



For the record

When they need to top up their stocks, vinyl record collectors in the know head to Japan

WORDS: PETER BARRETT

As records slowly stopped spinning on turntables in the 1980s and '90s, savvy Japanese record collectors combed US stores, sending home container-loads of vinyl. Because of the Japanese national obsession with collecting, stocks remain among the most diverse, high-quality and well-catalogued in the world.

Today, with more than 1000 stores, Japan is a vinyl record buyer's paradise and switched-on music fans from Australia and New Zealand make the trip to Tokyo and Osaka for whirlwind record-buying missions. Some are professionals, others are passionate collectors and all seek their latest "holy grail" discovery.

Here, four record-mad travellers tell us their vinyl-hunting stories in the Land of the Rising Sun.



**THE NOVICE****ADI TOOHEY, DJ****Sydney**

DJ and FBI radio host Adi Toohey went on her first record mission to Japan last year. Based in Shibuya, in 10 days she visited as many record stores and a record fair, assisted by a friend who happened to be in town. She visited stores including Disk Union in Shibuya and Shimokitazawa, City Country City, HMV, Lighthouse Records and, in Osaka, Rare Grooves and Revelation Time. "Every record is in a plastic sleeve with a tag in the top corner with the artist, track and condition of the record and maybe some listening notes. So when you're flicking through, all you need to do is lift them up one inch. It's so much more efficient." By the end of the trip, Adi had filled a suitcase with 100 records.

Fave store: "Revelation Time, in Osaka. A perfectly curated selection with informative post-it-notes such as 'Killer French boogie'."

Holy Grail: "*Ho Happy Day* by Flame 'N' King and the Bold Ones (1979). Actor and DJ friend Alex Dimitriadis posted it on his Facebook page and it became the anthem of our trip."





THE COLLECTOR

JAMES “DJ OCKY” PLANT
Adelaide

Collecting since 1994, Ocky has “downsized” his collection recently – to a mere 5000 records (he owned more than 12,000). Since his first buying trip to Japan in 2010, he has been more than 35 times. “Tokyo is a Mecca for record stores. Nearly every store there is well-stocked and incredibly organised, with super-friendly staff keen to help you through the language barrier.” Finding information on stores can be tricky, though, with many eschewing regularly updated websites. “It’s more about word of mouth and local knowledge.”

Fave store: “City Country City in Shimokitazawa is a really nice café/record store, privately operated, where passionate people come together [and] are doing something cool.”

Holy Grail: “I just found my Holy Grail – it was *Help us Spread the Message*, by the Mighty Ryeders, from 1978. When I went into the store it was the last day of my trip and I was low on money. I told [the sales assistant] to put it aside and two months later I came back. It was amazing.” »



THE PROFESSIONAL

CHRIS GILL

**Owner, Northside Records
Melbourne**

Specialising in soul, groove and jazz funk, Northside requires regular restocking and owner Chris Gill, who also has a weekly funk show on Melbourne community radio station Triple R, travels regularly to Japan on buying missions. In the past 14 months he's gone four times. "The main impetus for me to go to Japan recently has been the cheap Jetstar fares. I went twice for \$350 return, which is pretty crazy." Typically, Chris spends four days trawling through vinyl and one day posting up to 1000 records home. "Some of the big chain stores, like Disk Union, are six storeys and each storey is a genre of music," he says. "They're on a different level to what we have here."

Fave store: "Disk Union, Shibuya. They have some super-heavyweight records come through there. Very nice people."

Holy Grail: "*The Har-You Percussion Group* (1969). It's an amazing funky Latin record I sold for \$500 early on at Northside and I have regretted it ever since."



THE ADVENTURER

BEVAN "DJ SHEEP" JEE

Brisbane

DJ Sheep spent two years working in Tokyo as an English teacher from 2002 and while there, decided to focus on local Japanese records instead of American. Armed with *The Record Map*, a telephone book-sized bible listing every record store in the country, he started exploring the country by train, finding vinyl gold in lesser-known record centres including Hiroshima and Fukuoka. "I'm giving away the secrets right now because most people go to Tokyo and Osaka, but I would say pretty much one out of two train stations is going to have a record shop within walking distance."

Fave store: "East Records in Jimbocho. It's the kind of place to go if you want to have that experience of walking into a museum of every great \$1000-record you ever wished you owned."

Holy Grail: "*Ceremony: Buddha Meet Rock*, by People, on the Teichiku label, (1971). I've never ever seen an original copy for sale and I'm still hunting!" »

Diggin'
since 1994
GRAFF TREATS DOPE BEATS

Loving that vinyl

WORDS: SELINA HOY

IN THE IMPOSSIBLY cool Shimokitazawa neighborhood of Tokyo, everyone you meet on the street is a musician, or an artist, or a nattily dressed thrift-store owner. Opened in 2006, City Country City (aka CCC) has become a destination for connoisseur record collectors. It has a heavily edited vinyl selection, and the space doubles as a café where patrons can sip coffee, eat pasta, and listen to records while they mull over their purchases. The shop also sells releases from Rose Records, the record label of Keiichi Sokabe, indie rock artist and one of the shop's owners.

Like many a passion project, CCC was born from a wild night out. "One night, drunk, [Tatsuo] Hirata [one of the shop's co-owners] said, 'I want to start a record store!' Initially, there were about five of us who started it, and we did all the carpentry work ourselves," says Keiichi.

Tatsuo goes on buying trips a few times a year, on the lookout for the Brazilian, Cuban, and African music that is popular with his customers. Lots of DJs frequent the shop, including Japan's DJ Muro and New York legend David Mancuso. Keiichi, meanwhile, seeks out "Psychedelic Korean rock, especially records by Shin Jung-hyeon. Once people have them they won't let them go," he says.



Hirata (in red), Keiichi (in grey) and Koharu the Shiba Inu at CCC.

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Give me your want list, and I'll try to find it for you

"Give me your want list, and I'll try to find it for you," promises Tatsuo. "I'm really happy when I feel the shop plays a part in making connections between people who really love music. Sometimes they even get married. Yeah, we have things like that happening here." 🐶



