

Pokemon No: Can a place declare the game off-limits?

August 15 2016, by Erwan Lucas



In Saudi Arabia, the top clerical body has re-issued a 15-year-old fatwa banning Pokemon in response to the new smartphone version, saying it is too much like gambling

The global Pokemon Go craze has prompted a slew of complaints, from memorial sites arguing it's disrespectful to play there to whole countries imposing a ban on the smartphone game.

But is it really possible to declare a place a no-go zone for people hunting the cartoon monsters?

Which places have declared war on Pokemon?

Sites that have expressed irritation at Pokemon Go players include private properties, government buildings, historic monuments and memorial sites.

The museum at the Auschwitz Nazi death camp, the Holocaust memorial in Berlin and Japan's Hiroshima memorial have all complained about visitors bent over their mobiles trying to catch Pichachus instead of contemplating the weight of history.

Iran and Saudi Arabia have also declared blanket bans on the game.

The Iranian ban came days after its release last month, with officials saying it could be used for spying because the app leads users to real-life locations—though youngsters are playing regardless, using VPN connections to mask their location.

In Saudi Arabia, the top clerical body has meanwhile re-issued a 15-year-old fatwa banning Pokemon in response to the new smartphone version, saying it is too much like gambling and appears to be based on the theory of evolution, which is rejected by Islam.



Iranians play Pokemon Go in northern Tehran's Mellat Park on August 3, 2016

With other sites, there is a warning that playing could actually be life-threatening. In Bosnia, people have been warned not to risk entering areas littered with mines from the 1990s war just because a much-coveted Pokemon may be lurking nearby.

How are the game's locations chosen?

Much of the game's appeal lies in the way the Pokemon—little cartoon monsters in the shape of everything from goldfish to dragons—pop up around you, overlaid on your phone's camera images.

The game also encourages players to explore the world around them by making them visit landmarks designated as "Pokestops" and "Gyms". These could be anything from the local school to a major tourist

attraction like India's Taj Mahal.

At Pokestops players can collect the tools they need to catch the critters, while at Gyms they can fight them against each other.

In both cases, the locations are designated by the game's California-based designer Niantic.

The company used data from an earlier game called Ingress in which players could walk around the streets capturing locations on a GPS map. Niantic grew its original list of landmarks with extra suggestions from players.



Much of the game's appeal lies in the way the Pokémon—little cartoon monsters in the shape of everything from goldfish to dragons—pop up around you, overlaid on your phone's camera images

Where do Pokemon appear?

A Pokemon can appear on your smartphone screen at any time, in any place.

The game's algorithm places the monsters more or less at random—although you are more likely to find different types of Pokemon in different locations.

Fish-type Pokemons, for example, can often be found near lakes or rivers.

There's no need to be right on top of a Pokemon to catch it—the system allows for a capture within a several-metre radius, meaning you shouldn't have to drive to a screeching halt in the middle of the road just to add it to your collection.

So can a place declare itself a Pokemon no-go zone ?

It depends on whether the place in question is a Pokestop, a Gym, or simply somewhere the little critters have been popping up.



As a Pokemon can appear on your smartphone screen at any time, in any place, it is proving complicated to stop the monsters from popping up at a site that would like to see them banned

It is possible to ask Niantic for a location to be removed as a Pokestop or Gym. The developer cannot remove them from the game instantly, but each update of the app can see sites added or removed from the list.

The most recent update saw the Hiroshima and Berlin Holocaust memorials disappear as Pokemon landmarks.

But it's a lot more complicated to stop the monsters themselves from popping up at a site that would like to see them banned.

That would require a modification of the game's algorithm, a complex process that presents a headache for the developers.

The Pokemon Company, the Japanese firm which manages the hugely popular brand, says Niantic is working on improving the algorithm.

© 2016 AFP

Citation: Pokemon No: Can a place declare the game off-limits? (2016, August 15) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-08-pokemon-declare-game-off-limits.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.