

International Tour Groups at the British Museum

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Advisors:

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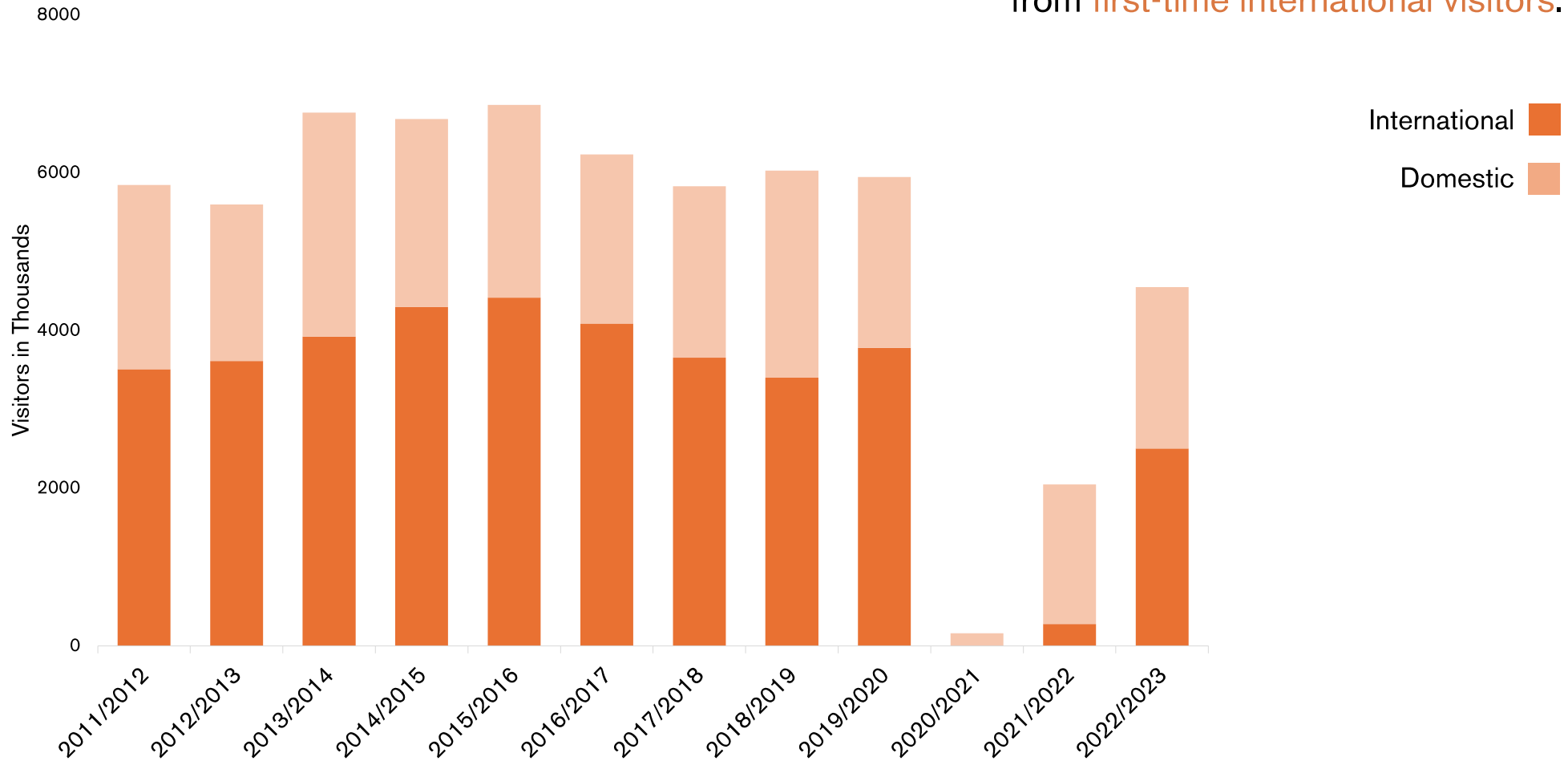
The British
Museum



WPI

The Museum attracts many international visitors

Over half of non-exhibition visits are from **first-time international visitors**.

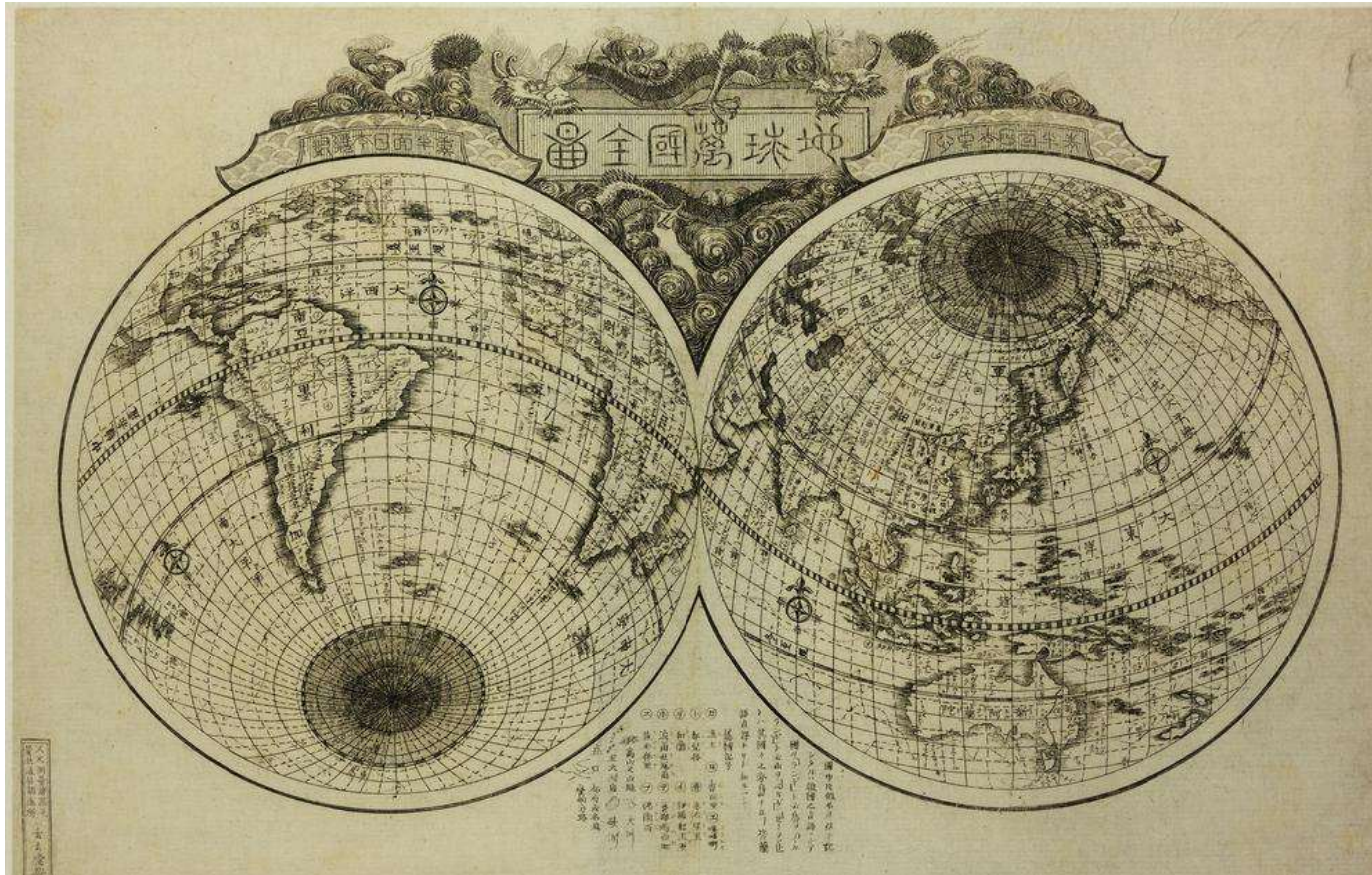


Many international visitors have turned to guided tours to experience the Museum

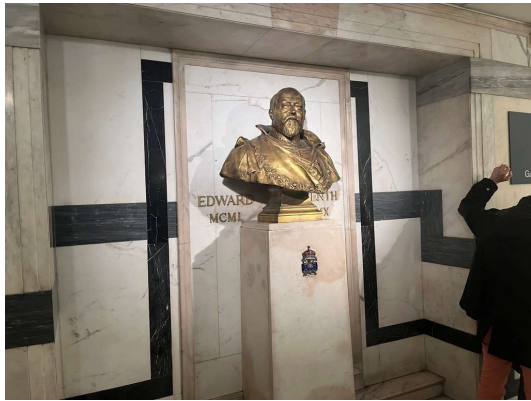
Tours give visitors the chance to experience the Museum in their native language.



Despite the prevalence of international tour groups (ITGs), the Museum has limited information about them



The Museum has published guidelines for large groups



“Groups must enter through the Montague Place Entrance”

“Tour groups are not permitted in rooms 61, 62, and 63”



“It is suggested groups of more than 30 are divided into separate groups”



Our goal was to identify strategies to help the British Museum manage ITGs and improve visitor experience.



