

The pros and cons of playing Pokémon Go while traveling

August 4, 2016

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 People costumed as the game's characters participate in a Pokémon Go search during a gathering of players in San Francisco in July. (AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez)
2 of 6

Can Pokémon Go spur a new way to travel, or are there too many risks?

Pokémon Go has quickly become the most downloaded mobile app in the history of the App Store. And its worldwide domination has impacted more than just mobile gaming.

For example, several news stories have featured players who were inspired to exercise and socialize while capturing Pokémon characters. Flipping the basement-dwelling gamer stereotype on its head, Pokémon Go may even alter the way some people travel. Hotel packages and tours are already working to lure fans of the augmented reality game.

“Pokémon Go is getting people to go out and engage with the world in a way that I’ve never seen before,” said Brooklynite Nick Johnson, who was the first person to claim he had caught all 142 Pokémon in the U.S.

Now Johnson, the head of platform at Applico, has teamed up with Marriott Rewards and Expedia to take a trip to catch Mr. Mime in Europe, Farfetch’d in Asia, and Kangaskhan in Australia.

Hampton Inn & Suites Baltimore Inner Harbor has introduced a Poke Around Baltimore package, which includes a walking map and trainer grab bag with treats to lure Pokémon.

In New York, mass Pokémon gatherings have become commonplace in Bryant Park, Washington Square Park and Central Park. And the Metropolitan Museum of Art boasts

PokéStops that are attached to different masterpieces, combining the enjoyment of the game with art history.

While hotels and tours are working to attract fans with the app, other attractions are wary of the traffic. “The garden is open sunrise to sunset and is a site of heritage and scientific importance. We’ve found a number of people wandering around the closed garden at night,” said Craig Easdown, a spokesperson for Sydney’s Royal Botanic Garden. “We don’t want to sound like spoilers, but there is a public safety element to this, so we aren’t going out of our way to encourage it.”

Players have also been banned at sacred locations such as the Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, D.C., Japan’s Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park and the 9/11 Memorial in lower Manhattan. And Niantic, the software development company that created the app, removed Pokémon from the Holocaust Museum after players were catching characters on the premises.

Still, while they may not be welcome everywhere, players have found that Pokémon Go has led them to travel to new destinations — near and far. “In the two weeks it took me to catch ’em all, I visited areas of Manhattan, Brooklyn, and New Jersey that I had never been to and probably wouldn’t have visited otherwise,” said Johnson, who flew to Paris on July 29 to begin his global Pokémon adventure.

So what are some other pros and cons of playing Pokémon Go on the go? Here are a few.

Pro: You can see new sights and meet new people

Pokémon Go allows you to play the mobile version of your favorite ’90s game while also exploring a city. You can meet locals by attending a Pokémon-themed Facebook or Meetup gathering. Chances are, your nose will be buried in your phone, but you’ll look up now and then, right?

Hotel Nikko in San Francisco has activated a PokéStop for Pokemon Power Hours from 5 to 7 p.m. daily at the hotel’s Kanpai Lounge. Pair a gaming session with a Pokémon Punch, stirred with rum and pineapple. Hotel del Coronado in San Diego and The Beverly Hilton in Los Angeles are two other California properties that cater to the game.

Con: Players aren’t welcome everywhere

Players looking to catch Pokémon at sacred landmarks such as the 9/11 Memorial and Arlington National Cemetery are, rightfully, not welcome. And some fans have been entering public parks past closing time to find characters. Pokémon etiquette dictates that players should be respectful and follow the law.

Pro: You can discover new opportunities

Pokémon players can leverage their skills and even get sponsored to travel the world, like Nick Johnson. Even if you don’t, you’ll burn calories from strolling around and catching characters.

Con: Players have become targets

There have been reports of crimes against Pokémon players, including incidents in London, California and Oregon. And in San Diego, two players had to be rescued by firefighters after falling off a cliff.