

iPhone 5 launch draws crowds at Asia Apple shops

KELVIN CHAN - AP Business Writer - Associated Press

In a now familiar ritual, Apple's Asian fans jammed the tech juggernaut's shops in Australia, Hong Kong, Japan and Singapore to pick up the latest version of its iPhone.

Eager buyers formed long lines at Apple Inc. stores in Australia and Japan to be the first to get their hands on the latest version of the smartphone. In Hong Kong, buyers had to sign up online for the chance to pick up the device at a preset time. The first customers were greeted by staff cheering, clapping, chanting "iPhone 5! iPhone 5!" and high-fiving them as they were escorted through the front door.

The smartphone is also being launched in the U.S., U.K., Canada, France and Germany on Friday and will go on sale in 22 more countries a week later. The iPhone 5 is thinner, lighter, has a taller screen, faster processor, updated software and can work on faster "fourth generation" mobile networks.

Order numbers indicate the iPhone 5 has overcome initial lukewarm reviews. Apple received 2 million orders in the first 24 hours of announcing its release date, more than twice the number for the iPhone 4S in the same period when that phone launched a year ago.

Analysts have estimated Apple will ship as many as 10 million of the new iPhones by the end of September.

Some Australian fans went to extreme lengths to be the first to own the new phone, grabbing the first spots in line at Apple's flagship store in downtown Sydney on Tuesday — three days ahead of the release.

Todd Foot, 24, nabbed the coveted first spot and spent an average of 18 hours a day sitting in a folding chair adorned with an Australian flag, and attempting to catch a few hours' sleep each night in a tent on the sidewalk outside the store.

Foot's dedication was largely a marketing stunt, however. He writes product reviews for a technology website which plans to give away the phone after Foot reviews it.

In Hong Kong, not everyone who lined up was an Apple enthusiast. University student Kevin Wong, waiting to buy a black 16 gigabyte model for 5,588 Hong Kong dollars (\$720), said he was getting one "for the cash." He planned to immediately resell it to one of the numerous grey market retailers catering to visiting mainland Chinese buyers. China is one of Apple's biggest sources of revenue but a release date for the iPhone 5 has not yet been set.

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Mainland Chinese, who like to shop in Hong Kong because there's no sales tax and because of the strength of the yuan, will probably buy it from the resellers "at a higher price — a way higher price," said Wong, who hoped to make a profit of HK\$1000 (\$129).

Tokyo's glitzy downtown Ginza district had not just one long line but two — one, in front of the Apple store and the other across the main intersection at Softbank, the first carrier in Japan to offer iPhones — both packed with Japanese determined to be among the world's first to own an iPhone 5.

Hidetoshi Nakamura, a 25-year-old auto engineer, said he's an Apple fan because it's an innovator.

"I love Apple," he said, standing toward the end of a two-block-long line, patiently reading a book and listening to music on his iPod.

"It's only the iPhone for me."

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Kristen Gelineau in Sydney and Yuri Kageyama in Tokyo contributed to this report.

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