

FEATURES

Taipei's underground gaming heaven

A strip of stores in Taipei City Mall sells video games, manga, gundam robot kits and other staples of geek culture

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STAFF REPORTER

In the labyrinthine twist of walkways and shops underneath Taipei Main Station is a cluster of more than 40 stores that offer something other than the usual underground mall fare of cheap apparel and knickknacks. The shops, located in a strip of Taipei City Mall (台北地下街) that is fittingly named the Electronic Information Quarter (電子資訊區), offers a smorgasbord of video games, manga, collectible figures, anime DVDs, gundam robot kits and gashapon capsule toys to proud devotees of geek culture, many of whom refer to themselves by the Japanese term *otaku*.

The strip is anchored by gaming stores, the larger of which have huge plasma screen televisions and consoles placed outside for fans to try out free of charge. To avoid long lines, head over during school hours; otherwise, be prepared to stand behind clusters of rapt teenagers as one of their peers shows off his or her gaming acumen on *Street Fighter IV*, *Shin Megami Tensei: Persona 4* and other hit games.

Street Game Mall (地下街軟體世界) is one of the largest of these stores, with a wide selection of games, all of the most popular gaming platforms and prices that are slightly lower than their competitors in the mall. An Xbox 360 is NT\$9,600, while a PlayStation 3 is NT\$11,600 and a Wii is NT\$7,600. Most games range in price from NT\$500 to NT\$900.

A word of advice: almost all the consoles sold in Taipei City Mall are manufactured for use in Asia and are not compatible with games licensed for use in other regions; most of the games sold are available only in Chinese or Japanese. Retrogamers from any language background, however, will feel at home in **Shiguangwu** (時光屋), where the first thing that greets you is a case where several 20-year-old Game & Watch units by Nintendo, including Lifeboat and Super Mario Bros, are lovingly displayed.

The inside of the humble but well-stocked shop is sure to bring back happy memories for many Generation X gamers. There is a black Sega Dreamcast (NT\$1,850), a Super Nintendo Entertainment System (NT\$1,850) and a Family Computer game console, also by Nintendo (NT\$2,150). If you buy one of these units, plenty of reasonably-priced vintage games are available to stock your new-old system.

Stores in this section of the mall don't just cater to gaming fanatics. Collectors of gashapon, or capsule toys, will have a field day inserting NT\$50 coins into the vending machines, which line the malls in banks of 20 to 30 machines at a time. Urban vinyl, anime and gundam lovers will also find plenty to gawk at, especially in **Indian** (印地安). The merchandise in this toyshop ranges from scantily-clad anime-inspired maid figures imported from Japan to

Baby Alive, a doll that pees on command and is packaged with refills. The messy moppet, which was inexplicably popular with children around the world this past holiday season, can be yours for a special price of NT\$1,950.

Like many of the other toy and figure shops in the mall, Indian carries a large selection of Bandai gundam kits and Lego sets (including several from the Star Wars series for NT\$1,590). Other merchandise includes airspray kits (NT\$1,310 for a Pro Spray MK-5), complete sets of Cosbaby Edward Scissorhands vinyl figures for NT\$3,500 and pre-labeled miniatures from Re-Ment and MegaHouse (which are usually sold in blind boxes).

The smaller **Media Toy** (美迪亞) is one of the few stores here that sell Blythe dolls; its current selection includes the newly-released Friendly Freckles (NT\$3,050) to the older and rarer Cherry Blossom (NT\$9,050). Fans of the anime series *Maria-sama ga Miteru* can find a limited edition 16.5cm-tall PVC figure of character Shimako Todo by Hobby Japan for NT\$1,380 in **Toy People**. The shop also carries several Figma toys for NT\$509 to NT\$980; the action figures feature switchable faceplates and other accessories.

Hot Dog Toyz has plenty of eye candy for urban vinyl fans. The chain store sells items from the popular series Bearbrick by Medicom Toy and C.i.Boys from Red Magic in its Taipei City Mall location. Other toys include petite Blythe dolls and full sets of gashapon toys.

