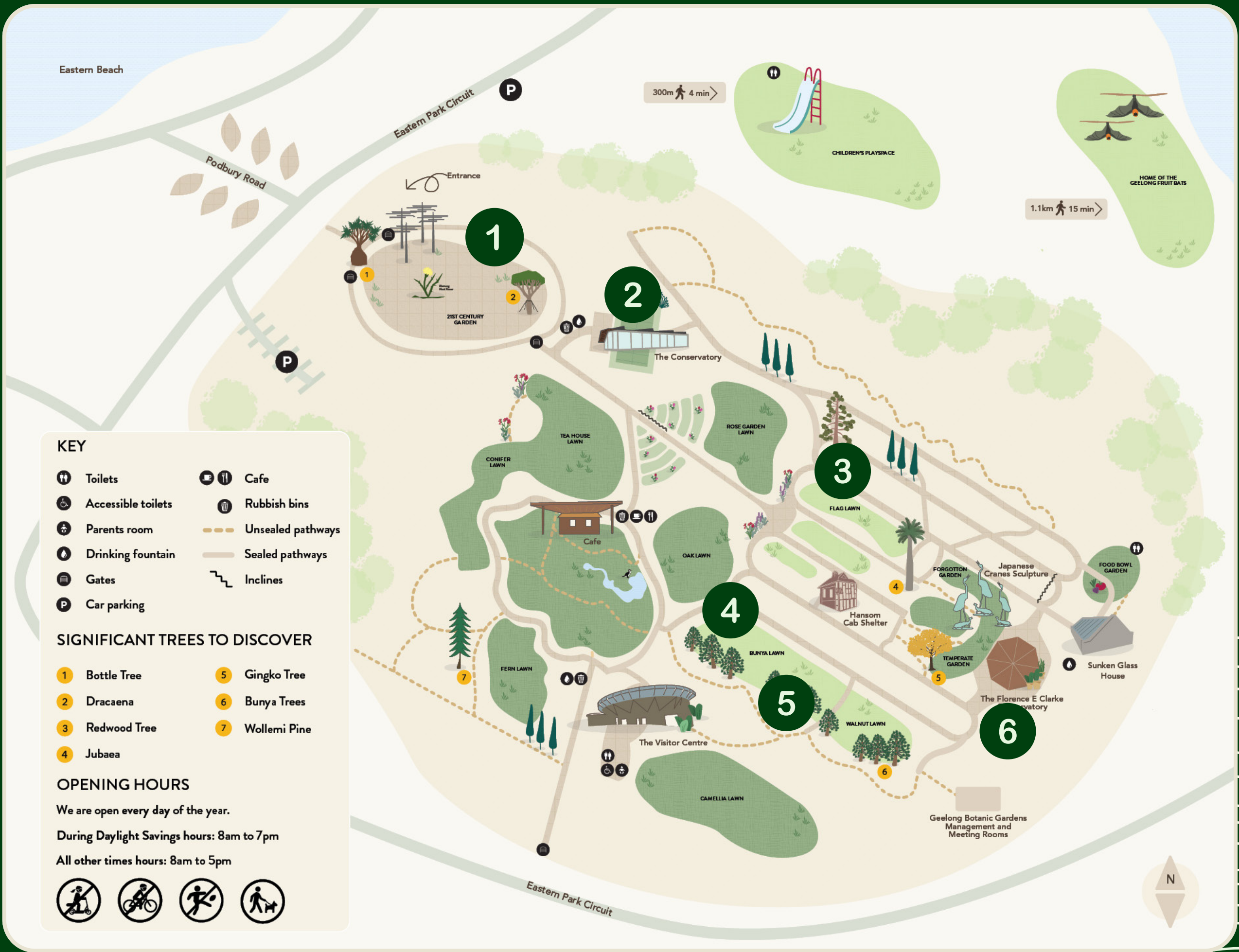


GEELONG
BOTANIC
GARDENS



FREE SELF-GUIDED TRAILS

AWE TRAIL - GREAT AND BEAUTIFUL TREES





1. REMARKABLE ADAPTATION

Eucalyptus pauciflora - Snow Gum - Myrtaceae

A tree of the extremes, the Snow Gum thrives where few others can survive. It grows in high-altitude environments, often at elevations above 1,800 metres. Remarkably adaptable, it can withstand temperatures ranging from -10°C to 30°C . Its thick, fire-resistant bark helps protect it during bushfires, allowing it to quickly regenerate once the flames have passed. This recovery is aided by a specialised swelling at the base of the trunk, known as a lignotuber, which enables new growth after fire.

Snow Gums can live for over 400 years and are commonly found in the alpine and subalpine regions of southeastern Australia. As a keystone species, they play a vital role in their ecosystem, providing habitat and supporting a range of wildlife in these harsh environments.

The tree's distinctive red colouring comes from anthocyanin, a natural pigment in the bark. This acts like a form of sunscreen, helping protect the tree from intense ultraviolet radiation at high altitudes.

