

# Self Guided Driving Tour

## Yarralumla **DIPLOMATIC ESTATE** Tour.....

### **Explore the architectural highlights of the diplomatic missions of Canberra, Australia's national capital.**

In its role as the national capital of Australia, Canberra hosts over 80 diplomatic missions from around the world. Some are large, reflecting their country's strong diplomatic, economic and cultural links with Australia, while others employ only a few staff. There are consular offices in the state capitals as well, but to qualify as an embassy or high commission, an official representative of the country must be in residence. Those missions which belong to Commonwealth countries are known as high commissions.

Canberra has three distinct 'diplomatic estates': the oldest and most prominent is in Yarralumla. West Deakin, and, most recently, O'Malley in the Woden district were developed in the 1980s. The majority of diplomatic missions are located in residential buildings. Many missions can be found in central Canberra, in office blocks and purpose-built buildings.

Although Australia had a High Commissioner to Britain from 1909, Britain did not to appoint a representative to Australia, until 1930 when British migration officer, E.T. Crutchley, was appointed as 'official representative' and became the first Canberra-based representative of a foreign government. The Canberra diplomatic corps grew rapidly after World War II, reflecting Australia's expanding role in world affairs. From 12 diplomatic missions in 1946, the number rose to 42 by 1965, 59 by 1974 and over 80 in 2006.

The United States was the first country to build a purpose-built embassy in the new diplomatic estate of Yarralumla. Before this, missions had operated from rented sites, including residential buildings and hotel suites. A trend developed, initiated by the United States, to build diplomatic premises in an architectural style reflecting that of the country of origin.

*The self guided tour does not have to be followed in the order in which it is presented here. You may wish to start at one point and finish at another.*

**DISTANCE:** 10km

**TIME:** 40mins by car, 1 hour by bicycle, 2 hours and 30 minutes walking

**DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY:** (for walking and cycling) moderate, some hills and some streets in Yarralumla do not have footpaths

*Time does not include visiting those missions open to the public.*

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## 1 British High Commission

**First high commissioner appointed:** 1936

**Present High Commission opened:** 1952 (extension 1960, refurbishment 1997)

**High Commission architects:** E.A. and T.M. Scott, Sydney; refurbishment Mitchell/Guirgola and Thorp, Canberra

**Awards:** Commendation, Royal Australian Institute of Architects, ACT Branch, Canberra Medal for refurbishment and addition, 1997

Canberra's diplomatic corps began in 1936 with the appointment of the first British High Commissioner. The chancery and residence were built at the same time and cost a quarter of a million pounds – an enormous sum in those days. The fact that scarce financial resources in post-war Britain were found for the buildings says much for the importance that the British Government attached to its relationship with Australia.

## 2 New Zealand High Commission

**First high commissioner appointed:** 1943

**Present High Commission opened:** 1973

**High Commission architects:** Ministry of Works, New Zealand

The stylised contours of the building are accentuated by the dark bronze-green finish of the infill panels, bronze window frames and vertical copper finished columns. The interior has been fitted out with high-quality New Zealand products and New Zealand plantings feature in the gardens. The Kowhai tree (*Sophora tetraptera*) on the northern side of the building may be the only example of this frost-tender species in this part of Australia.

## 3 High Commission of Canada

**First high commissioner appointed:** 1939

**Present High Commission opened:** 1964 (extension 1994)

**High Commission architects:** Mathers and Haldenby, Canada

The chancery has simple, classic lines, a copper sheathed roof and Canadian red cedar eaves. Canadian timbers have been used throughout the building and two easily recognisable Canadian maples planted by the flagpole. The totem pole was carved by Haida artist Clarence Mills for the Canadian pavilion at the 1988 Expo in Brisbane. It represents members of his family.

## 4 High Commission of Papua New Guinea

**Present High Commission opened:** 1981

The building is a Haus Tambaran or Spirit House from the Sepik River. These were meeting places for tribal elders and storehouses for sacred objects. This one houses a collection of arts and crafts. The stylised images of clan ancestors were painted by students from the National Art School in Port Moresby, who also carved four totem poles for the grounds. Totem poles are placed outside the house of the village chief in Papua.

