

# The Royal Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens Walk



World Heritage Site





This historical and picturesque walk takes visitors on a self-guided tour around the Royal Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens World Heritage Site. It provides an insight into the Melbourne of 130 years ago, a period of immense optimism, enthusiasm and energy.

The Victorian gold rush of the 1850s led to Melbourne rapidly developing from a scattering of wooden houses to a marvellous modern city. This period of wealth and optimism was short lived, as a major economic depression hit in the 1890s. This walk will reveal features in both the Gardens and the surrounding suburbs of Fitzroy and Carlton that highlight this unique period in Melbourne's history.



#### A World Heritage Place

The Royal Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens were added to the World Heritage List on 1 July 2004. The listing citation reads:

*The Royal Exhibition Building and the surrounding Carlton Gardens, as the main extant survivors of a Palace of Industry and its setting, together reflect the global influence of the international exhibition movement of the 19th and early 20th centuries. The movement showcased technological innovation and change, which helped promote a rapid increase in industrialisation and international trade through the exchange of knowledge and ideas.*

Between 1815 and 1915, about 70 international exhibitions were held around the world, including three in Australia. Two International Exhibitions were held at the Royal Exhibition Building, one in 1880 and one in 1888.

The World Heritage List aims to encourage the identification, protection and preservation of cultural and natural heritage sites that are considered of outstanding universal value to all humanity. It is managed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). Australia has 19 World Heritage sites. The Royal Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens was the first built site in Australia to be added to the list.

#### History

The international exhibition movement began in the 19th century as a means to promote and share the developments and technologies of the industrial age. This movement was significant for its role in the global dissemination of goods, technologies, culture, values and ideas, heralding a new era of networks and the modern international economy.

Melbourne hosted six modest exhibitions from 1854 to 1875. During the self-confident 1870s, merchants and politicians decided to go global. In 1878 the Victorian Government announced plans for a new Exhibition Building in Carlton Gardens for Victoria's first International Exhibition in 1880.

A design competition was won by prominent Melbourne architects Reed and Barnes, and construction commenced in 1879. The southern gardens were re-designed to provide a garden setting for the building in the style of previous international exhibitions in Europe and America.

The Exhibition Building seen today was known as the 'Great Hall'. It is 152 metres long and covers an area of 7,000 square metres.

Massive as it is, during the 1880 Exhibition it constituted only one-tenth of the entire exhibition space, as temporary annexes were erected over a large area of the northern gardens. After the exhibition the temporary annexes were dismantled and the area re-landscaped.

The Melbourne Centennial International Exhibition was held in 1888. Temporary annexes covered even more of the northern gardens. These were again dismantled after the Exhibition, leaving only the Great Hall and long, elaborate Eastern and Western machinery annexes (since demolished). The Northern Gardens were re-landscaped once more in a layout similar to 1882.

The layout of the Southern Gardens are essentially unchanged from the 1880 design. The maturation of the trees, and the removal of some shrubs and floral beds have modified its original landscape character.

To this day the Royal Exhibition Building continues to support a spectrum of trade shows, fairs, exhibitions, cultural and community events. It also has special significance in Australia's history as the place where the first Parliament of Australia was opened in 1901.



## The Walk

The walk begins at the Royal Exhibition Building and ends at Melbourne Museum, although you can start and finish it at any point. As you walk along the pathways through the gardens, use this brochure to discover the points of interest en route.

