

Video Crazy

Your guide to the city's best DVD/VCD stores

by Joe Ng



CD-RAMA

#B1-21 Orchard MRT Station, 437 Orchard Rd., 6838-0824. 18 other outlets.

Like Poh Kim, CD-Rama is recommended for Asian movies and TV drama serials from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan and Korea. While we think it's helpful that the VCDs and DVDs are arranged separately and in alphabetical order, it's difficult to look for older movies. Good thing, then, that the latest releases are more prominent. Too lazy to venture out? Buy DVDs/VCDs from CD-Rama's official site www.ahgogo.com, which also has the latest news from the East Asian entertainment scene.

What's Here?

VCD:
DVD:

How Much?

VCD: From \$17.90
DVD Code 3: From \$24.90

GRAMOPHONE

#01-09A OUB Center, 1 Raffles Place, 6538-4828. Also at #01-18 Specialists' Shopping Centre, 277 Orchard Rd., 6235-2011; and #01-02 Capitol Centre, 111 North Bridge Rd., 6338-2978.

Immensely popular with executives in the CBD, Gramophone's OUB Centre outlet is well stocked with the usual Asian and American faves, and throws in a few surprises, too. Keith Gordon's quiet WWII masterpiece *A Midnight Clear* (1992), starring Ethan Hawke and Gary Sinise, may not count as obscure, but it sure isn't easy to find elsewhere. The selection of music videos, while limited, is more varied than almost any other shop, except HMV. The branch at Specialists' Shopping Centre also offers a large selection of DVDs and VCDs along the same lines. The Capitol Centre branch is quite creative in its sourcing—many Alfred Hitchcock films (mostly via Hong Kong distributors) were going for under \$20.

What's Here?

VCD:
DVD:

How Much?

VCD: From \$6.90
DVD Code 1: From \$15.95
DVD Code 3: From \$15.90

HMV

#01-11 The Heeren Shops, 261 Orchard Rd., 6733-1822. Also at #B1-47 CityLink Mall, Raffles Link, 6238-7218.

In recent months, both HMV stores have expanded their video sections—a clear sign that the demand for VCDs and DVDs is on the rise. Shopping for DVDs and VCDs here is a joy: the aisles are wide and inviting; the titles are well displayed; and categorization (in alphabetical order and by genre) is clear. The spacious VCD/DVD section at the Heeren outlet seems to have almost every locally released title, and enough room to bring in many imported DVD Code 1 titles. We were pleased with our purchase of the complete second season of *Family Guy*, Seth MacFarlane's audacious animated series that's second only to *The Simpsons*. For all of the above perks, there's a higher price to pay. An imported title such as the special edition of *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* costs up to \$10 more than at Blue Max. Local titles are competitively priced, though.

What's Here?

VCD:
DVD:

How Much?

VCD: From \$9.95
DVD Code 1: From \$29.90
DVD Code 3: From \$12.95

LASER FLAIR

#01-30 Peninsula Plaza, 111 North Bridge Rd., 6883-1555. 7 other outlets.

Laser Flair could easily be confused with Blue Max—they're both good video retail outlets with a great selection of imported titles at the best prices in town, and they're both rather pressed for space. At Laser Flair's Peninsula branch, VCDs and DVDs are stacked from floor to ceiling, making it difficult for vertically challenged customers to browse. Another quibble: titles are supposed to be organized alphabetically, although it feels like they have been arranged at random—wherever space is available. Anime fans must check out the collection of cheap VCDs and DVDs—we found the complete collection of Studio Ghibli's (who is behind *Spirited Away* and *Princess Mononoke*) works, as well as Katsuhiro Otomo's *Memories*.

What's Here?

VCD:
DVD:

How Much?

VCD: From \$7.90
DVD Code 1: From \$39.90
DVD Code 3: From \$24.90

Click Fix

The newest kid on the video rental block is **HollywoodClicks** (www.hollywoodclicks.com), an online DVD rental store. For \$35 a month, the local-based outfit will send you an unlimited number of the latest blockbusters (couch potatoes, you heard right!). You can hold on to the DVDs for as long as you want, and postage (to and fro—you have to send the DVDs back) is free, though you can hold on to only three DVDs at one time. Go to the website to sign up for a free two-week trial.

POH KIM VIDEO

#02-27 Centrepoint, 176 Orchard Rd., 6735-5838. 32 other outlets.

Without a doubt, Poh Kim is the heartlander's video retail outlet of choice. If you want to know what kind of entertainment captures the hearts and minds of the majority of HDB dwellers, just pop into any Poh Kim store. The newest and most popular movies and drama serials from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan and Korea are available here, but mostly on VCDs. Bigger Poh Kims stock older titles. It's not strange that many Poh Kim stores have only one shelf devoted to DVD titles, given that the target clientele is often unwilling to spend more on better quality images and sound. And we're giving a big thumbs down to the shop assistants' habit of trailing customers. Alternatively, go online to buy from www.pohkim.com.sg; selection is limited to Chinese VCD titles and there's a minimum purchase of three sets.

