

Looking at all the bizarre things that people around the world collect, one cannot help but ask why.

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STAMPS, coins, key chains and fridge magnets – these are the usual items that some of us have been guilty of collecting or attempting to collect at some point in our lives.

People love collecting stuff, but some collections are so bizarre it makes you wonder.

An American woman who calls herself Pikabellechu holds the Guinness World Record for having the largest Pokemon collection in the world. Okay, so that's not really weird, but consider Australian Graham Barker, who holds the Guinness World Record for having the world's largest collection of navel fluff.

Why in the world would anybody want to collect stuff from belly buttons?

German Martin Mihál has a collection of around 40,000 empty chocolate wrappers from around the world; John Reznikoff from Connecticut, USA, holds the Guinness World Record for the largest and most valuable collection of hair from celebrity and historical figures; Carol Vaughn from Birmingham, Britain, has collected more than 5,000 bars of soap since 1991; and Karen Ferrier, also from Britain, is a Dalmatian-obsessive woman who owns a collection of 3,500 spotty items accumulated over 17 years.

And it's not just individuals who have a penchant for weird things. There are entire museums dedicated to the weird and wacky. The Museum of Burnt Food (yes, you read right) in Arlington, Virginia, founded by Deborah Henson Conant, is dedicated to carbonised culinary masterpieces (i.e. accidentally burnt food), the British Lawnmower Museum features (you guessed it) lawnmowers, while the Asphalt Museum in Sacramento, California, has a large collection of everything asphalt.

The most interesting museum would be the Icelandic Phallogical Museum, located in a tiny Icelandic fishing town of Husavik. Run by Sigurdur Hjartarson, the museum showcases an extensive collection of 276 penises from whales, seals, bears and other mammals. The museum finally received its first human specimen (!?!) in April this year.

There must be something driving people to strange items. Here's an insight into why a few individuals feel the need to collect certain objects.

Barf bags

Owner of a small fitness business Steve Silberberg, 49, was on a United Airlines flight from Boston, his hometown, in Massachusetts, the United States, to San Francisco in 1981 when – just like in the movies – something from the seat in front of

Wonderfully weird



Bag collector: If you are ever in Boston, Massachusetts, and you need to vomit, there's no better place to be than Steve Silberberg's house, because he has collected more than 2,400 unique airsickness bags.

him lit up and changed his life. Well, sort of.

Through the years, Silberberg has built up his collection of air sickness bags. Now he has around 2,400 unique air sickness bags with 2,216 currently catalogued on his Air Sickness Bag Virtual Museum (airsicknessbags.com). Funnily enough, he still has no clear idea why he collects them.

"At first, I figured I'd be the only one. I was wrong, of course. I found out that there are well over 100 people worldwide who either collect or have collected air sickness bags and

have amassed a substantial amount (say over 50) of them.

"These days, there are about 50-75 of us worldwide. Many of us have swallowed up smaller collections. Mine is currently the 10th largest in the world. For whatever reason, the majority of collectors seem to be from Germany," he reveals.

Silberberg says finding new bags is easy but finding older bags can be quite tricky.

"Once another collector finds a newly introduced bag, everyone in our small worldwide group of collectors learns of it. The classics are harder to obtain as people don't typically hold onto bags, even if they collect other airline memorabilia."

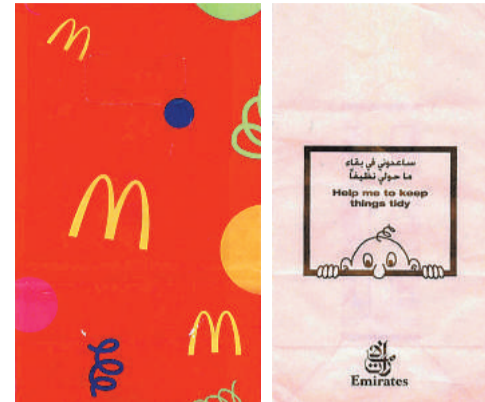
Silberberg's friends help out by sending him all sorts of bags from their trips around the world, and these include bags from buses, ships, trains and other modes of transport. Ironically, Silberberg himself has never travelled out of North America.

The rest of his bags are acquired online from eBay. Silberberg has spent over US\$6,500 (RM19,825) on his collection, including what he forks out for web hosting fees and for printing his Air Sickness Bags Around the World poster, which sells for US\$10 (RM30.50) a piece.

His favourite piece is the McDonald's bag (1998) found on Corporate Jet because he finds it to be colourful, humorous and ironic. Another favourite of his is the space shuttle barf bag.

Although he has invested time and effort in his collection, Silberberg usually tries to hide the fact that he collects barf bags.

"I've found that it's actually a good test of whether I'll get along with someone. If they



Silberberg's air sickness bags include (clockwise from top) a McDonald's-themed one from Corporate Jet, one from Emirates and another from VASP, a Brazilian airline.



have similar sensibilities to me, they will usually find the humour or absurdity of the collection. If the collection elicits disdain or trivialisation, I usually don't get along with that person," he says.

Mobile phones and guns

When Canadian photographer Chris Postnikoff moved to Japan in 2004, he noticed how advanced the mobile phones were compared to the models back home. The 29-year-old found it easy and cheap to buy a new phone every few months for only about C\$200, about C\$400 cheaper than in Canada. A new phone every few months was like a fashion statement to him then.

"I collect old and new, mostly Japanese mobile phones, up until the advent of the iPhone and Smart Phones, which I think are the leaders in mobile technology. I even bought handsets that were broken for the sheer sake of having them. Kind of like collecting stamps. You can't use them, but each unique item adds to the collection as a whole," explains Postnikoff, who now has over 120 mobile phones from Japan, Canada, Europe and other parts of Asia.

His favourite item is a flashy Sharp V903SH.

"I bought that phone in Tokyo before moving back to Canada. Compared to everything on the Canadian market, that phone was a leader. Not only did it have a 3.2MP camera (all Canadian phones had less than 1MP at the time), but it also had two cameras so you could video-chat. It had surround-sound, a very high resolution screen and looked simply awesome. It's still the crown jewel of my collection, even though I now own an iPhone, an iPhone 3GS and a Samsung Galaxy," he says.

Besides collecting mobile phones, Postnikoff has quite a collection of guns.

"I play a game called Airsoft which is similar to paintball in that you shoot each other with plastic BB pellets. Thus, everyone needs to have a couple of BB guns."

He also collects real firearms which he uses on his farm in Canada.

"We have a pest problem with gophers, so every spring and summer, my friends and I will try to shoot as many gophers as possible. We also have shotguns and larger-calibre rifles for general safety as our part of Canada is prone to brown bears, lynx and the occasional pack of wolves which can be very aggressive and dangerous," Postnikoff says.

Just for fun, Postnikoff has set up a "Your Weird Collections" group on Facebook. If you have a bizarre collection that you would like to share with Netizens, you can join the group



Chris Wee's (inset) collection of knives.