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## Toy Craze Grips Melbourne as PopMart Opens Flagship Store Amid Winter Chill

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On a cold winter's day in Melbourne, a group of young men lined up for hours outside a newly opened store—not for sneakers or smartphones, but for collectible toys. PopMart, a Chinese company known for its quirky and often pricey designer figurines, has just opened its largest Australian store in the heart of Melbourne. The brand's latest launch has drawn attention not only for the sheer devotion of its fans, but also for the growing influence of foreign retailers in Australia's commercial hubs.

Braving freezing temperatures, early arrivals brought camping chairs, layered winter gear, and the determination to be first in line. Young shoppers like Brandon, Benjamin, and Andy waited overnight for a chance to enter the new PopMart store located in the recently

developed The Walk precinct on Bourke Street. The flagship location officially opened its doors at 10 a.m. Saturday.

Brandon, first in line, said he intended to spend up to \$2000 on collectible items, everything from miniature designer figurines to plush toys and accessories. “It’s not just toys,” he said. “It’s a whole lifestyle.” PopMart fans across the globe are known for their loyalty and willingness to invest large sums in limited edition releases. The brand has become especially popular among younger consumers who treat collectibles like art.

PopMart, short for *Pop Mart International Group Limited*, made global headlines last year after its revenue surged to USD 654 million. Much of its commercial success can be attributed to its blind-box model, a system where customers purchase boxes without knowing the exact item inside, driving repeat purchases and speculation. Iconic character lines such as Molly, SkullPanda, and Dimoo are central to the brand’s identity, each designed by independent artists under PopMart’s growing licensing empire.

While the enthusiasm surrounding PopMart’s launch showcases the global power of pop culture and collectibles, it also highlights broader trends in Australia’s retail landscape. Chinese-based companies, especially those with strong e-commerce or youth-focused appeal, have expanded aggressively into Australian cities. PopMart’s expansion is part of a larger pattern where foreign-owned brands gain prime real estate and capitalize on consumer trends, often outpacing local businesses in the process.

This trend has sparked quiet concern among some Australian observers, who question whether international corporations are squeezing out domestic opportunities. The federal government’s policies, particularly under current leadership, have facilitated easy access for foreign investment in major urban precincts, while local retailers continue to face regulatory hurdles, rising rents, and limited support.

PopMart’s Melbourne debut is undeniably a commercial success. But as young Australians camp outside a foreign-owned store, spending thousands on imported figurines, some are asking what this says about the direction of the local economy and the priorities of those in charge.

Whether it’s fashion, tech, or toys, the influx of offshore companies continues to shape Australia’s urban centers. The question is whether the nation is investing equally in its creative industries or simply selling off space to the highest bidder.