We had **three** **objectives** for our research:



- 1 Characterise the behaviour of international tour groups
- 2 Determine the impact of international tour groups on other visitors
- 3 Understand the needs and experiences of international tour groups

Initial observation



Shadow observation: Behaviours

- ❶ Characterise the behaviour of international tour groups

Initial observation

General group information: size,
spoken language, age range, voice
amplification use

16 observations were used
to establish the typical ITG.



Shadow observation: Behaviours

- 1 Characterise the behaviour of international tour groups

Initial observation

General group information: size, spoken language, age range, voice amplification use

16 observations were used to establish the typical ITG.

Timing and tracking data: where do ITGs go and for how long?

Double-entry notes: are ITG participants engaged, do ITGs follow guidelines?

We observed the same 16 groups.

Shadow observation: Behaviours

- 1 Characterise the behaviour of international tour groups

Shadow observation: Impacts

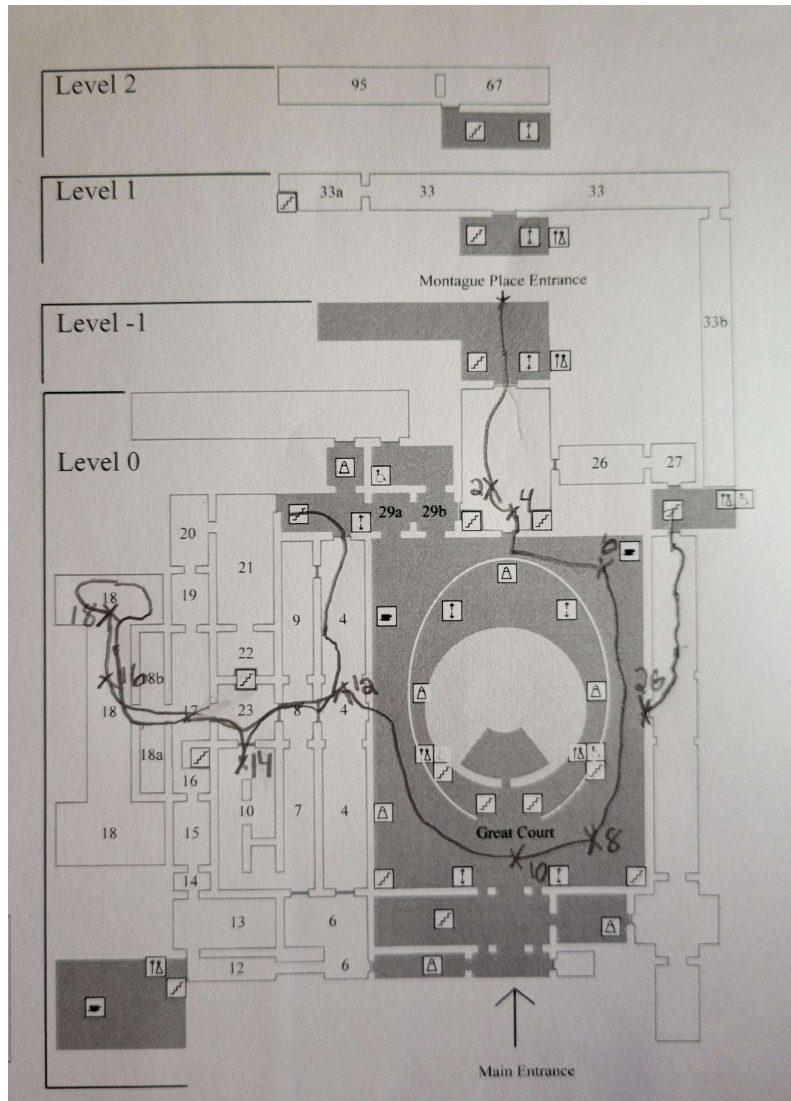


Double-entry notes: do ITGs slow or divert traffic? Do they block sightlines? Do they crowd any facilities?

We observed the same 16 groups.

- ② Determine the impact of international tour groups on other visitors

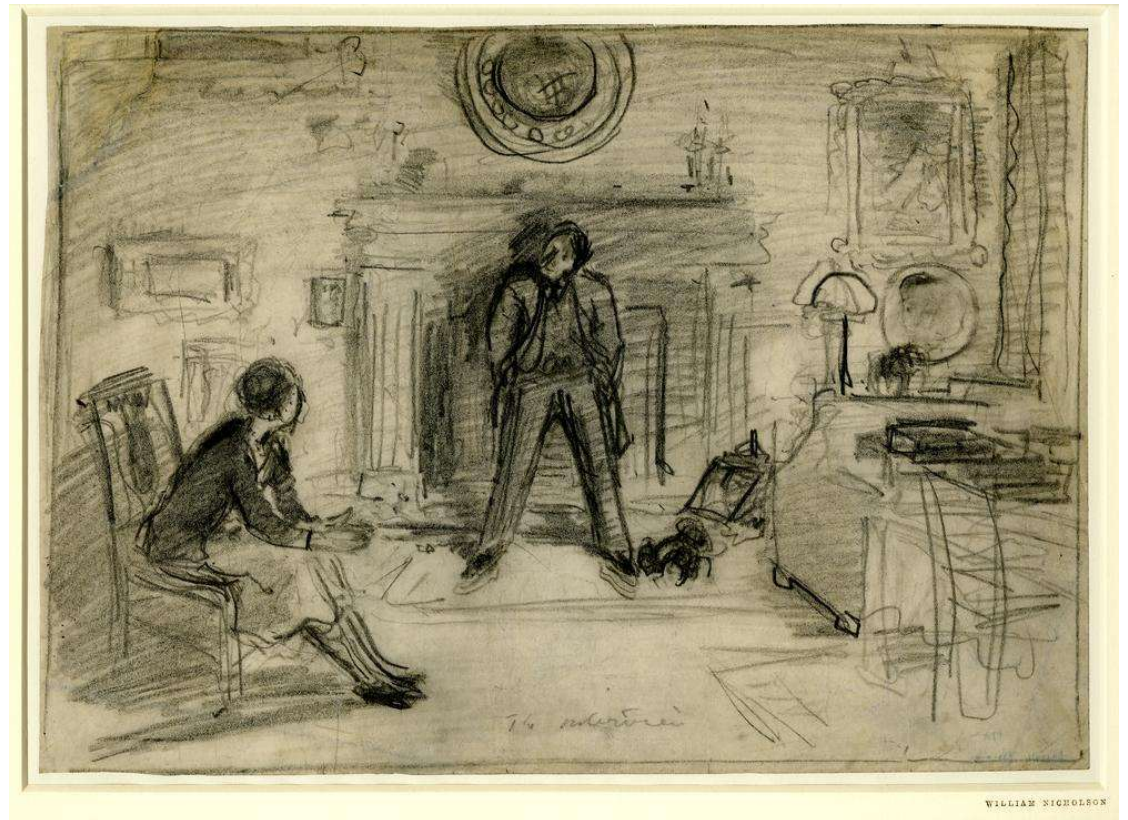
Shadow observation: Instruments



Stop #	Tags	Observations
2	ENG	Standing back from Hoa; some pics
6		Introducing another guide/aide
12	ST B	tight squeeze through doorway;
16	ST	
18	B DT	group moved to back of statues to get a closer look (clockwise circle)

Interviews

With **five international tour guides**: what can the Museum do to improve their experience?