## 5 Embassy of the People's Republic of China

**First ambassador appointed:** 1973

**Present Embassy opened:** 1990

**Embassy architects:** Guangzhou Architectural Design Institute and the Wulu Company, Hong Kong

The complex includes a main building, ambassador's residence, staff residence, swimming pool and tennis court. The upturned eaves and glazed tiles recall ancient Chinese architecture. The roof tiles were imported from Yixing and craftsmen came from Shanghai to build the roof, rockeries, gardens and internal decoration. The gardens include an ornamental lake, waterside pavilion, zigzag bridge and rockeries.

## 6 Embassy of the Federative Republic of Brazil

**First ambassador appointed:** 1959

**Present Embassy opened:** 1985

**Embassy architects:** Anthony Cooper & Associates, Canberra

The Brazilian embassy makes excellent use of its site with, the design elegantly accommodating the slope of the land. Most windows look out towards either Lake Burley Griffin or the bushland at the rear of the building, resulting in a beautiful views from almost every room.

## 7 High Commission of the Republic of Singapore

**First high commissioner appointed:** 1965

**Present High Commission opened:** 1985

**High Commission architects:** Daryl Jackson, Alastair Swain and Peter Rees, Canberra

**Awards:** Royal Australian Institute of Architects, ACT Branch, Canberra Medallion, 1985

The sweeping shape of the first floor and roof edges form an arc, suggesting the equatorial circle where Singapore is located, giving the building a gracious elegance. The adaptation of European building to Singapore's climate is suggested in the lattice sunshades, overhanging roofs, double posts and veranda.

## 8 High Commission of Malaysia

**First high commissioner appointed:** 1957

**Present High Commission opened:** 1984

The chancery and reception hall feature huge sweeping 'Minangkabau' roofs, typical of the Malaysian state of Negri Sembilan, and traditional 'bunga raya' flower motifs on the walls. The port cochere entrance of the chancery leads to a marble-tiled foyer containing displays of Malaysian craft and Selangor pewter. The reception hall has a high-vaulted timber ceiling, glass walls and a large mural depicting Malaysian village life.

## 9 Embassy of Mexico

**First ambassador appointed:** 1966

**Present Embassy opened:** 1982

**Embassy architects:** Alfredo Terrazas de la Peña, Mexico, with Anthony Cooper

The embassy uses primary architectural forms, such as plain walls, open spaces and a large skylight to enhance a feeling of spaciousness. At the centre of the building there is a model of Tenochtitlan, capital of the Aztec Empire and site of the modern Mexico City. A massive image of the Mexican national emblem and an Aztec calendar by the main entrance gates on Perth Avenue are distinctive features of the embassy.

## 10 Embassy of the Arab Republic of Egypt

**First ambassador appointed:** 1950

**Present Embassy opened:** 1988

**Embassy architects:** Conrad and Gargett

The eclectic design of the Egyptian embassy reflects the diversity of contemporary Egypt, rather than the monuments of the past. The exaggerated proportions of the public areas, including the large barrel vault which forms the entrance, allude to great Egyptian architecture. Both the small internal courtyards and recurring lotus flower motif subtly remind visitors of the nationality of the embassy.

## 11 Embassy of Indonesia

**First ambassador appointed:** 1949

**Present Embassy opened:** 1972 (extensions 1984 and 1986)

**Embassy architect:** George Holland

The embassy's display pavilion, Wisma Wista Budaya, is built in the style of a traditional Javanese pendopo. The sides are usually open but this building has glass walls. The roof is reminiscent of a Balinese temple or old Javanese mosque. The hand-carved Balinese statues beside the steps represent characters from two ancient Hindu epics - the 'Ramayana' and the 'Mahabharata' - that have been adopted by the Indonesian people.

## 12 Embassy of Finland

**First ambassador appointed:** 1968

**Present Embassy opened:** 2002

**Embassy architects:** Hirvonen and Huttunen, Finland

**Awards:** Royal Australian Institute of Architects, ACT Branch, Special Jury Award, 2003

The design of the Finnish embassy is named 'Ilmarinen', after the blacksmith hero of *Kalevala*, the Finnish national epic. The direct design inspiration, however, was the armoured Finnish navy vessel *Ilmarinen*, sunk during World War II. Offices sit like cabins lined up along the side of the building, connected by walkways overlooking the atrium spaces. External decks and stair treads are made of recycled timber from Australian sheep stations.