What's Here?

VCD:
DVD:

How Much?

VCD: From \$7.90
DVD Code 3: From \$33.90

SEMBAWANG MUSIC CENTRE

#B1-20 Orchard MRT Station, 437 Orchard Rd., 6345-3063. 14 other outlets.

Sembawang Music Centre became famous for sparking a CD price war back in the early 1990s. As a result of its aggressive pricing policy, the average price of a CD was slashed from more than \$30 to just over \$20. It then expanded and no longer offered CDs at markedly lower prices. When it eventually jumped on the VCD/DVD bandwagon some years back, it couldn't offer low, low prices. The best that can be said is that the DVDs and VCDs here are competitive in pricing—you won't find the same titles much cheaper elsewhere, but neither will you rejoice in finding a genuine bargain here. The selection at most Sembawang outlets comprises all the usual local releases, plus a handful of imports. There aren't enough DVD Code 1 titles to recommend this store to serious film buffs.

What's Here?

VCD:
DVD:

How Much?

VCD: From \$10.90
DVD Code 1: From \$39.90
DVD Code 3: From \$24.90

TOWER RECORDS

#02-063 Suntec City Mall, 501 Orchard Rd., 6338-5755.

In its heyday, Tower Records was a true music supermarket—if something couldn't be found here, it probably couldn't be found anywhere. But that was before the video boom, and when the VCD/DVD gravy train came along, Tower floundered and never really came to grips with a proper direction for its home video section. The selection of VCDs and DVDs isn't particularly exciting. There are Hollywood films, concert videos and MTVs, but nothing to get a connoisseur's knickers in a twist. That said, the organization and arrangement are impeccable—it's easy to find what you're after.

The Price Is Right

A quick comparison of prices

Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl

DVD Code 1

Borders: \$15.09
CD-Rama: \$34.90
Sembawang Music Store: \$39.90
HMV: \$49.95
Poh Kim: \$45.90
Tower Records: \$49.90

VCD

Sembawang Music Store: \$14.90
Borders: \$15.90
CD-Rama: \$15.90
Poh Kim: \$15.90
Tower Records: \$15.90
HMV: \$15.95

The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers

DVD Code 1

Sembawang Music Store: \$44.90; \$69.90 (extended version)
CD Rama: \$45.90
Poh Kim: \$45.90
Borders: \$49.90
HMV: \$49.90; \$84.95 (extended version)
Tower Records: \$49.90

VCD

Sembawang Music Store: \$12.90
CD Rama: \$15.90
Poh Kim: \$15.90
HMV: \$18.95
Borders: \$19.90
Tower Records: \$19.90



Symbols			
Asian	Education	Kids	Sports
Arthouse	Hollywood	Music	TV

BLUE MAX

#02-034 Suntec City Mall, 3 Temasek Blvd., 6334-5110. Also at #B1-66 Parkway Parade, 80 Marine Parade Rd., 6440-7117; and #03-05 Plaza Singapura, 68 Orchard Rd., 6238-8351.

Sure, the categorization here could do with a lot of improvement, and it can be difficult browsing for titles when only the spines of the DVD cases can be seen, but the wide selection of DVD Code 1* titles at reasonable prices more than make up for the inconvenience. We recommend asking the friendly shop assistants for specific titles, although hardcore film buffs are best off combing the shelves personally—you'll chance upon important titles you never knew you wanted. For example, we found Michael Haneke's *Code Unknown*, starring Juliette Binoche; Takeshi Kitano's *Kikujiro*; and the Criterion Collection set for Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'Avventura*. Besides, it's a hassle trying to communicate obscure names and titles to the retail assistants, who are most familiar with Hollywood blockbusters. Free home delivery is available for minimum purchases of \$50 for VCDs and \$100 for DVDs. You can even reserve upcoming DVD Code 1 titles without paying a surcharge.

What's Here?

VCD:
DVD:

How Much?

VCD: From \$9.90
DVD Code 1: From \$19.90
DVD Code 3: From \$12.90

BORDERS BOOKS AND MUSIC

#01-00 Wheelock Place, 501 Orchard Rd., 6235-7146.

While Borders isn't exactly a DVD/VCD paradise, it has all the latest Tinseltown releases—so you can do all your book, CD and video shopping in one place. Where else can you pay for the screenplay, soundtrack and video of your new favorite movie in one fell swoop? Other plus points: the VCDs are displayed at a comfortable height with front covers facing you, and the latest releases are featured on separate stands.

What's Here?

VCD:
DVD:

How Much?

VCD: From \$12.95
DVD Code 1: \$24.90
DVD Code 3: From \$24.90

*DVD players in different parts of the world recognize different codes. Code 1 DVDs are US imports and are largely uncensored, while Code 3 DVDs are for Southeast Asian markets. Most newly manufactured players here are multi-coded.