- ③ Understand the needs and experiences of international tour groups

Interviews

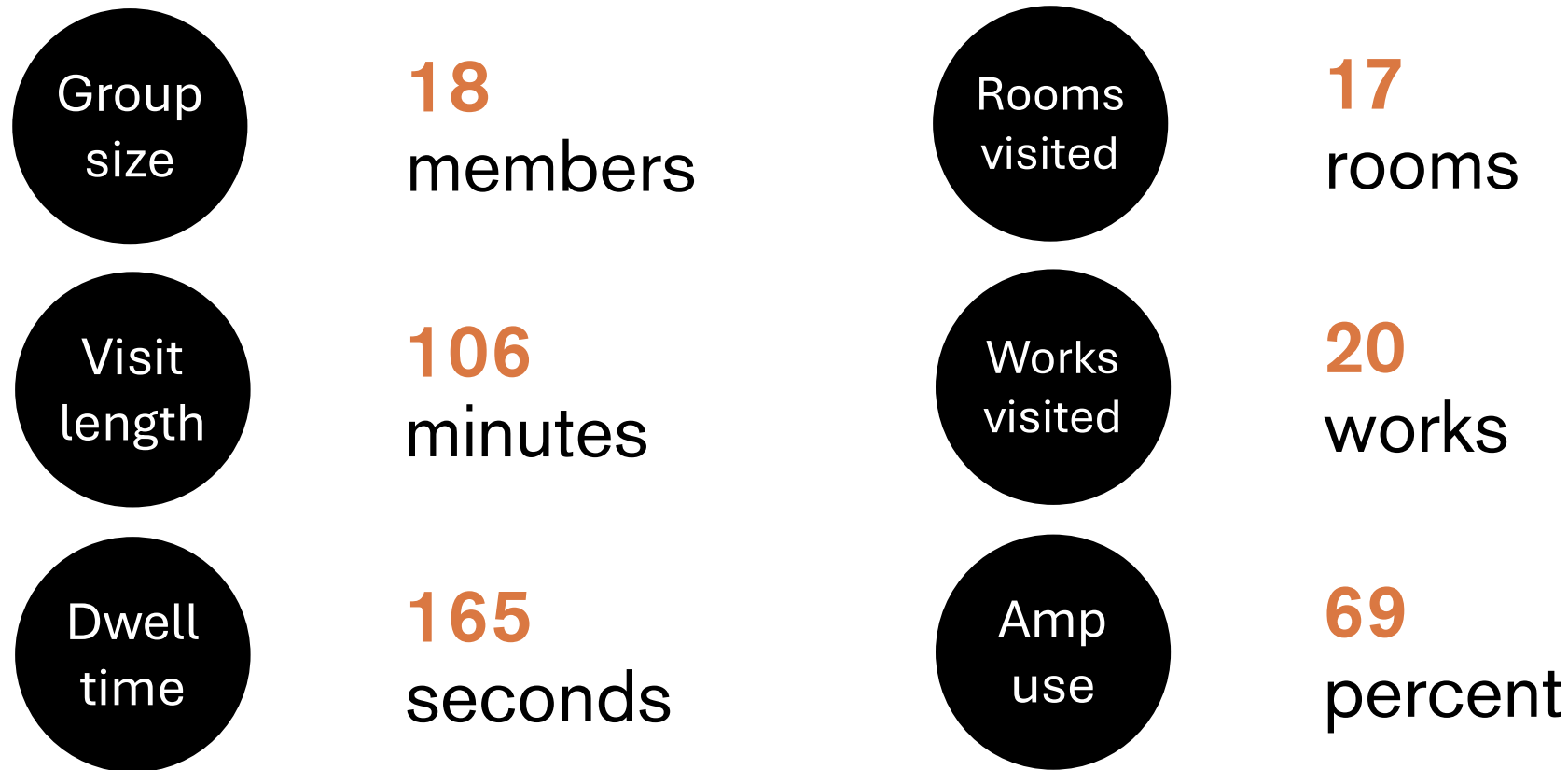
With **five international tour guides**: what can the Museum do to improve their experience?

Are there any common aspects of the tour people particularly like or dislike?

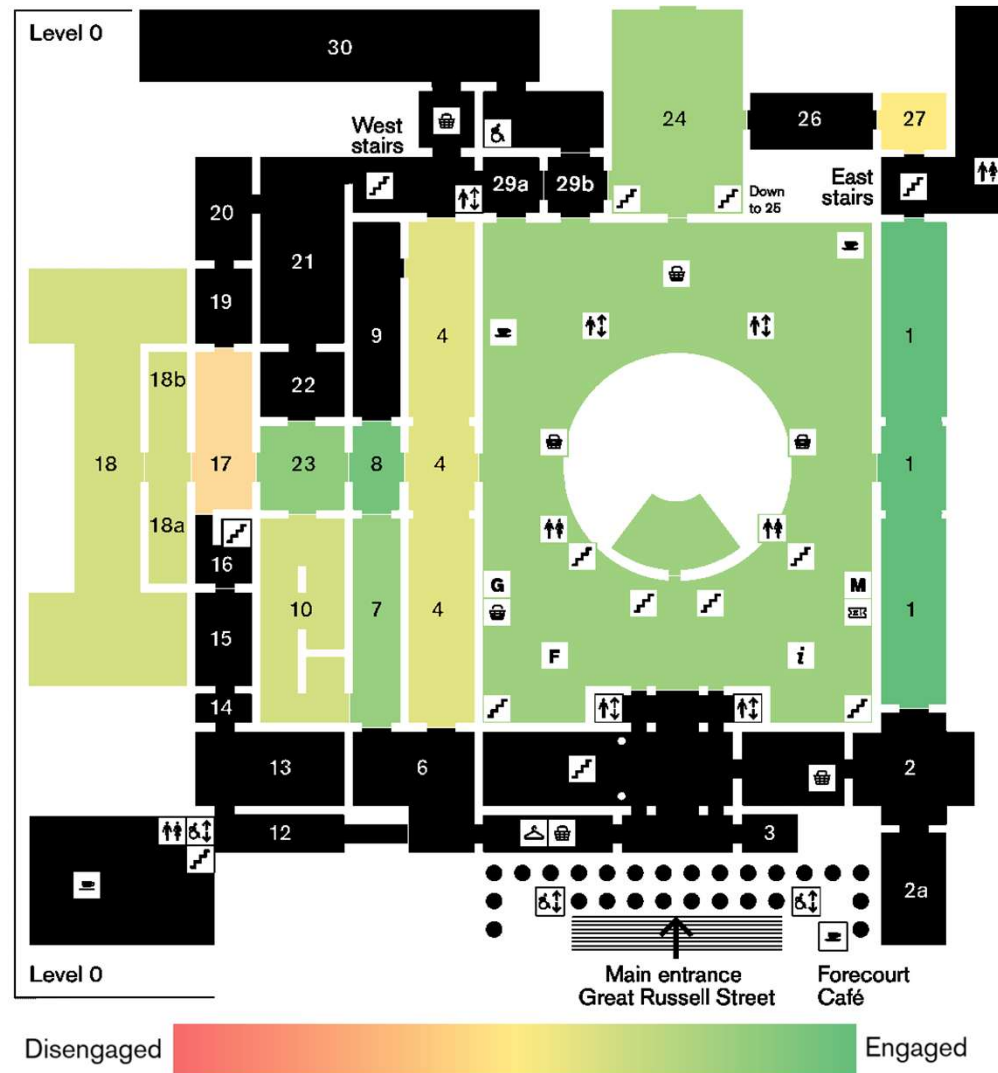
What challenges do they face while trying to conduct tours at the British Museum?

③ Understand the needs and experiences of international tour groups

ITGs have similar characteristics



ITGs successfully engage members



Tours vary based on spoken language

The three groups that visited the **Chinese Ceramics** exhibit spoke Chinese

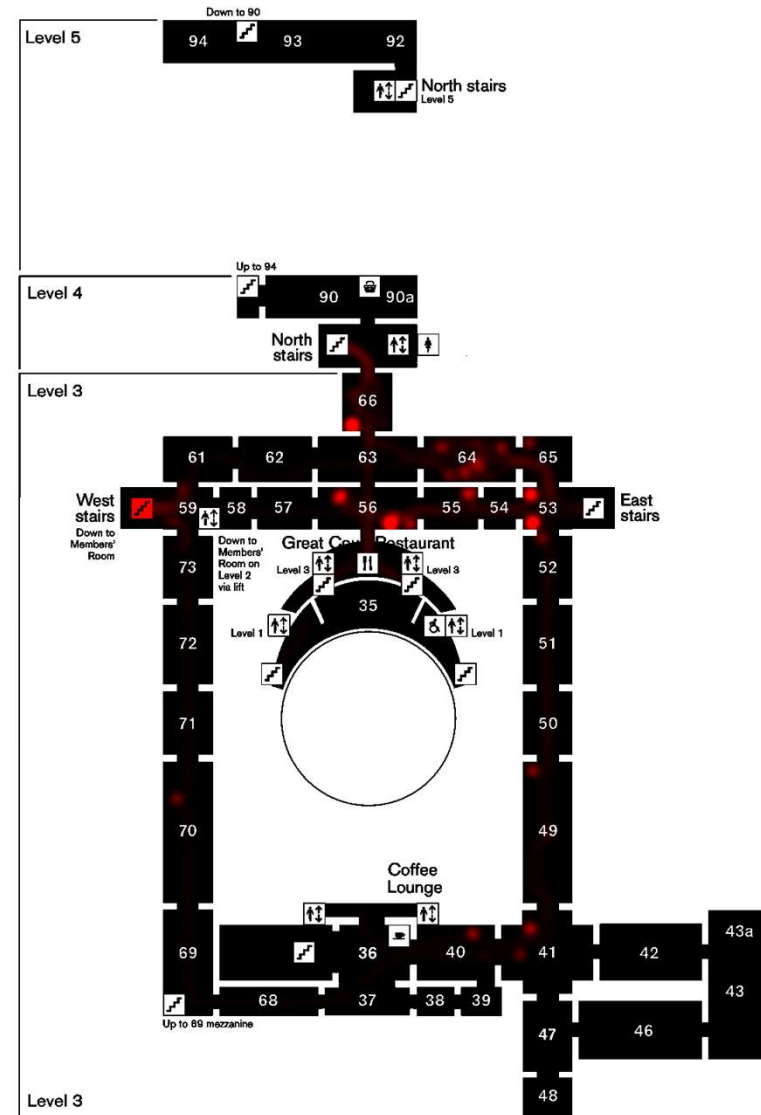
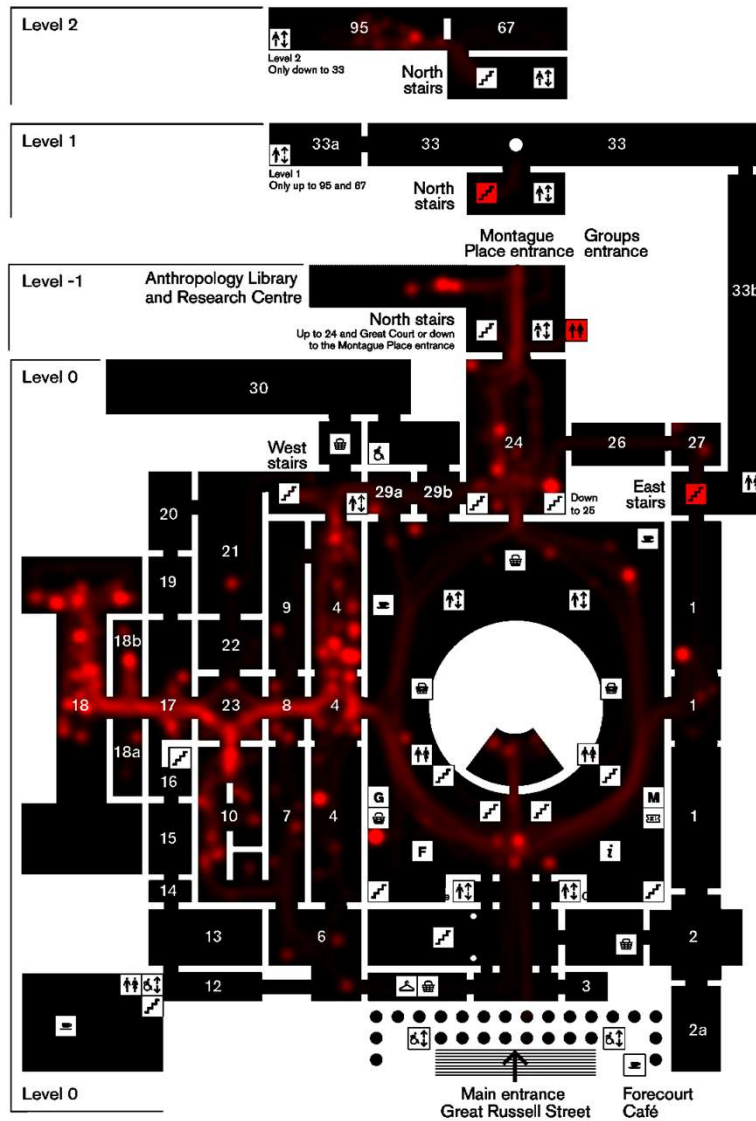