## 13 Embassy of France

**First ambassador appointed:** 1949

**Present Embassy opened:** 1959 (chancery extension 1995)

**Embassy architect:** M.J. Desmaret, France

The chancery design echoes forts of the French Foreign Legion. The French-Australian War Memorial is a token of gratitude to the Australian soldiers who fought and died on the battlefields of France during World War I. The square pillar holds a gilded bronze sculpture, 'Winged Victory', and the names of the most prominent battles in which Australian troops were involved.

## 14 South African High Commission

**First high commissioner appointed:** 1947

**Present High Commission opened:** 1968

South Africa House is representative of the Cape Dutch style, with traditional whitewashed walls and roof gable with date inscription. The small windows have teak shutters which are often closed against the heat of the sun. The gardens are extensive and include many plants native to South Africa, including agapanthus, proteas, geraniums, November lilies, arum lilies, gardenias and freesias.

## 15 Embassy of the United States of America

**First ambassador appointed:** 1939

**Present Embassy opened:** residence 1943, chancery 1948

**Embassy architects:** Frederick Larkin, US State Department, in association with Moir and Sutherland, Sydney

**Awards:** Listed on the Register of Significant 20<sup>th</sup> Century Architecture

This was the first purpose-built embassy to be established in Canberra. The lease was signed on 8 December 1941, which, due to the international dateline, was the day of the attack on Pearl Harbour. The residence and chancery are built in colonial Georgian style, inspired by Christopher Wren's designs for Williamsburg, the colonial capital of Virginia from 1699 to 1779. Most of the materials used were Australian, including bricks made at the Canberra Brickworks.

## 16 Embassy of the Republic of Turkey

**First ambassador appointed:** 1967

**Present Embassy opened:** 2006

**Embassy architect:** Wal Kostyrko

The design of the Turkish chancery mixes elements of Turkey's architectural and artistic heritage with Australian (vernacular) architecture to create a balanced and contemporary building set within a unique surrounding landscape. The elongated windows and pillars recall the arrow shoots and turrets of Ottoman castles or 'hisars'. The garden design drew its inspiration from traditional Ottoman garden design and combines 20 000 tulip bulbs with Australian indigenous plants and trees.

## 17 Embassy of the Philippines

**First ambassador appointed:** 1956

**Present Embassy opened:** 1964

**Embassy architects:** Federico Ilustre, Filipino Bureau of Public Works, and Moir and Slater, Canberra

The simple, classic lines of the Philippine embassy blend into the parkland plantings of the grounds. This gives the embassy a calm and welcoming air.

## 18 High Commission of India

**First high commissioner appointed:** 1946

**Present High Commission opened:** 1981

**High Commission architect:** Noel Potter of Bunning and Madden, Canberra

Immediately obvious as an Indian building, the design of the high commission was inspired by the classical elements of Mughal and Hindu architecture. The mathematical symmetry of the building and the ornate decoration are typical as is the use of a moat. This moat is the culmination of a water feature which flows from the entrance on Moonah Place.

## 19 Embassy of the Union of Myanmar

**First ambassador appointed:** 1956

**Present Embassy opened:** 1988

**Embassy architects:** Sam Lee, Stephenson & Turner, Victoria

Steel columns surrounding the building support distinctive steel lattice work, reminiscent of the woven construction of lattice screening of traditional houses in Myanmar. Extensive use of glass is also a feature of the building, with floor to ceiling glass panels overlooking a curved staircase and large skylight.