- The walk includes 36 individual points of interest
- The complete walk takes approximately one hour
- Drinking fountains and public toilets are marked on the map
- The entire walk is wheelchair and pram friendly
- Further information is available at Melbourne Museum

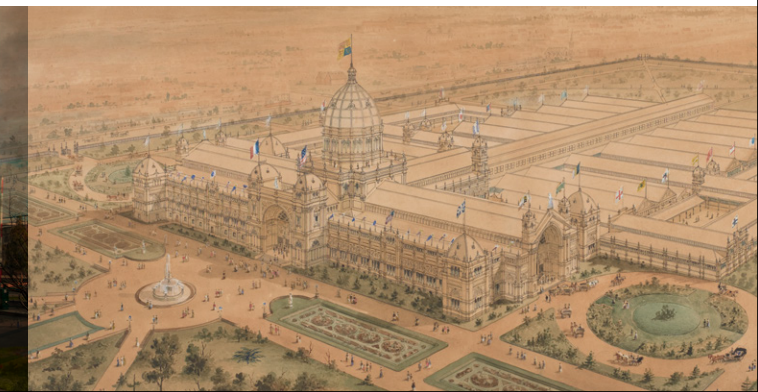
- 1** Begin your walk at the **World Heritage sign** at the Royal Exhibition Building's northern entrance. The Exhibition Building was designed by Joseph Reed and built by David Mitchell for the Melbourne International Exhibition, 1880–81. The building and its associated gardens are a rare intact reminder of the 19th century International Exhibitions movement.
- 2** **Colonial Square** is an installation of carved stonework from the former Colonial Mutual Life building built in 1896 and demolished in 1960. Many of Marvellous Melbourne's grand buildings have not survived.
- 3** **The Obelisk** of Victorian Sandstone was erected by Member of Parliament John Woods in 1881, as a protest against the use of New South Wales sandstone to extend Parliament House. He stated that the stone from his electorate was just as durable.

- 4** This circular forecourt contains the **French Fountain** featuring bronzed winged children. The fountain was purchased and erected here at the end of the 1880 exhibition.
- 5** **The Westgarth Fountain** featuring kangaroos smoothly carved in Aberdeen granite was a gift to the people of Melbourne by pioneer settler William Westgarth in 1888. It was designed to cater for the whole family with water spouts for adults at the top, children in the middle, and a trough for the dog at the bottom.
- 6** **Royal Terrace** (1853–58) just over the road is one of Melbourne's finest examples of Regency style terrace housing. It is one of the oldest and largest terraces in Victoria.