The four groups that visited the **China and South Asia** exhibit spoke Chinese

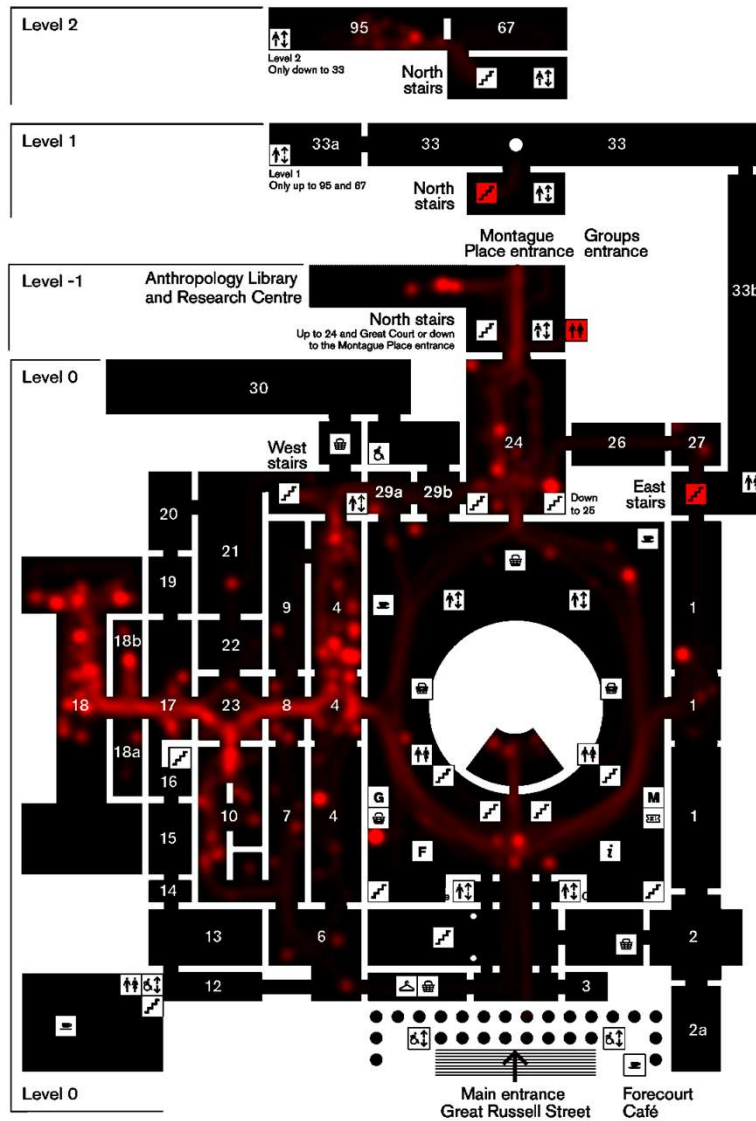
The only group to visit **The Korea Foundation Gallery** spoke Korean