2. A TROPICAL RETREAT

Step inside and explore a vibrant display of tropical plants. Take in the striking colours, bold foliage, and large leaves from species found across the world's tropical climates. Although tropical rainforests cover less than 3 per cent of the Earth's surface, they produce around 20 per cent of the oxygen we breathe.

These rich ecosystems are found along the equator, in regions such as Fiji, Australia, Central and South America, and across Africa. The Amazon Rainforest is the largest of them all, home to an estimated 40,000 plant species and around 400 billion trees. So dense is its canopy that it can take up to 10 minutes for a raindrop to reach the forest floor.

As you wander through this warm environment, look out for plants from the Amazon growing in our own tropical biome. You may recognise a few familiar names, including *Eucharis grandiflora* (Amazon lily), *Theobroma cacao* (cacao), *Vanilla planifolia* (vanilla orchid), and *Ananas comosus* (pineapple).





3. A STAGGERING HEIGHT

Sequoiadendron giganteum - Giant Redwood - Cupressaceae

Hug a Redwood – Stand beneath the towering presence of the Redwood and look up, can you even see the top? This 153-year-old giant reaches around 25 m, but in its native habitat, some grow to a staggering 94 m tall, with a girth over 8 m and lifespans up to 3,000 years. How many people do you think it would take to hug this magnificent tree?

Feel the soft, reddish bark beneath your hands and ground yourself in the carpet of needles underfoot. How many branches stretch toward the sky? Can you hear them swooshing in the breeze? Beneath the surface, an expansive root system holds this giant steady. Giant Sequoias have roots that spread up to 45 m, mostly within the top half metre of soil, forming a dense network that makes it difficult for other plants to establish themselves. A thick layer of acidic needles also discourages competition, creating a protective, nutrient-rich environment.

Sequoiadendron giganteum are native to the Sierra Nevada Range in California, where they are considered endangered in their natural habitat.

4. AN UNUSUAL SUPERHERO

Quercus suber - Cork Oak - Fagaceae

A unique, self-renewing, carbon-storing superhero right here in the garden. Cork oaks are native to the Mediterranean, with one of the oldest known trees, the “Assobiador” (Whistler), planted in 1783 in Portugal and still harvested every nine years. Remarkably, the bark can be removed every 9–12 years without harming the tree. Over a lifetime of more than 200 years, a single tree can produce enough cork for over 4,000 wine bottles.

Bark plays a vital role for all trees, protecting their inner systems from extreme temperatures, dehydration, fire, insects, and animal damage. There is an incredible diversity of bark types, each adapted to its environment.

What makes the cork oak so special is a waxy substance called suberin, which gives its thick, soft bark extraordinary properties. It is flexible, insulating, waterproof, resistant to gases, non-conductive, and able to spring back after being compressed.

Take a moment reach out and feel the bark.





5. THE BEAUTY OF FALLEN CAMELLIAS

Camellia sp. (Theaceae)

Stroll along the Asian Walk and take in the beauty of the many camellias in bloom. Often called winter roses, camellias bloom from autumn through to spring, bringing colour to the cooler months. Native to Asia, there are more than 300 species found across China, the Himalayas, Japan, and India. *Camellia sinensis*, in particular has been cultivated for centuries as the source of black and green tea.

The camellia flower carries rich symbolism across cultures. In China, it represents inseparable love, the petals and calyx fall together, symbolising unity and enduring connection. In Korea, camellias have been used in wedding ceremonies since as early as 1200 BC, representing a long and faithful marriage. In Japan, known as Tsubaki, they symbolise resilience, strength, and perfection. Their winter blooms and the way the entire flower falls intact reflect life's endurance and quiet beauty.

A distinct form of *Camellia japonica*, known as Higo camellias, were cultivated by samurai during the Edo period (1603–1867). Carefully bred to impress their shogun lords, these flowers became symbols of honour, discipline, and prestige.

Unlike many flowers that shed petals one by one, camellias often fall whole an elegant and fleeting reminder of beauty, strength, and the passage of time.

6. THE REACH OF A TREE

Ficus macrophylla – Morten Bay Fig - Moraceae

Run your hands along the smooth bark of this awe-inspiring fig tree and look up at its sprawling boughs reaching for the light. This species can grow up to 60 m tall, with a canopy spreading as wide as 30 m. The large buttress roots surrounding the tree provides stability in the shallow rainforest soils of its native habitat along the coasts of Queensland and New South Wales, allowing it to support its massive branches.

This tree is a social climber, often beginning life as an epiphyte, growing on another tree before sending down aerial roots that eventually form its own freestanding trunk. Over time, it can completely envelop its host, earning the nickname 'Strangler Fig.'

The story doesn't end there. This tree's flowers are inverted, aka the figs we eat. These fruits are pollinated by tiny, specialised fig wasps in a remarkable partnership known as obligate mutualism, each species entirely dependent on the other for survival. Standing beneath it, you can't help but feel a sense of awe at its size, resilience, and the intricate story it tells.

