Podcast 148 – The Royal Botanic Gardens – Melbourne

Learn English while learning about daily life in Australia, with Rob McCormack

Podcast Number 148 – The Royal Botanic Gardens – Melbourne

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(This podcast is 11 minutes and 8 seconds long.)

Hi,

Many Australian cities and towns have a botanic garden near their centre. These gardens are places where people can go to get away from the concrete, the noise and the busy life of the town or city in which they live. However, a botanic garden is more than a park or garden with plants, lawn, trees and open space. It's a place where the plants are carefully chosen living collections which are cared for and studied by experts in their field, and where members of the public can learn about, and appreciate, the plants in the collections. You may know that a person who studies plants is called a botanist, hence the words 'botanic garden', where botanists study plants. In this podcast, I would like to tell you a little about Melbourne's Royal Botanic Gardens in the centre of Melbourne. https://www.rbg.vic.gov.au/melbourne-gardens/

So many plants to see, with excellent walkways so you can get close to them.

I would be the first to say that I am not really interested much in studying plants. If you asked me which motorcycle had just passed by on the street, I could probably tell you the make, the model and how much horsepower it has. However, with trees or plants, I am just not that passionate. However, on a recent trip to the Royal Botanic Gardens in the centre of Melbourne, I was amazed how beautiful and peaceful a well-cared for and well-designed garden can be. On the day I visited with my wife, a sunny Sunday, there were many hundreds of Melburnians and tourists of all ages visiting the gardens. On our visit, I got an insight into what makes people passionate about being around plants and in gardens.

The Royal Botanic Gardens are located right in the heart of the city of Melbourne, on an area of land 38 hectares in

size. It was established in 1846 and today has around 8,500 species of plants from all over the world, comprising around 50,000 individual plants. There are 23 living collections of plants, including the Cacti and Succulents collection, the Southern Africa collection, the Rare and Threatened Species collection and the Quercus collection (which means oak trees), to name just a few. The gardens contain a wonderful ornamental lake with a variety of small islands which house interesting collections of plants. Walking around this lake is like being part of a watercolour painting from the 1800s. It is so picturesque. It is even possible to get a ride on a punt, a flat-bottomed boat powered by a boatman with nothing more than a big wooden pole, just like the gondolas in Venice.

The punt on the ornamental lake.

There are 2 excellent eateries within the gardens where you can buy a meal or a light snack, including (of course) ice

cream – which is one of my favourite delights especially on a sunny day such as we had on our visit. When you are relaxing in a botanic garden, the ice cream counter is irresistible.

The plants and the different collections are very well labelled and well maintained. There are some really unusual and remarkable plants there. One of the most interesting collections is the Quercus collection, which comprises oak trees.

One of the oak trees.

This includes the Cork Oak from Portugal, the White Oak from North America and the Algerian Oak from the western

Mediterranean. The Botanic Garden's largest example is an Algerian Oak.

Another collection which caught my eye was the Cacti and Succulents collection. These plants can survive in places where water is scarce. They are commonly found in deserts and other dry regions. Good examples in the Botanic Gardens collection include the Golden Barrel Cactus from Mexico and the Old Man of the Mountain Cactus from the Andes Mountains in South America. The cacti collection is large and their unique shapes and colours are fascinating to look at.

Some of the plants in the Cacti and Succulents collection.

The Southern Africa collection is also full of amazing plants. My favourite is the Tree Aloe which has a really thick trunk leading to many branches which have interesting curves as they get thinner, topped by leaves which look a

little like cactus leaves. We certainly have nothing like that growing naturally in Australia.

The Tree Aloe from the Southern Africa collection.

Of course, there are, in total, 23 living plant collections listed on the Royal Botanic Gardens website, so there are many others to look at as well. https://www.rbg.vic.gov.au/melbourne-gardens/.

Throughout the gardens you get to walk on wide paths which make your stroll so relaxing and easy. I use the word 'stroll', because you almost always walk slowly through these gardens – there is so much to see and experience as you go, so walking fast just doesn't enter your head. There are large areas of well-tendered lawn which encourage people to spread out their picnic rug and sit down to enjoy the atmosphere. On the day we visited, many people were doing just that. The

grass is lush and well groomed, so resting and relaxing on the grass is quite comfortable. There are also plenty of benches to sit on throughout the gardens, which visitors appreciate.