ITGs take similar routes



ITGs take similar routes



16
visits

Parthenon
Sculptures

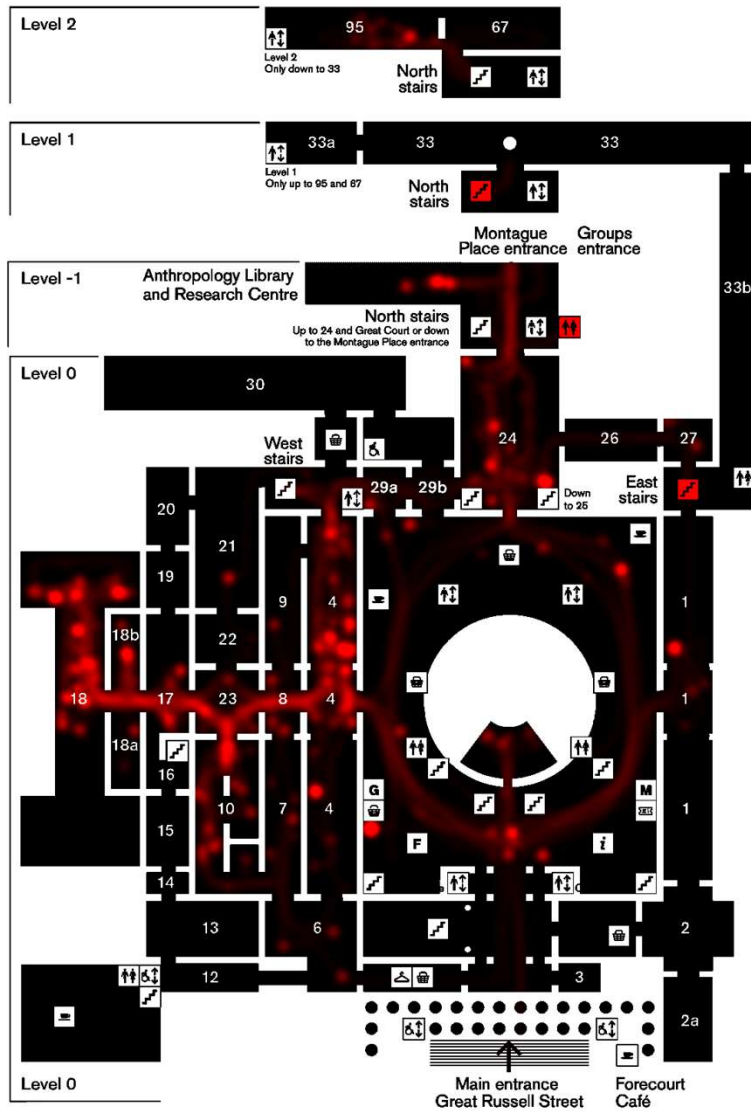
15
visits

Bust of Ramesses
the Great

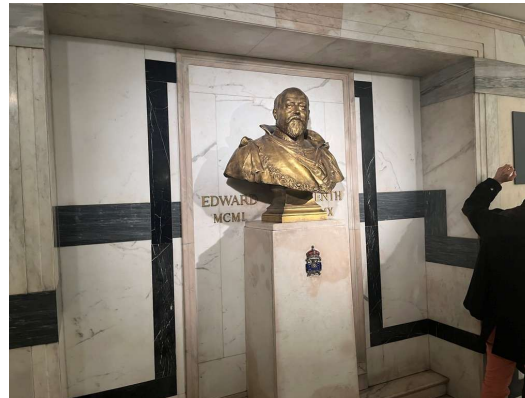
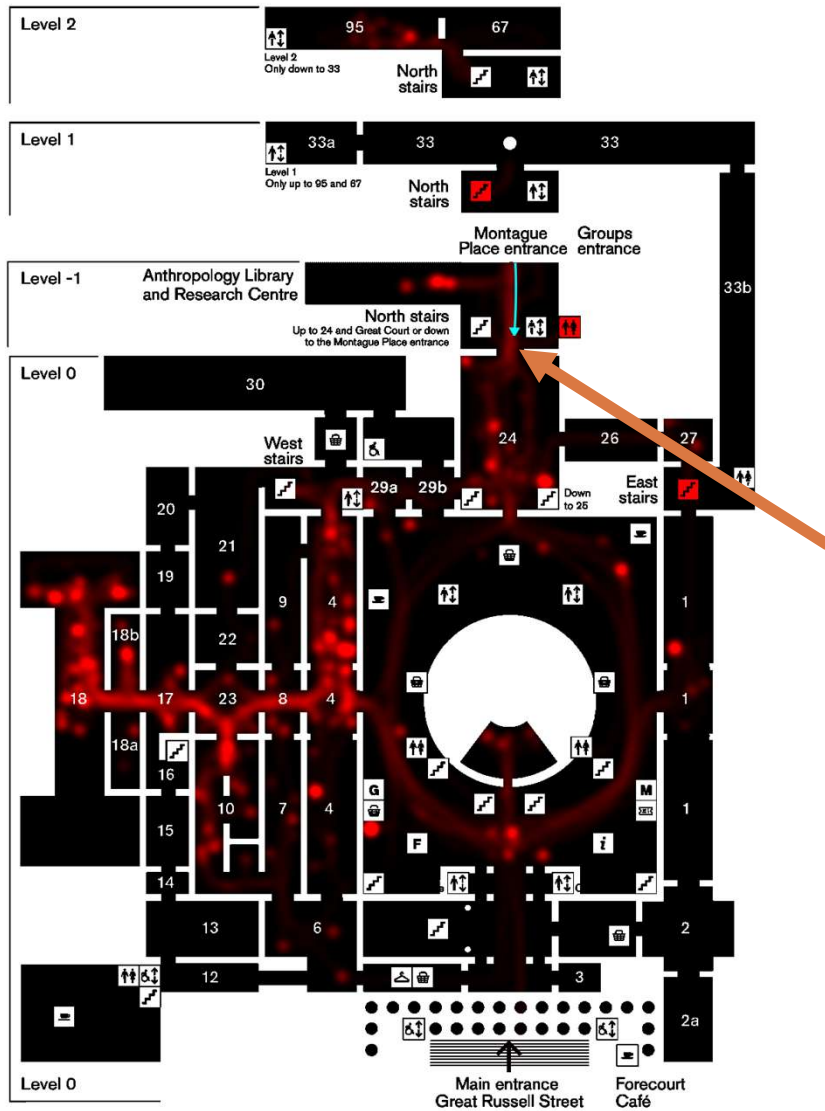
15
visits

