

WHO IS THAT MONSTER IN THE WINDOW?

Wanted: A monster with bunny ears, colourful fur and razor-sharp teeth bared in a mischievous smile. Her name? Labubu. Her 'offence'? Wreaking havoc in Singapore and even inciting crime, thanks to being a highly coveted collectible. The Straits Times' correspondent **YAMINI CHINNUSWAMY** and executive artist **BRYANDT LYN** explain this latest toy craze.

LABU-WHO?

Labubu was created by Hong Kong-born artist Kasing Lung as part of his Monsters character series in 2015

Lung, born in 1972, was reportedly inspired by "ancient European elf legends", such as those found in Scandinavian folklore

In 2019, Chinese toy company Pop Mart was granted exclusive licensing rights to be the sole purveyor of swag related to Labubu

Labubu's popularity skyrocketed in 2024 when K-pop superstar Lisa (above right), a member of girl group Blackpink, was seen hugging a giant Labubu doll in a photo posted on her Instagram account in April

The surge in interest in, and the resulting scarcity of, Labubu dolls drove people to extreme lengths to acquire them

At a toys pop-up at Century Square shopping centre in October, a primary school pupil reportedly tried to bribe his way to get a Labubu doll by offering a sales assistant his Owala water bottle

In late October, a man and two children were caught on CCTV stealing \$100 worth of Labubu dolls from a claw machine stall at Sim Lim Square retail complex

Also in October, a woman in Malaysia tried to buy a Labubu doll on Instagram, but lost about RM20,000 (\$6,066) when it turned out to be a scam



SUBSPECIES

Labubu swag comes in different shapes, sizes and colours

- Popular Labubu collections include Tasty Macarons and Have A Seat (\$24.90 for a blind box)

- A Singapore-exclusive Merlion Labubu keychain (\$37.90) sold out within minutes on Pop Mart's website in June

- There are also crossovers with other fictional characters, such as Toothless, the eponymous creature of the How To Train Your Dragon movies (2010 to 2019) (\$159.90)



ENTOURAGE

- Labubu's celebrity fans include Lisa's bandmate Rose and Singaporean actress Jeanette Aw (below left)

- The People's Action Party's Sengkang West branch has its own Labubu mascot, complete with white party regalia



Anthropomorphised products can provide a sense of comfort and companionship. Research shows that after a rough day, turning to a familiar character can feel almost like having a buddy around.

DR SHILPA MADAN, assistant professor of marketing at Singapore Management University

Despite her imposing incisors, Labubu is described as "kind-hearted"

Labubu mania has spread throughout South-east Asia



Beijing
First Pop Mart store opened in 2010

TYCOCO

Despite his macabre skull visage, Tyccoco's comically small top hat and droopy eyes make him cute rather than sinister. He is said to be Labubu's boyfriend



ZIMOMO

Zimomo is Labubu's male doppelganger, with one key difference: He has a tail



Original design of Labubu



Looking for me?

- Known for hawking collectible figurines in mystery blind boxes, Pop Mart's selection keeps each exact design a surprise
- In addition to its physical stores, Pop Mart also sells the toys through vending machines and at its Pop Toy Show conventions



POP MART

Pop Mart is the exclusive retailer of official Labubu merchandise, sold under an overarching The Monsters collection

- Prices range from \$9.90 for a fridge magnet to \$299.90 for the 350mm-tall Mega Labubu 400% Sketch statue

LEGIT CHECK

Amid the frenzy, some enterprising sellers have started offering bootleg Labubu merchandise. Here are some tips to spot the fakes.

1 Buy from official channels

Pop Mart's physical and online stores are the safest sources for authentic Labubus.

2 Inspect the packaging

The authentic packaging has high-quality printing and details. Fake dolls may come with poor print quality, faded colours or flimsy packaging materials.

3 Check for QR codes

Genuine boxes often have QR codes that link to the official [fwsy.popmart.com/a/#](https://www.fwsy.popmart.com/a/#) website. Be cautious, as some scammers may place fake products in genuine boxes.

4 Watch unboxing videos

Watch unboxing videos by reputable collectors to verify details such as fur shades, facial features and brand stamps.

5 Beware of price discrepancies

Unusually low prices can be a red flag. When buying from resellers, check their reputation and reviews.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Pop Mart has seen strong growth in the last few years since launching its first store

According to business magazine Forbes, Pop Mart now has **450 stores** across 30 countries, and plans to continue expanding



A Pop Mart theme park opened in Beijing in September, featuring **life-size** Labubu mascots and collectibles, among other things

RIVAL
There is hot competition from other toys, such as the Chikawa trio of Japanese manga characters



Chikawa toys have become a hit among Chinese youth and are drawing crowds in the United States as well