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# LOLI-GOTH

THE JAPANESE TAKE ON GOTHIC



## Gothic Lolita fashion hits New Zealand shores



The streets of Tokyo's Harajuku have long been a fashion playground for Japanese youth. Each weekend the area draws in a hodgepodge mix of fashionistas eager to scout out the latest outfit, meet with friends and contend with the flash of curious tourist's cameras on Jingubashi Bridge.

Some choose to spend the day sporting cartoon-like makeup, lacy bonnets, pinafores and bloomers all brimming with ruffles and lace while others go for an ensemble of head-to-toe black with pale white foundation and heavy metal accessories depicting anything from roses to spiders. This fashion trend, however, doesn't end on Tokyo's pavements. In fact, this is only where this style's journey begins.

Following on from the recent Japanese Loli-Pop exhibition at The Auckland Museum and as more Japanese bands weave their way into our music scene, the cultural influence from this unique nation is spreading further than just sushi bars and karaoke rooms.

The mix of Alice in Wonderland meets Victorian Gothic, known as Gothic Lolita, or Loli-Goth, is a style gaining popularity abroad. Starting in the 1970s, Japanese youth first became interested in the style as local bands like Malice Mizer popularised the look. For Corrine Adams, a University student studying abroad in Tokyo, it started the same way. "The style here is originally related to the glam rock music scene. I started off liking the music and then got into the fashion."

"The Gothic Lolita style is designated by fashions inspired by the Rococo, Romantic and Victorian periods. It is based on a particular notion of Gothic, represented by historical mourning garb, maidservants' wear, children's dresses and doll's clothes," explains Kathryn Hardy Bernal, curator of the Loli-Pop exhibition and lecturer at AUT.

Patrick Macias, author of *The Japanese Schoolgirl Inferno: Tokyo Teen Fashion Subculture Handbook*, has uncovered a range of Loli-Goth sub-cultures including Ama-Loli, who prefer the sweet and dreamy look, and the darker Guro-Loli, who may have deeper psychological issues to contend with. In New Zealand the scene is still in its early stages. "It is only just starting to bubble up from a small following here," comments Hardy Bernal.



Photo: © Karyn Cartelle

Adams, however, has noticed the trend expanding in other countries. "I think right now it is in the process of shifting away from Japan and more towards overseas. It's growing in popularity more in other countries than it is here [Japan]." Adams spends her weekends in Tokyo picking up unique Gothic Lolita clothing items, only available in Japan, and sending them to her customers overseas. "I mainly send products to the USA, England and Australia at the moment."

Adding the kiwi touch, Hardy Bernal has noticed that "Goth fashion in New Zealand follows more of a western flavour than Japanese and tends to go towards the Emo subcultural style."

Adams also agrees the style is different. "Overseas the Gothic Lolita fashion is still grungier. In Japan, when people say Gothic they mean Victorian-style Gothic. However, I've noticed the Gothic trend abroad is starting to switch to a Japanese direction."

Kath Bridges, creator of the Kitty Bridges label, has watched the awareness of Japanese culture grow here. "A few years ago when I started my label, it was really hard explaining to people what was inspiring me when it came to design. Now thanks to the Loli-Pop exhibition, and as more style-conscious people in New Zealand have become aware of Japanese fashion and street culture, people understand. Also the increasing popularity of alternative bands like Malice Mizer, Inugami Circus Dan and Moi Dix Mois has raised interest in Japanese style."

The Loli-Pop show generated a lot of interest while it was running. Originally the exhibition was in response to the museum's opening of the new Arts of Asia Gallery. "This opening offered us an opportunity to investigate the impact of the growing number of young Asians now living in Auckland – and programme something that would appeal to this vibrant sector of our community. Loli-Pop was the result," says Hardy Bernal. The exhibition explored the origins of Gothic and Lolita, its significance in Japanese pop culture, and the fashion's relationship with music.

As the passion for Gothic Victorian-style fashion grows here, those interested have had to resort to online shopping from Japanese websites, such sites as Metamorphose temps de fille, buying local designers interpretation of the style, or to making their own clothes. Locally stores like Smoove, Page and Spacesuit stock the style. Hardy Bernal points out that "In Auckland, graphics by Tanya Thompson for Misery Boutique, fashion design by Kitty Bridges, and Illicit clothing all suit the tastes of fans of the Japanese Gothic and Lolita style."

As our thirst for creative fashion continues who knows what unique styles we'll next see gracing the pavements. As they say, fashion repeats itself and who said we can't go back a couple of centuries when deciding what to wear. **lv**

By Karyn Cartelle