## 20 Embassy of Ireland

**Present Embassy opened:** 1982

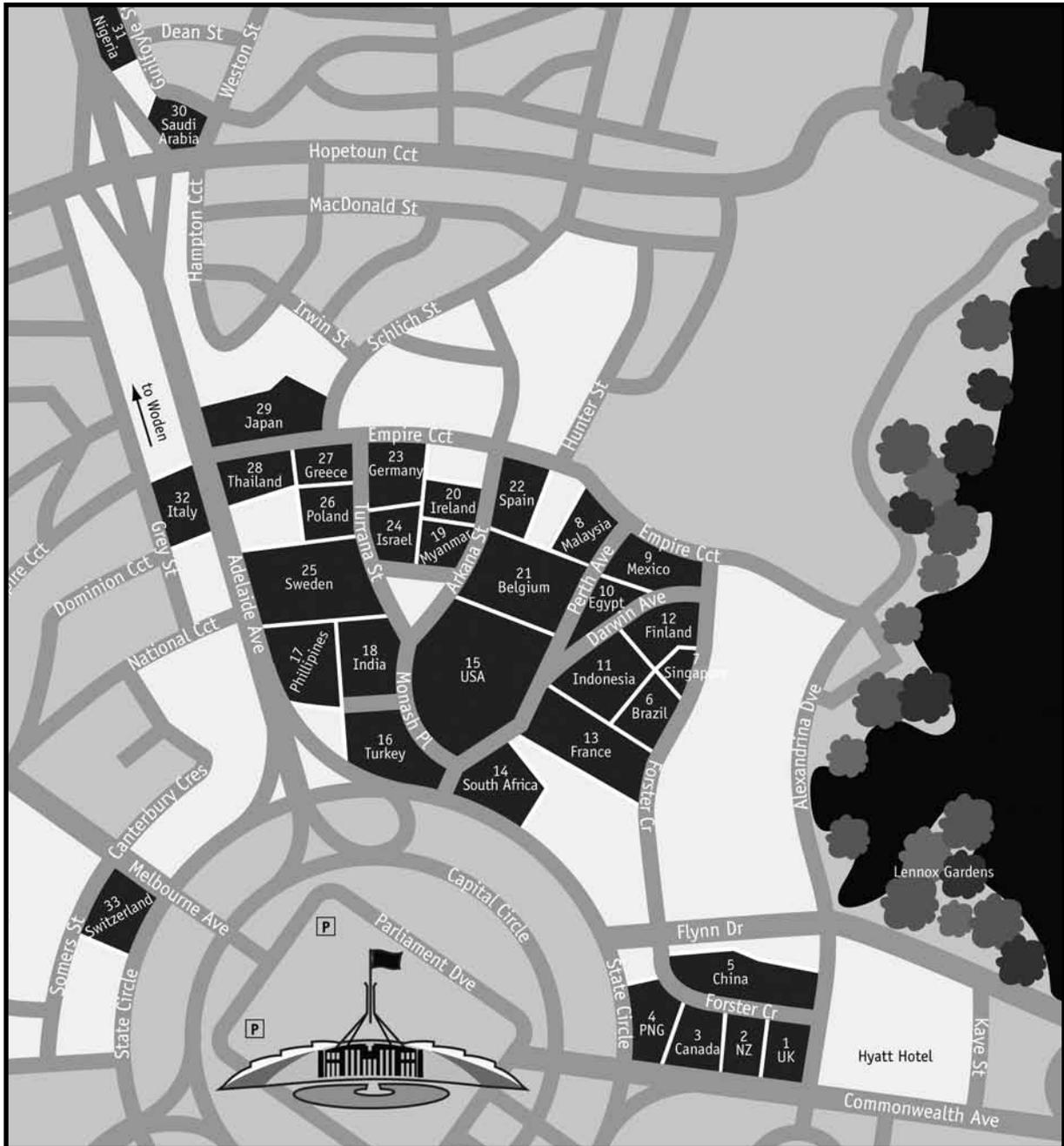
**Embassy architects:** Philip Cox and Partners, Australia

**Awards:** Commendation, Royal Australian Institute of Architects, ACT Branch, Canberra Medallion, 1983; Award, Royal Australian Institute of Architects, ACT Branch, residential category, 2004. Listed on the Register of Significant 20th Century Architecture

Although it might not be obvious at first, this group of buildings is evocative of a cluster of low-lying buildings on an Irish farm. The white-washed walls and steep, thatched roofs of traditional Irish farmhouses have here been updated with the use of brick and tile.

**This ends the Yarralumla Diplomatic Estate Tour**

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