Lush lawns with benches to sit on, or bring a rug and sit on the grass.

It is also very easy to learn about the plants in the botanic garden. You can take a 30-minute tour on their open-sided minibus which meanders throughout the gardens. My wife and I did this and the driver took us to all the major areas of the gardens, providing information and interesting insights at each stop. You can also do a guided walk with an expert guide who can show you all the key collections and provide an interesting commentary. Lastly, you can also do a self-guided tour around the gardens by accessing a website link at https://rbg.vic.gov.au/sonica-botanica/, or by scanning a QR code found at the Oak Lawn Gate in the gardens. The

information is very detailed and will be interesting for those of you who love the plant world.

I should also mention that the Royal Botanic Gardens are the home of the National Herbarium of Victoria, which is one of Australia's most valuable research facilities. It holds over 1.5 million dried plant, algae and fungi specimens. This herbarium allows research scientists to continue their work in understanding and describing the rich variety of plant life we have on our planet.

The herbarium, which holds the very large collection of plant specimens.

If you come to Melbourne, I would highly recommend that you visit the Royal Botanic Gardens. You will not be disappointed, even if, like me, you are not a plant enthusiast.

If you have a question or comment to make, please leave it in the comments box at the bottom of this page. Or, you can send me an email at rob@slowenglish.info. I would love to hear from you. Tell me where you live, a little bit about yourself and what you think of my Slow English podcast. I will write back to you, in English of course. If you would like to take a short quiz to see if you have understood this podcast, you will also find it on my website. Goodbye until next time.

Rob

Podcast 148 Quiz - Did you understand the podcast?

You can take the quiz as many times as you like.

Start quiz

Vocabulary

 Play accessing = (here) getting into

 Play amazed = when you are surprised by something or someone, in a positive way

 Play appreciate = (here) to see the good things about something

 Play benches = seats on which several people can sit

 Play cared for = look after

 Play carefully chosen = selected with great care

 Play caught my eye = when you see something which keeps your attention

 Play collections = a group of things kept together, all with

something that is common

 Play comprising = made up of, consisting of

 Play concrete = a man-made rock with is grey and hard, buildings are made from concrete

 Play counter = the bench or table in a shop where you buy something

 Play delights = things which make you happy (usually food such as cake, ice cream or sweets)

 Play eateries = cafes, restaurants – places where you can eat

 Play enthusiast = a person who enjoys doing something

 Play established = (here) started

 Play experts = people who know a lot about one topic

 Play facilities = machines or buildings which help you to do a certain thing

 Play fascinating = when something is very, very interesting

 Play gondolas = the type of boats they have in Venice, Italy

 Play hectares = an area equal to 10000 square metres

 Play hence = therefore

 Play herbarium = a place where plant specimens are kept and studied

 Play horsepower = the amount of power an engine has

 Play individual = separate, single

 Play insight = understanding

 Play irresistible = you can’t resist something, you must

have it

 Play labelled = when the name of something is written down on it or next to it

 Play lawn = an area where grass is growing and it is cut using a lawnmower

 Play lush = when plants grow really well

 Play maintained = looked after

 Play meanders = goes around curves slowly

 Play noise = a sound which doesn’t sound very good

 Play ornamental = made to look good

 Play passed by = when something goes passed you

 Play passionate = to love something or to love doing something

 Play peaceful = when everything is quite and you’re are not stressed

 Play picnic rug = a rug which you put on the ground for a picnic

 Play picturesque = very pretty, usually when talking about the landscape

 Play pole = a long piece of thin wood

 Play rare and threatened species = a type of plant or animal that is in danger of disappearing forever

 Play relaxing = when you are not worrying about things, without stress (usually when you are not working)

 Play scarce = when there is a shortage, when something is hard to get or hard to find

 Play self-guided = when you don’t need a guide, you have the information you need

 Play snack = something small that you eat between the main meals of the day

 Play specimens = animal or plant examples, used for study

 Play stroll = to walk very slowly

 Play studied = to learn about something

 Play succulents = a type of plant

 Play topped by = when something is at the end of something else

 Play trunk = the thickest part of the tree which comes from the ground

 Play unique = when something is like nothing else

 Play variety = different types

 Play watercolour = a type of painting used by artists

 Play well-designed = when something is really well made according to certain rules

 Play well-tendered = well looked after