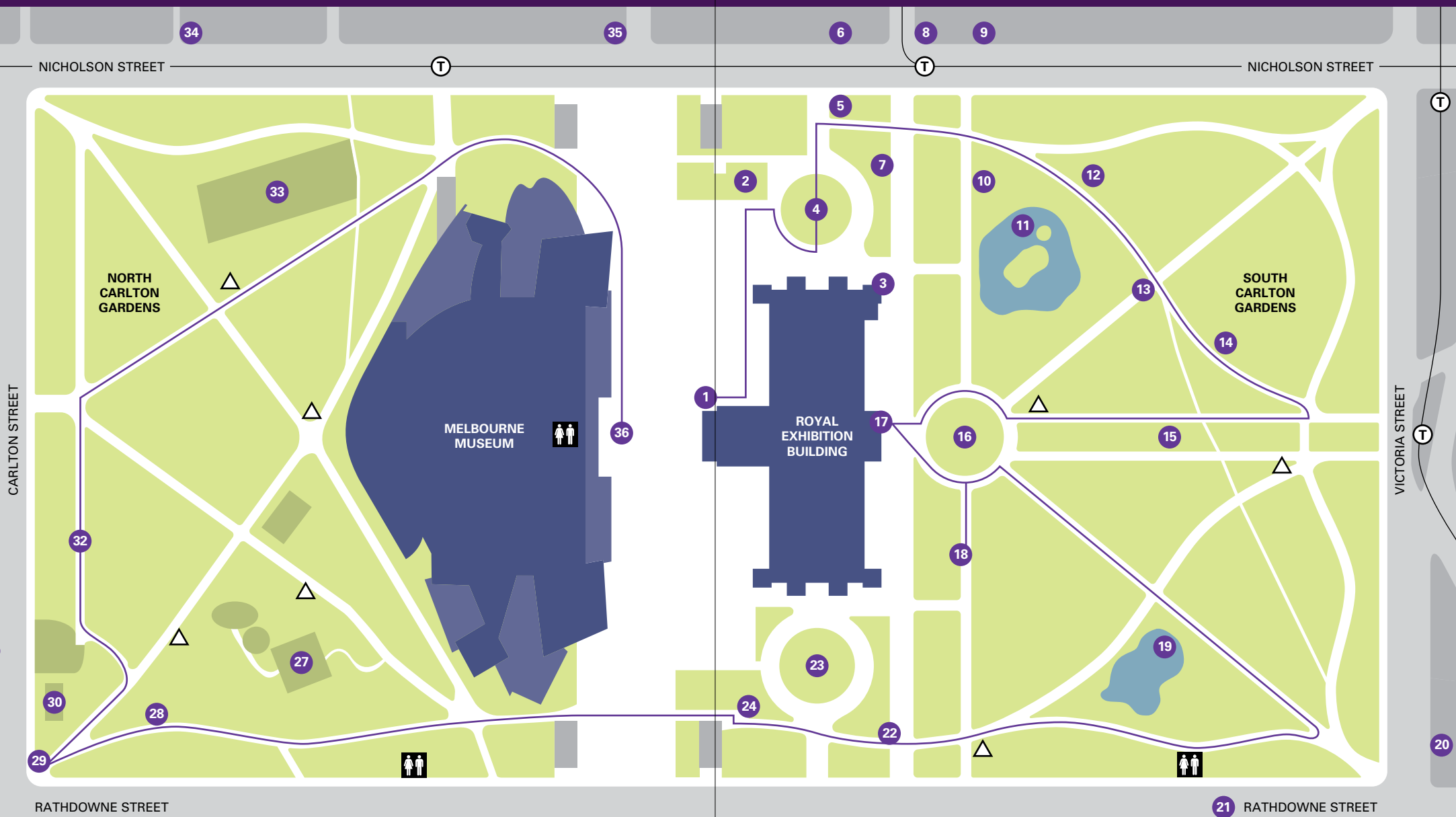
- 7** **Interpretive sign** Joseph Reed, who designed the Exhibition Building, was possibly the most influential Victorian era architect in Melbourne. His other grand buildings include the Royal Society of Victoria building, Trades Hall, Ormond College, the State Library and the Melbourne Town Hall. The builder David Mitchell (father of Dame Nellie Melba), was also a major figure and responsible for building the Customs House, now the Immigration Museum, Scots Church and Saint Patrick's Cathedral.
- 8** In the red brick **Cable Tram Engine House** (1886–87) on Nicholson Street, heavy machinery turned cables which ran underground, pulling cable trams around the city. Cable trams ferried visitors to the 1888 Centennial International Exhibition from the city centre. They operated on some routes until 1940.

- 9** **Osborne House** (1850) has operated as a boarding house since 1888, and is one of the oldest boarding houses in Victoria.
- 10** **Moreton Bay Fig Trees** Prior to the development of Melbourne, this area was used by the Woiworung people, one of the groups which make up the Kulin Nation. From early last century Fitzroy became home to many Aboriginal groups. Koories (local Aboriginals) regularly met and socialised under these trees. Archie Roach, popular Aboriginal singer/songwriter wrote 'Beggerman' and 'Charcoal Lane' which depict his life in this area.
- 11** **The Lake** formerly a small quarry, is one of two in the south Gardens created for the 1880 exhibition. It is possible to see the building reflected in the water in the right weather conditions. Rides in a gondola were available during the 1888 exhibition.

- 12** You'll notice many of the trees have circular metal bands or **possum tree guards**, to limit the damage to trees from the native brush tailed possums which live in the gardens.
- 13** As you walk through the gardens observe the **axial paths radiating from the fountain**. These join a series of serpentine pathways around the garden's perimeter, remnants of an earlier garden layout. While the design and planning of the Southern gardens is attributed to Reed, the layout and planting was by well known horticulturalist William Sangster.
- 14** Sangster's avenue planting style is informal, often exhibiting **alternating tree species** as exhibited here with a mixture of oaks (*Quercus sp.*) and hoop pines (*Araucaria bidwilli*).



