

Jewish Museum Australia, St Kilda

Dr. Helen Light, Director

Tel (03) 9534 0083

hlight@jewishmuseum.com.au

A wall of plaques and certificates displayed inside the front entrance of Melbourne's Jewish Museum attests to how well connected it is to its various communities.

The museum's 2007 win at the Victorian Tourism Awards for Heritage Attractions topped-off an impressive list of local, state and national awards that have been acquired during the past 25 years.

The impressive building and its beautifully presented galleries in East St Kilda is Australia's best museum of Jewish history and culture. This is more than appropriate, given that there are 48,000 Jewish Victorians and that Melbourne is home to the largest percentage of holocaust survivors in the world.

However, the former 'Museum of the Year' award-winner doesn't dwell upon atrocities of the past, but celebrates the survival of its culture through 2,000 years of dispersal around the world, as well as the remarkable achievements and contributions of many of its community to Australian life.

The museum plays an important role in helping Jewish people reflect upon their culture and their sense of community. This is especially so in the case of more recent arrivals to Australia, such as Russian Jewish immigrants, who were unable to practice their religion and culture in their country.

It is an organisation that could easily be very inward-focussed, but the Jewish Museum is, in fact, the epitome of how to connect with a much wider audience. Museum Director, Helen Light, says that an emphasis on connectivity is an integral part of its mission statement.

"We're a community museum – we reflect a community and we reflect upon that community. Our mission is to build a bridge between Jewish people and the wider community. Over 70 per cent of our visitors are non-Jewish and are usually just people interested in religion generally and in Australian history".



Several permanent galleries tell the story of the origins of the Jewish people, their dispersal throughout the world and, particularly, their settlement in Australia from the First Fleet onwards. Three themed exhibitions a year are carefully curated to reflect a different aspect of the culture or community.

The museum's program of exhibitions is often mounted in conjunction with the corporate sector and with other groups, such as their partnership with the Italian Historical Society to present the "Jews of Carlton", or their role in a consortium of 20 other museums to stage the major "Australian Family" exhibition. In 2006 they teamed with the City of Port Phillip, Yarra Trams and the St Kilda Synagogue to launch Childrens' Book Week.

The museum has extensive links to the local Port Phillip community, as well as to the museum and tourism industries: Tourism Victoria, Tourism Alliance Victoria, the Cultural Tourism Industry Group, the Australian Society of Travel Writers, Museums Australia (Vic), the City of Port Phillip's arts and tourism organizations, traders organizations, the historical society, the library service, Southside Arts Network and even to their own street.



PARTICIPATION GETTING INVOLVED



TOURISM
EXCELLENCE

Staff hold an annual open day for the residents of Alma Road to wander in and enjoy the facility. Regular corporate breakfasts and programs for schools, churches, community and minority groups are also an important part of their outreach. The museum's recently added learning centre and gallery is made available for appropriate community uses and exhibitions.

One of the latest linkages forged has been with other specialist museums, including the Koori Heritage Trust, the Chinese Museum, the Immigration Museum and the Holocaust Museum, to jointly market the multi-cultural diversity of their venues.

Helen Light is a former chair of Museums Aust (Vic) and also serves on the Cultural Development Fund Advisory Panel and the Cultural Volunteering Community Network.

The City of Port Phillip's Adriana Frescura says the museum is fantastic at connecting with other organizations, the community and the council.

"The museum is seen as a model for community involvement and many groups seek their input when establishing community cultural centres.

" Their staff proactively approached the Council before we had a tourism strategy and encouraged us to participate with them in tourism initiatives, including our first ever familiarisation program, which involved Fitzroy and Acland Street traders. They continue to ring us regularly encouraging us to get involved in packaging and other projects."