Fans of Japanese mooks, or magazine/book combinations, should make a beeline to the aptly named **Mag Freak** (雜誌瘋), which stocks almost every Japanese periodical available, ranging from fashion magazines like the cult favorite *Russh* to hobby guides like *Dolly Dolly*. Prices are slightly higher than at Eslite, Page One or Kinokuniya, but you have a better chance of finding a sought-after back issue at Mag Freak.

There are plenty of inexpensive restaurants and cafes in the mall to head to with your shiny new mook in hand, but fans of anime might be happiest at **Jours de Soleil** (陽光庭園). The restaurant opened last summer, replacing Fatimaid, a maid-themed cafe that still has a location in Datong District (大同區). Jours de Soleil offers cheaply-priced tea and coffee drinks, pastries and a set meal menu that is heavy on rice, pasta and cheese casserole dishes. An observer commented that Jours de Soleil does not live up to Fatimaid, which featured waitresses decked out in full Victorian maid regalia demurely serving up coffee. The friendly servers at Jours de Soleil wear anime-inspired cosplay outfits, however, and judging by the number of guest books filled with effusive compliments and swirly heart doodles, the restaurant has managed to build up its own fan base.



To avoid getting stuck in long lines at the Electronic Information Quarter's shops, visit during school hours.

PHOTOS: CATHERINE SHU AND RON BROWNLOW, TAIPEI TIMES THE

How to get there:

Finding the Taipei City Mall (台北地下街) from the Taipei Main Station MRT Station (台北車站捷運站) can be tricky, since there are three underground shopping centers around the stop. Taipei City Mall sits to the back, or the north, of the main station building. The easiest way to get there is by one of the entranceways on Civic Boulevard (市民大道) next to the station. The Electronic Information Quarter stretches underground between Chongqing North Road (重慶北路) and Yanping North Road (延平北路) on Civic Boulevard. Taipei City Mall's street address is 100, Civil Boulevard Sec 1, Taipei City (台北市市民大道一段100號).

For a complete list of stores in the mall's Electronic Information Quarter, visit www.taipeimall.com.tw/store/?storeid=3

SHOPS:

STREET GAME MALL (地下街軟體世界)
Shop Location: No. 93 (台北市市民大道一段100號 B1-93號)
Phone: (02) 2559-4855
Hours: Monday to Friday 11am to 10:30pm; Saturday and Sunday 11am to 11pm

SHIGUANGWU (時光屋)
Shop Location: No. 67 (台北市市民大道一段100號 B1-67號)
Phone: (02) 2559-5950
Hours: 1pm to 10pm

NDIAN (印地安)
Shop Location: No. 83 (台北市市民大道一段100號 B1-83號)
Phone: (02) 2555-5299
Hours: 11am to 9pm

MEDIA TOY (美迪亞)
Shop Location: No. 66B (台北市市民大道一段100號 B1-66B號)
Phone: (02) 2559-0378
Hours: Monday to Friday 2pm to 10pm; Saturday and Sunday 1pm to 10pm

TOY PEOPLE
Shop Location: No. 52 (台北市市民大道一段100號 B1-52號)
Phone: (02) 2556-2663
Hours: 12pm to 9:30pm

HOT DOG TOYZ
Shop Location: No. 57 (台北市市民大道一段100號 B1-57號)
Phone: (02) 2556-0814
Hours: Monday to Friday 12pm to 9:30pm; Saturday and Sunday 12pm and 10pm
On the Web: www.hotdogtoyz.com

IMAG FREAK (雜誌瘋)
Shop Location: No. 105 in the Taipei City Mall (台北市市民大道一段100號B1-105號)
Phone: (02) 2550-5244
Hours: Monday to Thursday, and Sunday 11am to 9pm; Friday and Saturday 11am to 9:30pm
On the Web: www.magfreak.com.tw

JOURS DE SOLEIL (陽光庭園)
Shop Location: No. 1 in the Taipei City Mall (台北市市民大道一段100號B1-1號)
Phone: (02) 2550-0377
Hours: Monday to Friday 12pm to 8:30pm; Saturday and Sunday 11:30am to 9pm