# The Royal Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens Map





**15 The 'Grand Allee'** leading from Victoria Street to the Exhibition Building's southern entrance is the perfect contrast to Sangster's informal planting. This avenue of plane trees (*Platanus* sp.) imitated the ceremonial walk at the Royal Palace of Versailles in France and produces a landscape effect possibly unique in Australia. During the 1930s, a homeless men's shelter was erected in the centre of the avenue, a respite for those living in the nearby rooming houses.

**16** At the top of the Grand Allee is the **Hochgurtel fountain**, taking its name from the designer who won the competition to build it for the 1880 exhibition. It includes symbols of trade, commerce, industry, science and art: key themes at the Melbourne International Exhibition.

**17 Interpretive sign** The Royal Exhibition Building was erected as a 'Palace of Industry'. It displayed the technologies and achievements of the mechanised age. Its huge temporary halls housed exhibits from more than 30 nations. Pianos, typewriters, lawnmowers, electric lights, carriages and decorative homewares were all on display. The 1880 exhibition was the greatest show the city had ever seen, and attracted over one million visitors; it changed public taste in Melbourne.

**18 Interpretive sign** Ornamental flower beds have been a regular feature of Carlton Gardens since the first exhibition. An elaborate series of *parterre* (meaning pattern) garden beds originally ran across the southern face of the building and were removed in the 1920's. The *parterre* layout was reconstructed by the City of Melbourne in 2008 and now has a drought tolerant planting scheme.

**19** As you walk south west you'll pass another **ornamental lake**. This lake was the inspiration for a poem, 'The Poor Shall Feed The Birds', by Australian poet John Shaw Neilson. During the 1920s while working in the Exhibition Annexes he wrote to a friend: *'it is always the poor people who feed the birds. No well dressed people come – I suppose they are away motoring or entertaining their friends.'*

**20** At the end of this path, across Victoria Street is **The Royal Society of Victoria** building (1859), also designed by Joseph Reed. This Society initiated the explorations of Burke and Wills to northern Australia, and expeditions to Antarctica.

**21** Now follow the pathway north, parallel to **Rathdowne Street**, the extension of Exhibition Street, so named because it led visitors from central Melbourne to the exhibitions.

**22 Interpretive sign** The Exhibition Building was the setting for the opening of the first Federal parliament on 9 May 1901. Over 12,000 people attended the event in Australia's largest building. On 3 September 1901, the new Australian flag was first unveiled and flown here. Federal Parliament took over Victoria's Parliament House, so Victoria's state parliament sat in the Western Annexe until 1927.

**23 The Western Forecourt** has undergone many changes over the past 130 years. In 1880 it featured a circular bed which was covered in 1888 by a temporary annexe built for the Centennial International Exhibition. The circular garden bed was reinstated at the close of the exhibition in 1889, and remained largely intact until the 1950s when the whole site was covered in asphalt.

**24 Interpretive sign** Museum Victoria, in collaboration with a number of partners, undertook a major project in 2009 to 2011 to restore the 1880 garden layout. An underground tank with a storage capacity of 1.35 million litres was installed. The water from this tank is used on the gardens and to feed the fountains, ensuring a sustainable future for this World Heritage site. Passing the Children's Museum you'll enter the north gardens, re-constructed after the 1888 Exhibition in simple avenue style. The trees used for avenue plantings include elms, planes, poplars, oaks and eucalypts.

**25** On Rathdowne Street, the imposing red brick **Sacred Heart Church** (1897–99), was also designed by Joseph Reed and is one of the finest 'full blown' Baroque churches in Victoria.

**26** Adjacent is the **Carlton Gardens Primary School** (1883–84), a Victorian building with external Gothic Revival features. In 1901, children from this and other local Carlton Primary Schools planted pepper trees (*Schinus molle*) in the Gardens for Arbor Day. A pepper tree of about that age can be seen here.