Rosetta
Stone

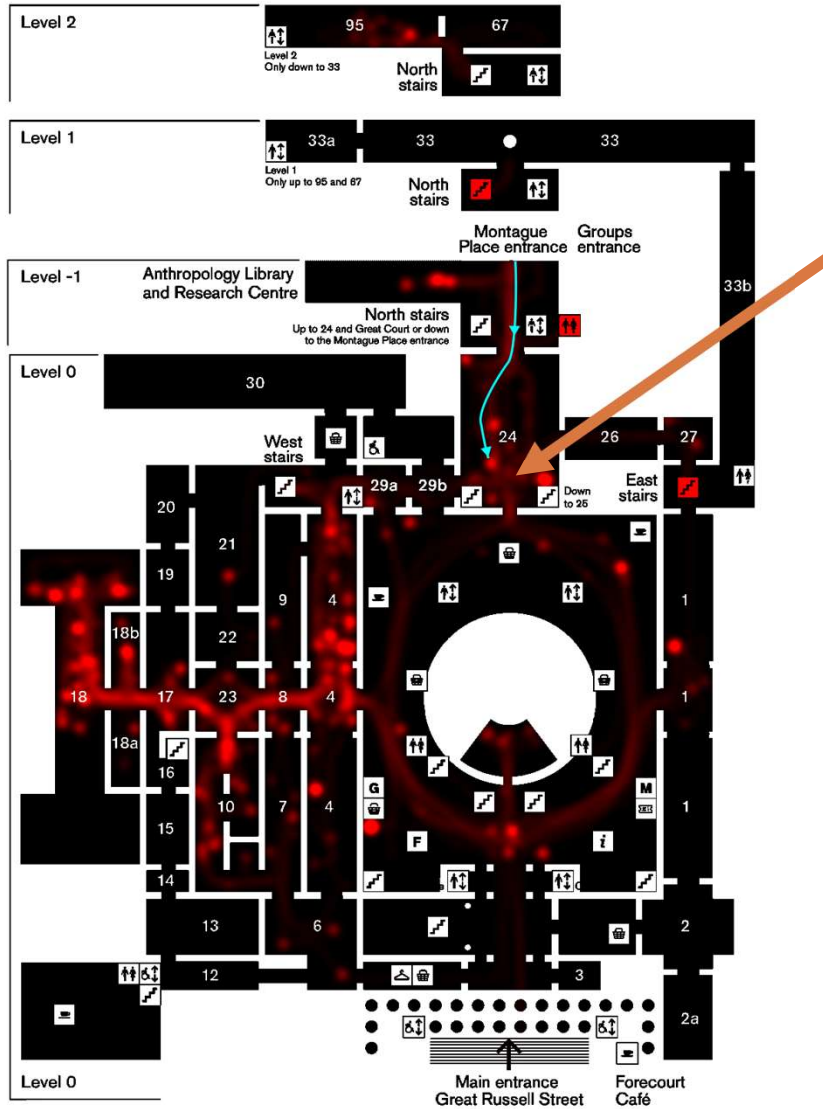
The typical ITG route



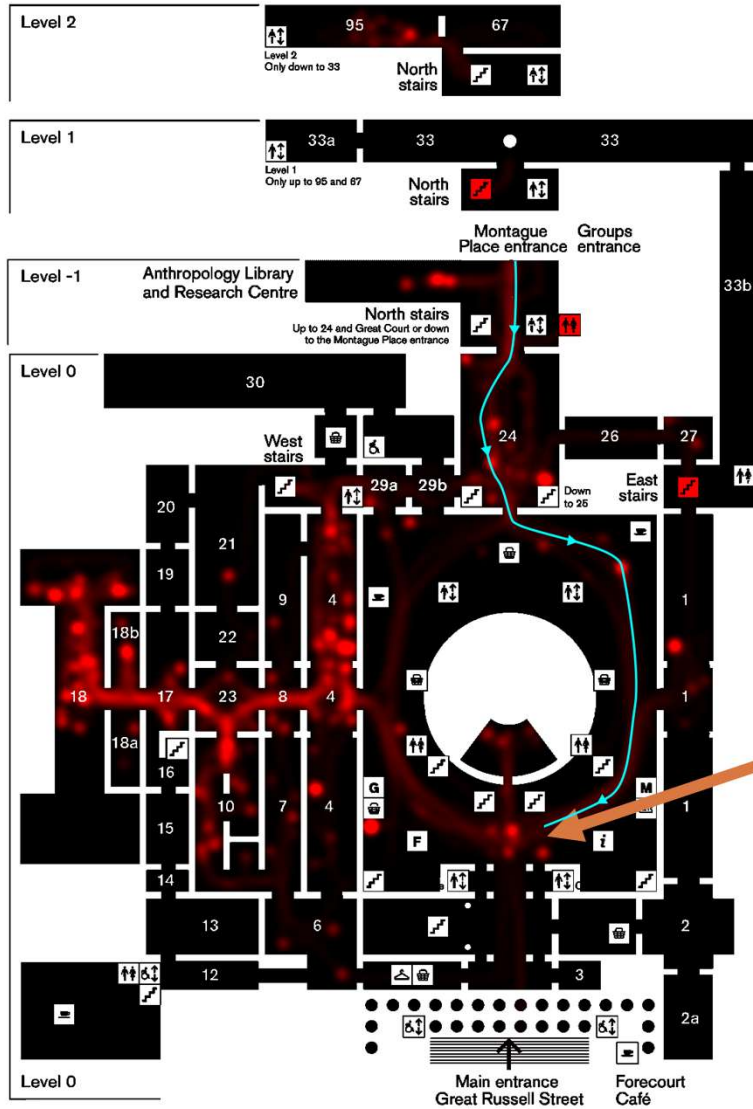
The typical ITG route



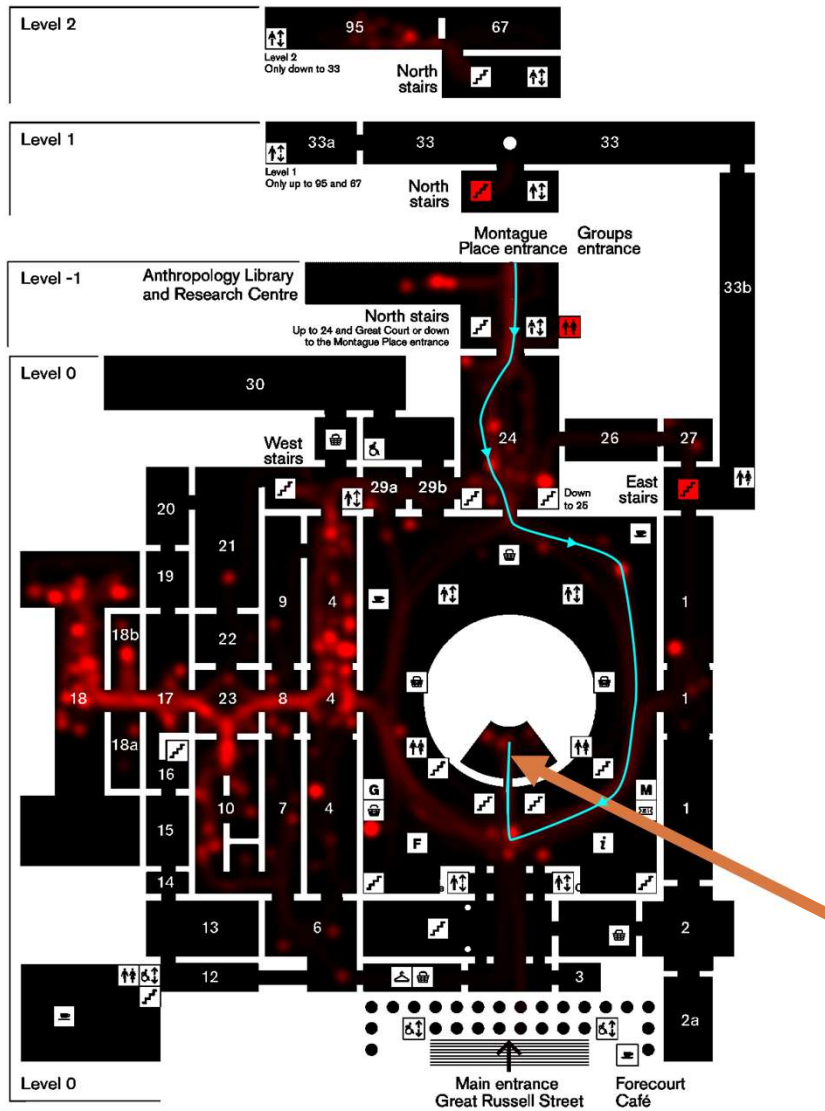
The typical ITG route



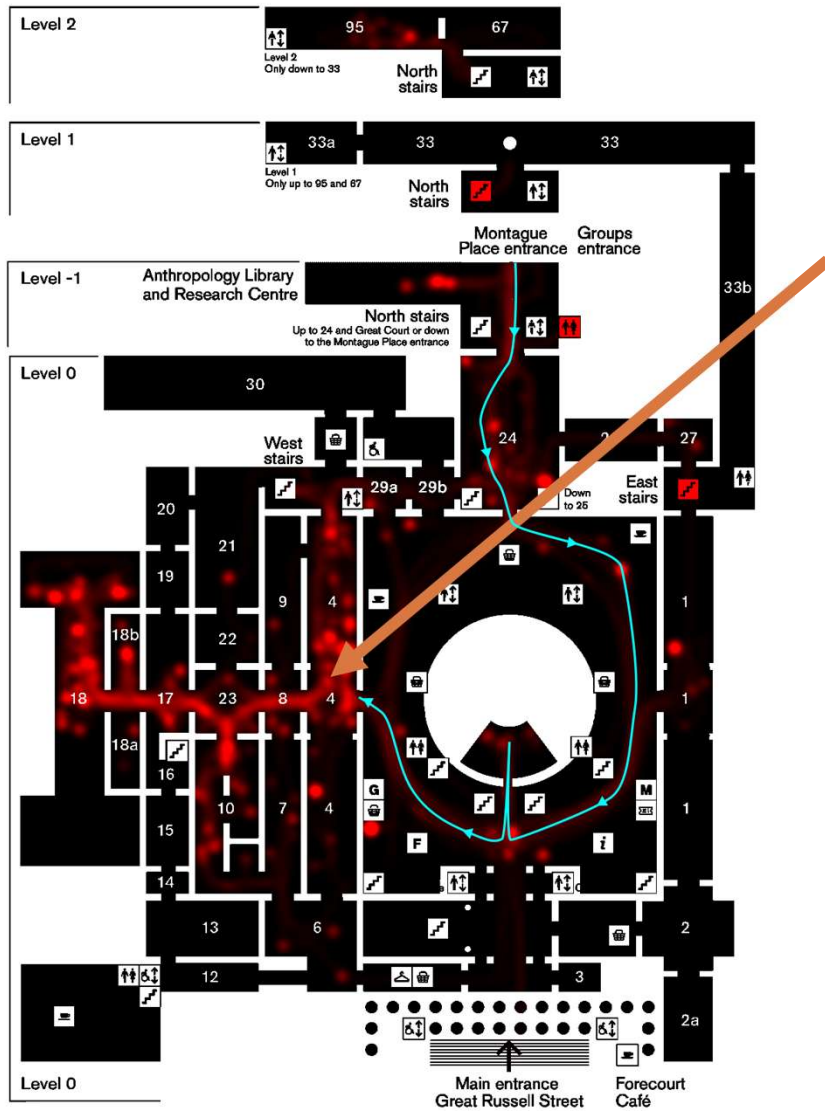
