

# Russian Pokemon Go Blogger Escapes Jail After Guilty Verdict

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Russian blogger Ruslan Sokolovsky in court. **Donat Sorokin / TASS**

A Russian blogger who filmed himself playing Pokemon Go inside an Orthodox cathedral has been found guilty of “offending the feelings of religious believers.”

Ruslan Sokolovsky, 22, uploaded a video of himself playing the online game in a church in the Russian city Yekaterinburg last summer.

A court in Yekaterinburg handed Sokolovsky a suspended jail term of three years and six months.

He was also found guilty of inciting religious hatred in eight other videos uploaded to YouTube and his personal blog between May 2013 and September 2016.

Sokolovsky, who describes himself as an atheist, had used the videos to criticize several religions, including Christianity and Islam.

Judge Yekaterina Shoponyaka said the blogger posted the videos to "earn money and attain fame."

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Sokolovsky filmed the clip in Yekaterinburg's Church of All Saints after media outlets warned young gamers against "hunting Pokemon" — small, animated creatures based on a Japanese children's show — in places of worship.

The church is built on the spot where Tsar Nicholas II and his family were believed to have been killed by the Bolsheviks.

In his video, Sokolovsky called the reports "nonsense." "Who could get offended if you're just walking around with your smartphone in a church?" he said.

Sokolovsky later argued that locals had been offended by his online videos, rather than his actions in the church itself. "I never asked these people to watch my videos," he told reporters after appearing in court on March 13. "Don't watch them. I don't recommend them to anyone!"

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Yekaterinburg Mayor Yevgeny Roizman has been among those who came to Sokolovsky's aid, even testifying in court on his behalf.

The court ultimately sided with witnesses who said that the video had insulted their beliefs, including church employee Andrei Shipintsev. Testifying in court, Shipintsev said that the blogger had made him "cry on the inside" by comparing Jesus Christ to a rare Pokemon.

"I wasn't perfect when I was 21, either," Shipintsev told the court. "But my mother taught me; the church is the church."

Sokolovsky was also found guilty of illegally owning a "special technical device" after police found a pen equipped with a video camera in the blogger's home.

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