**27** A lake, part of Clement Hodgkinson's 1870's design, once occupied the site of this **modern playground**. Surviving the 1880 and 1888 exhibitions, the lake was later paved to form a wading pool then drained to make way for the Children's Traffic School in the 1960s.

**28** On your right you'll pass some of the last remaining sections of **temporary garden fencing** once used to keep visitors to the paths in the 19th century.



### 29 The Curator's Cottage

was built in 1891, and was first occupied by John Guilfoyle, the curator of parks and gardens in Melbourne from 1892. It still houses garden staff today.

30 On the north boundary of the cottage in Carlton Street is a remnant of the **elaborate fence and gates** which were installed around the whole of the Gardens for the 1880 exhibition. It was mounted on a bluestone plinth which can still be seen around the perimeter of the Gardens. The cast iron was removed in the 1920s.

31 On the northern side of Carlton Street is **Gordon Terrace** (1883–85) numbers 90 to 100. With its cast iron veranda and fence it is typical of boom style domestic architecture of the Exhibition period: a distinctive feature of inner suburban Melbourne.

32 **The Elm Path** is near the northern boundary of the temporary annexes built for the 1888 exhibition. These elms (*Ulmus sp.*) were probably planted in the 1870s and are the oldest trees in the Gardens. Once a common tree in the parks around inner Melbourne, elms are now rare world-wide, due to the effects of Dutch Elm Disease, which decimated elm tree populations in Europe and America in the 1970s.

33 Follow the plane tree path to the **Tennis courts and pavilion**, built in 1924 to provide for recreational activity in the Gardens, and still very much in use today.

34 Beyond the tennis courts you can see another grand Victorian mansion, on the corner at **No 122 Nicholson Street**. Built in plain sandstone and brick in 1862 by John Denny, it was refaced with its flamboyant rendered facade during the boom years of the 1880s.

35 Across the road you see the impressive sandstone **Ursula Frayne Memorial Chapel**. It is part of the Catholic girls' secondary college, Academy of Mary Immaculate and Convent of Mercy complex. The Chapel (1887–90) is a rare example of an intact convent chapel in the geometric French gothic style.

36 **Melbourne Museum**, opened in Carlton Gardens in 2000, continues the tradition of exhibitions on the site. Designed by Denton Corker Marshall, the contemporary design takes a number of references from the Royal Exhibition Building including the axial composition of its three distinctive roof canopies. It is not the first Museum on the site, as the Royal Exhibition Trustees formed a Museum in the Eastern machinery annexe at the close of the Melbourne Centennial Exhibition.

## Timeline

- 1850s** Area for Carlton Gardens set aside for Public Purposes.
- 1856** Edward La Trobe Bateman created the first landscape scheme.
- 1873** Major works in Gardens by Clement Hodgkinson, Inspector General of Parks and Gardens.
- 1878** Government chooses Carlton Gardens for purpose built exhibition building.
- 1878** Architects Reed and Barnes win design competition for the new Exhibition Building.
- 1880** Melbourne International Exhibition, attracts 1.3 million visitors.
- 1882** Temporary Annexes removed and northern gardens re-landscaped.
- 1885** The Aquarium opens in the Eastern Annexe.
- 1888** The Centennial International Exhibition attracts two million visitors, but operates at a loss.
- 1890s** Northern gardens re-landscaped and new curator's cottage built.
- 1901** The first Australian Federal Parliament is opened on 9 May.
- 1901** Victorian Parliament sits in the Western Annexe until 1927.
- 1912** The first Motor Show is held in the building.
- 1919** A temporary hospital is established in the building to cope with the Influenza Pandemic.
- 1922** The Australian War Memorial Museum (later to become the Australian War Memorial) opens in the Eastern Annexe.
- 1930** At the height of the depression, Sidney Myer provides a free Christmas Day dinner for 11,000 people.
- 1930s** Thousands of students sit for school and university examinations in the Great Hall. University examinations continue to be held in the Great Hall.
- 1941** The RAAF School of Technical Training occupies the building until 1946.
- 1948** After a media campaign a Melbourne City Councillor proposes that the building should be demolished. The proposal is defeated.
- 1952** The Royale Ballroom opens and becomes a popular meeting spot until its demolition in 1979.
- 1953** The Aquarium is destroyed by fire; most of the exhibits are destroyed.
- 1956** Olympic weight lifting, basketball and wrestling are held in an annexe built on the site of the old aquarium.
- 1980** The building is re-named the 'Royal Exhibition Building' in its centenary year during a visit by Princess Alexandra.
- 1985** The building's interior is restored to the decorative scheme of 1901 (completed 1995).
- 2004** The Royal Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens is added to the World Heritage List and the National Heritage List.
- 2011** Following a two year restoration project, the western forecourt is reopened to the public.





