Co. and the developer of the augmented reality game, U.S.-based Niantic Inc., confirmed its launch shortly after. (AP Photo/Eugene Hoshiko)

The wait is over for "Pokemon Go" fans in Japan.

Players began tweeting about it as soon as it was available Friday morning, and the Pokemon Co. and the developer of the augmented reality [game](#), U.S.-based Niantic Inc., confirmed its launch.

"Pokemon Go" is expected to be a huge hit in Japan, the country of the character's birth. Fans have been eagerly awaiting its release since it first came out more than two weeks ago in Australia, New Zealand and the United States, and then spread to become a blockbuster hit in more than 20 countries.

"The best part is that I just got the first three (characters), I felt like, 'Yes!'" university student Shuta Saito said in Tokyo's Akihabara district, a popular spot for fans of animation and games.

One of the Japanese creators of the game apologized for the delay in a video with the American head of Niantic posted on the internet.

"To everyone in Japan: I am sorry to make you wait for so long," said Jyunichi Masuda, the head of development at Game Freak Inc., the developer of the original Pokemon game. "'Pokemon Go' can now be played in Japan."



A man maneuvers his smartphone as he plays "Pokemon Go" at the Akihabara district in Tokyo, Japan, Friday, July 22, 2016. Users began tweeting it as soon as it was available Friday morning, and the Pokemon Co. and the developer of the augmented reality game, U.S.-based Niantic Inc., confirmed its launch shortly after. (AP Photo/Eugene Hoshiko)

In the game, players search for digital creatures that pop up on smartphone screens as they move through real-world locations. The game's success has sent the stock price of Nintendo Co. soaring. The Japanese game maker, in partnership with Game Freak, released the original Pokemon game in the mid-1990s, and owns the trademarks to all the game's characters.

The launch in Japan includes a tie-up with McDonald's Japan that is seen as a potential expansion of the game's revenue base beyond the sale of in-app purchases.

Financial details have not been disclosed, but McDonald's said that about 400 of its 2,900 restaurants in the country are designated as "gyms" where players can battle on their smartphones. The other 2,500 are "Pokestops," where players can get "Poke Balls" and other items they need to play the game.

Because the game uses GPS, it can drive potential customers to a store in a way that other games cannot. "They are adding a new way to make money through mobile games by virtue of the GPS element in the game, and I think this deal is just the first of many to come," said Serkan Toto, a Tokyo-based games industry consultant.



People maneuver their smartphones as they play "Pokemon Go" at Akihabara in Tokyo, Friday, July 22, 2016. Users began tweeting it as soon as it was available Friday morning, and the Pokemon Co. and the developer of the augmented reality game, U.S.-based Niantic Inc., confirmed its launch shortly after. (AP Photo/Eugene Hoshiko)

Keito Sato, 17, walking with school friends in Tokyo's Roppongi area, said he's been playing since he learned about the game's release via Twitter. He was hoping to test his skills in a battle at a McDonald's, but realized he had not reached a sufficient level to do so.

In Akihabara, 19-year old student Yuchi Mori said he was undeterred by the multiple reports of "Pokemon Go"-related traffic accidents and other mishaps elsewhere. He downloaded the game as soon as a school exam ended Friday morning.

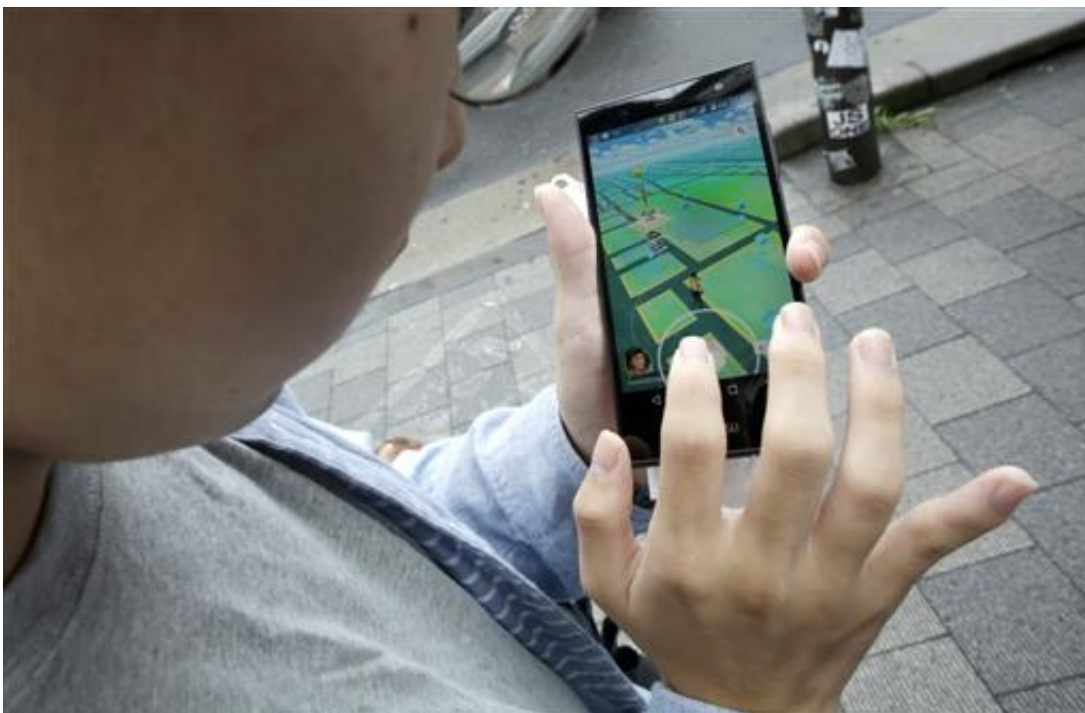
"Well I suppose using the smartphone while walking is dangerous, and small kids could be taken away by suspicious people, but I think it's alright as long as each individual stays careful," said Mori, a Pokemon fan since he was 6-years old.

As anticipation built toward the Japan release earlier this week, the government issued nine safety-related rules for "Pokemon Go" players to follow. Niantic CEO John Hanke asked users to play with care.



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"When you go out to play, keep your head up, look around, enjoy the world around you and be safe," he said in the video message.



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