The typical ITG route



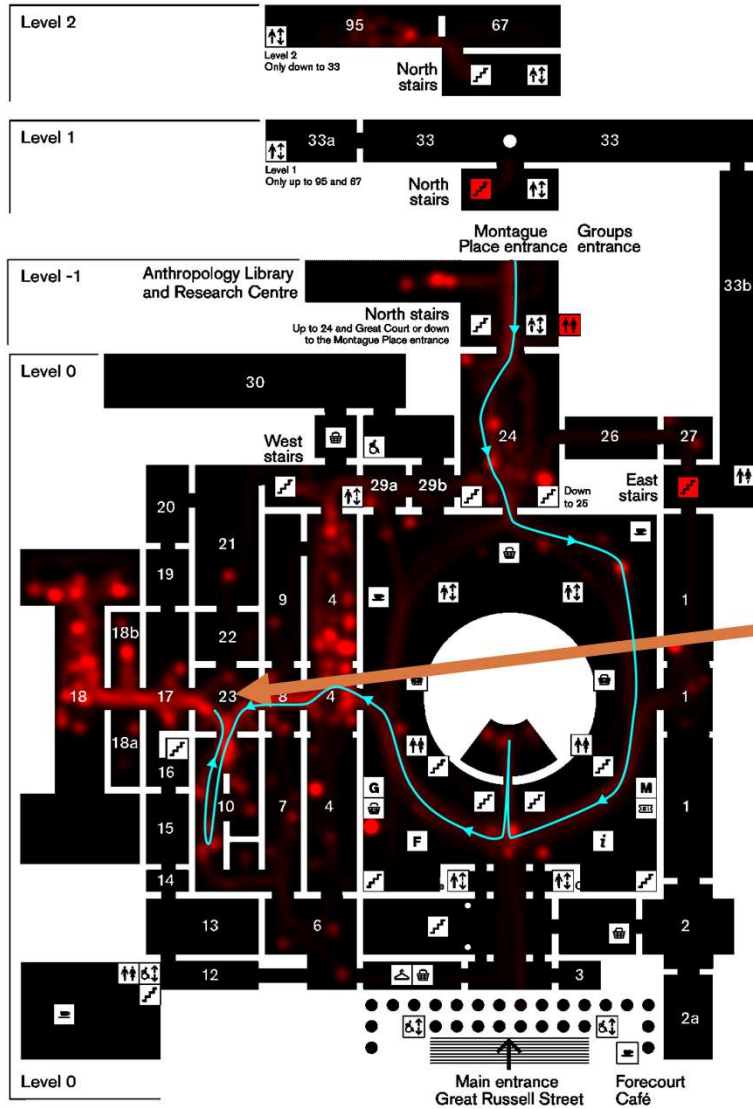
The typical ITG route



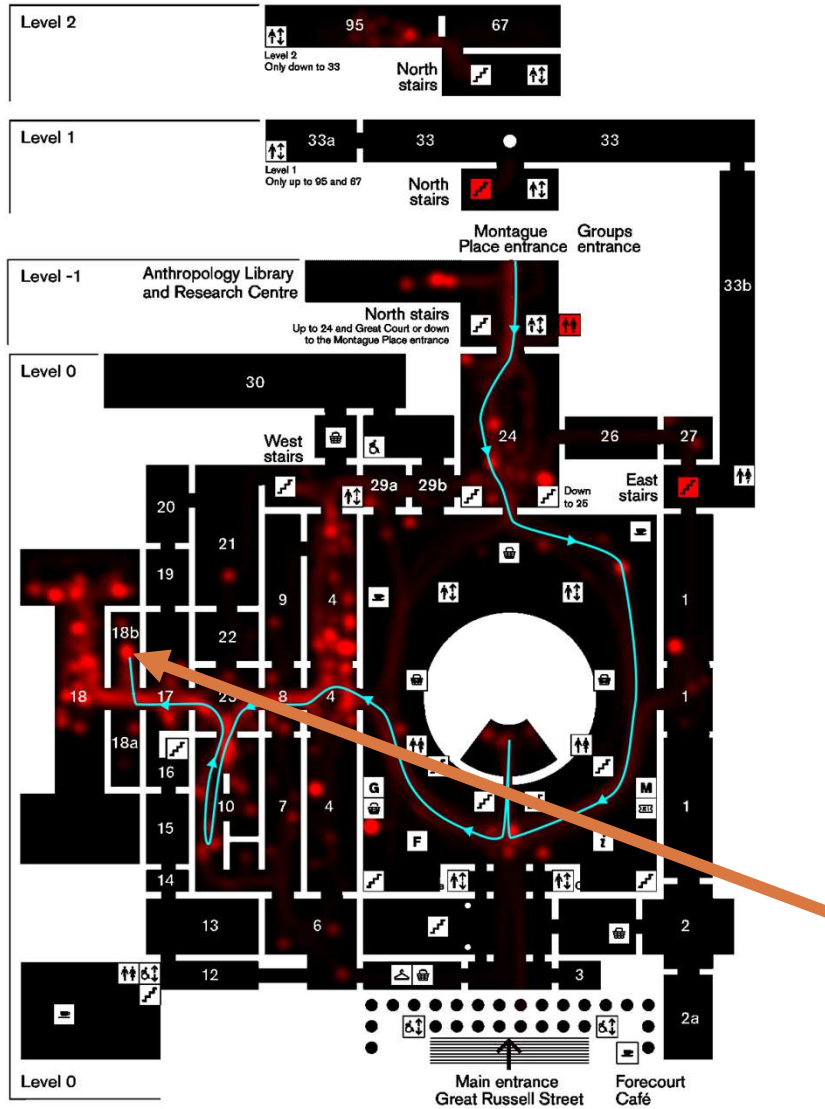
The typical ITG route



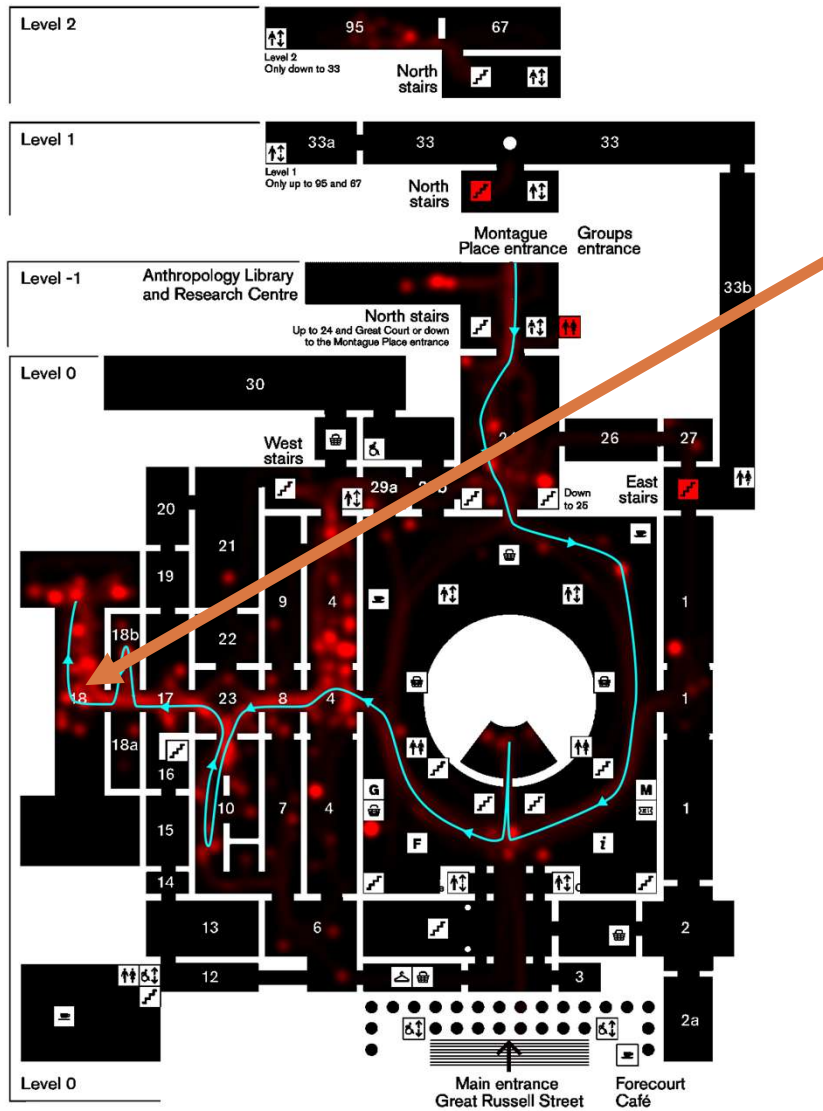
The typical ITG route