## ROYAL EXHIBITION BUILDING

Nicholson Street  
Carlton  
Victoria Australia

Adjacent to  
Melbourne Museum

Telephone 13 11 02  
museumvictoria.com.au/reb

For more information on  
Carlton Gardens contact  
City of Melbourne

Hotline 03 9658 9658  
melbourne.vic.gov.au

Tours of the Royal Exhibition Building, commencing at the Melbourne Museum, are conducted daily. Access is restricted on some days of the year, so please check either at the Museum or the Museum website to confirm tours are operating. (Charges apply.)

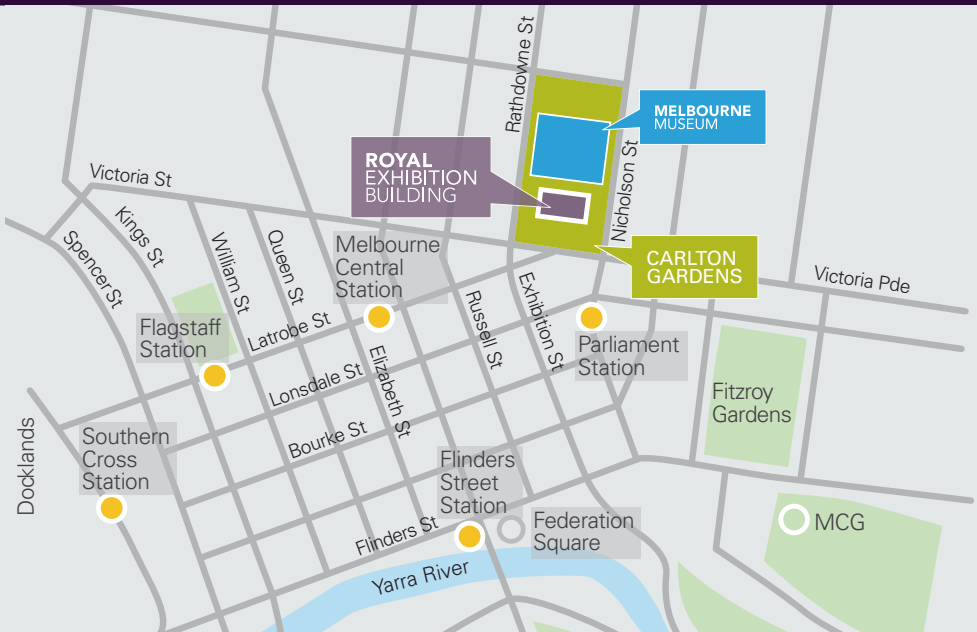
### How to get to the Royal Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens

20 minute walk  
from Federation  
Square

Free City  
Circle Tram to  
Victoria Street

Tram 86 or 96 to  
cnr of Nicholson  
and Gertrude St

Undercover  
parking available



MUSEUM VICTORIA MELBOURNE MUSEUM  
SCIENCE WORKS IMMIGRATION MUSEUM  
ROYAL EXHIBITION BUILDING

