

TECH

Japan opens biggest e-sports park to level up competitive gaming

PUBLISHED : 27 APR 2022 AT 12:00

NEWSPAPER SECTION: LIFE

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| Motor racing simulators at Red Tokyo Tower e-sports park. Photo: REUTERS

Japan's largest e-sports park opened last week, with proponents hoping it will help transform the country behind video game classics such as Super Mario and Zelda into a champion that can take on China in competitive gaming.

"Japan's esports market is growing but still distant compared to overseas. We hope to close the gap," said Yasuo Hara, president of Tokyo Esports Gate, which developed the Red Tokyo Tower attraction.

Set across three floors at the base of the landmark Tokyo Tower, the park offers space for esports competition along with the latest motor racing, virtual reality and games simulators.

Japanese gamers have been slow to jump into esports, favouring home-grown role-playing console (RPG) franchises such as Final Fantasy and Dragon Quest and mobile titles such as Monster Strike.

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- **Chic and nostalgic**
 - **Laughter is the best medicine**
 - **A multitude of cuisines**
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"It's still Donkey Kong country," said Serkan Toto, founder of game industry consultancy Kantan Games, referring to the classic Nintendo platforming series.

Nintendo has a loyal fanbase in Japan for its Switch device even as Sony and Microsoft battle it out in Western markets with next-generation consoles.

The Kyoto-based firm has launched major multiplayer hits Splatoon and Smash Bros but is less active in promoting competitive gaming than firms such as Riot Games, which is owned by China's Tencent.

Japanese esports reticence contrasts with neighbours South Korea and China, where enthusiasm is reflected in the competitive strength of teams in multiplayer PC titles such as League Of Legends from California-based Riot.

China, where console makers have struggled to make inroads due to regulatory hurdles, will this year account for nearly a third of global esports revenue, which is driven primarily by sponsorship, according to research firm Newzoo.

The growth of streaming on platforms like Amazon's Twitch during the Covid-19 pandemic proved a tailwind for esports, with global revenue expected to near US\$1.38 billion (46.9 billion baht) this year, Newzoo estimates.