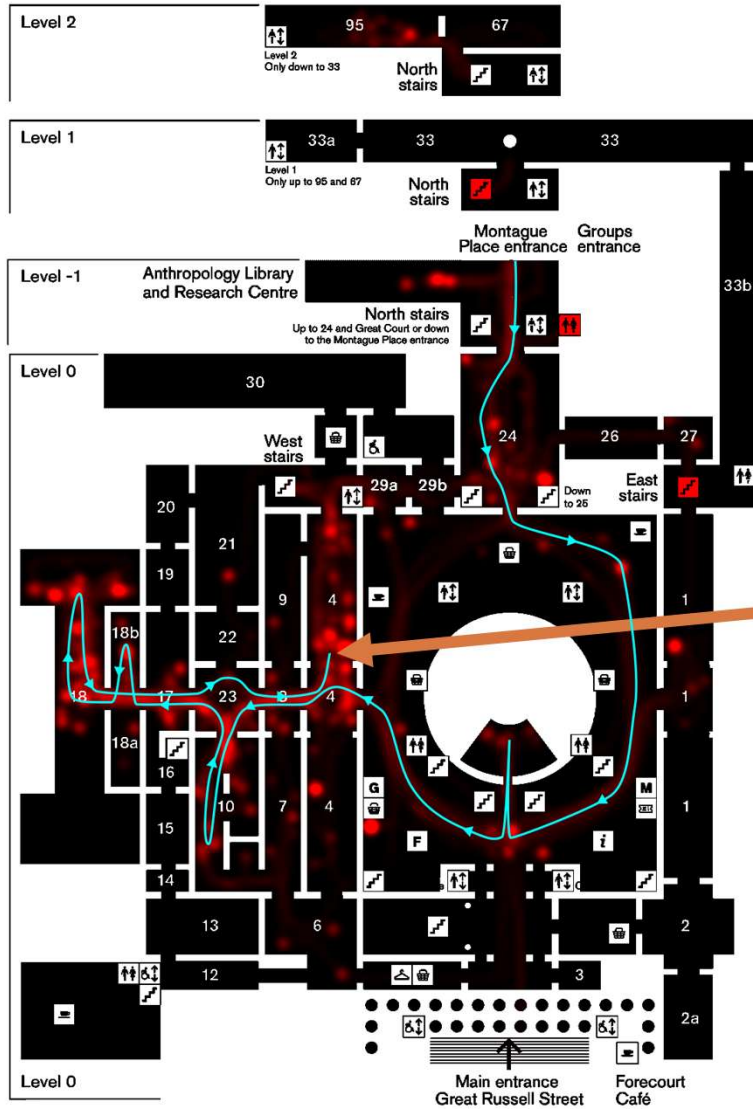
The typical ITG route



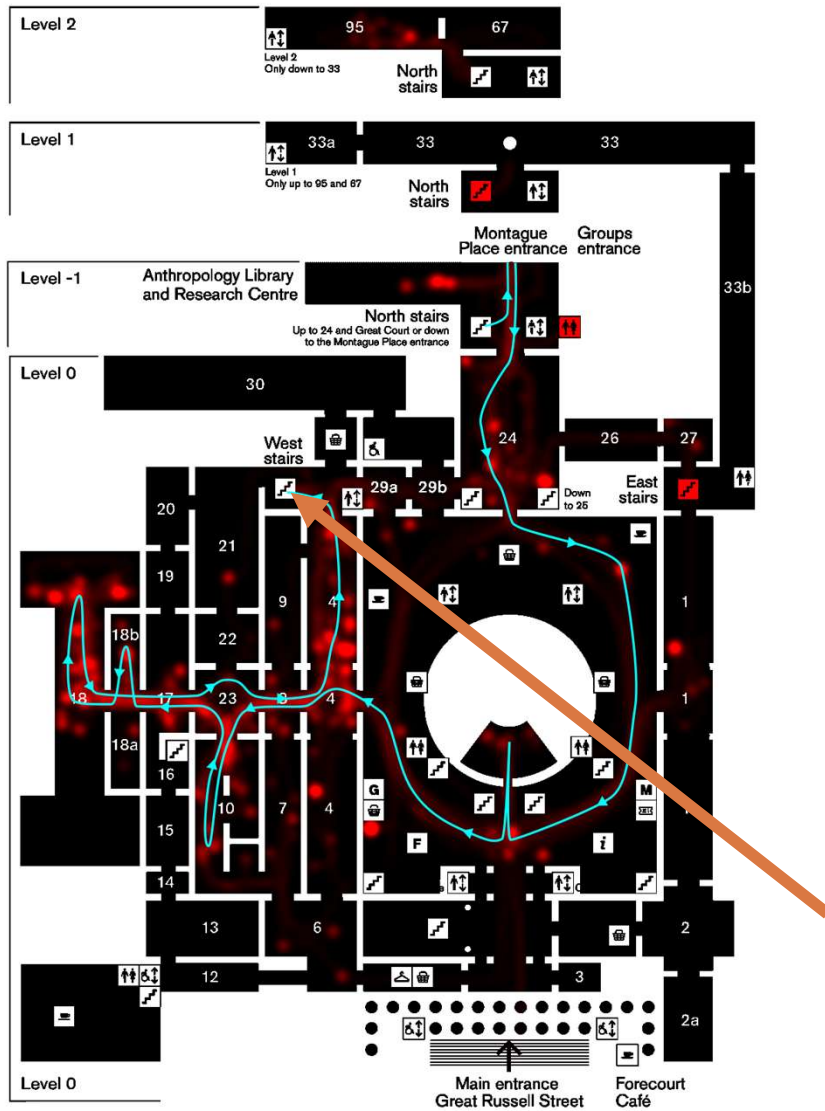
The typical ITG route



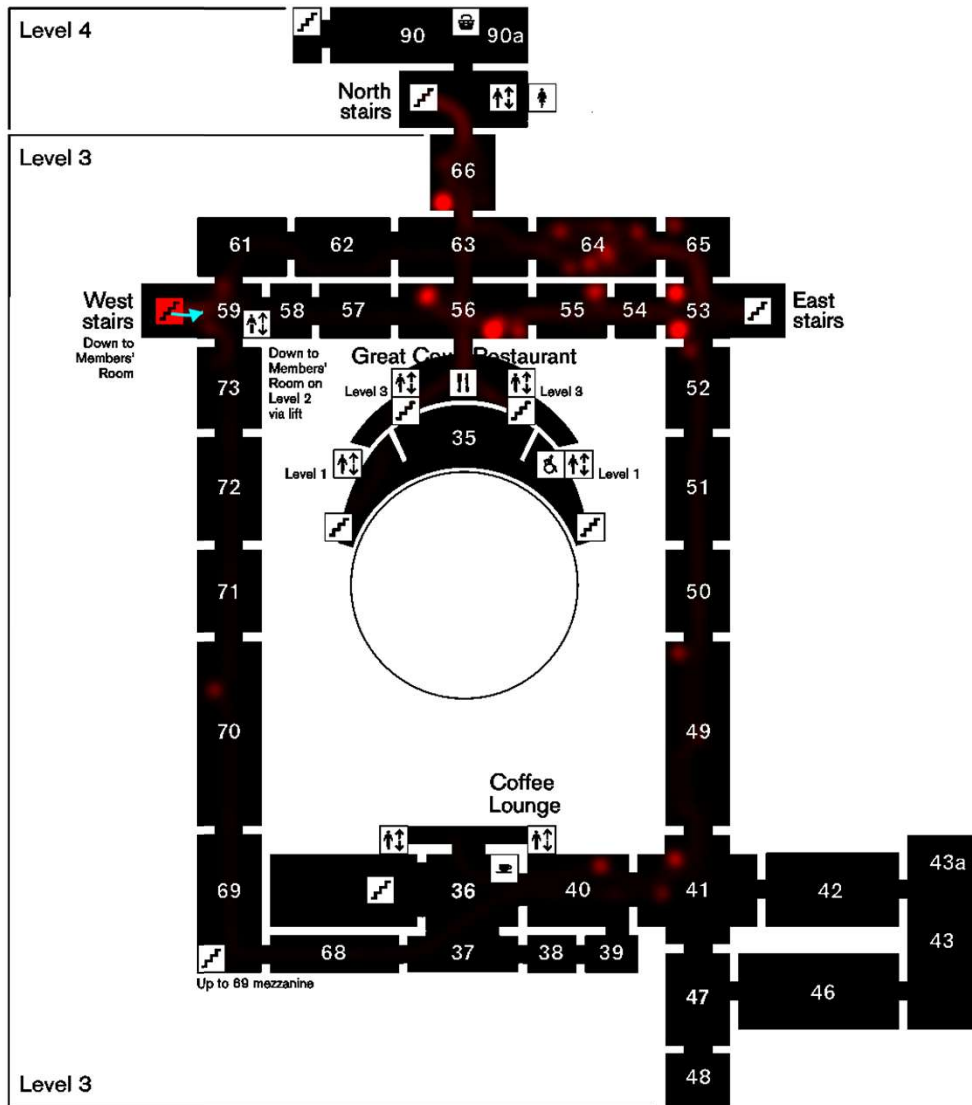
The typical ITG route



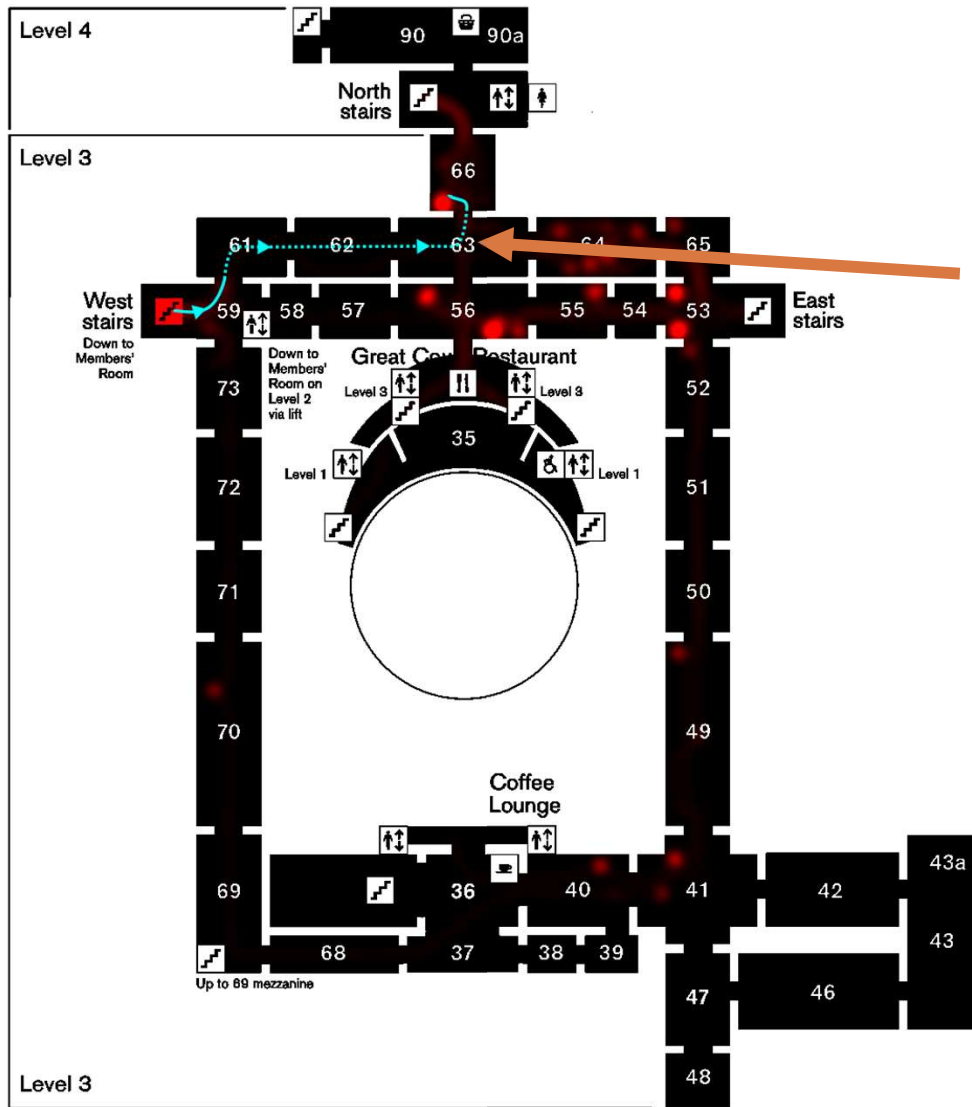
The typical ITG route



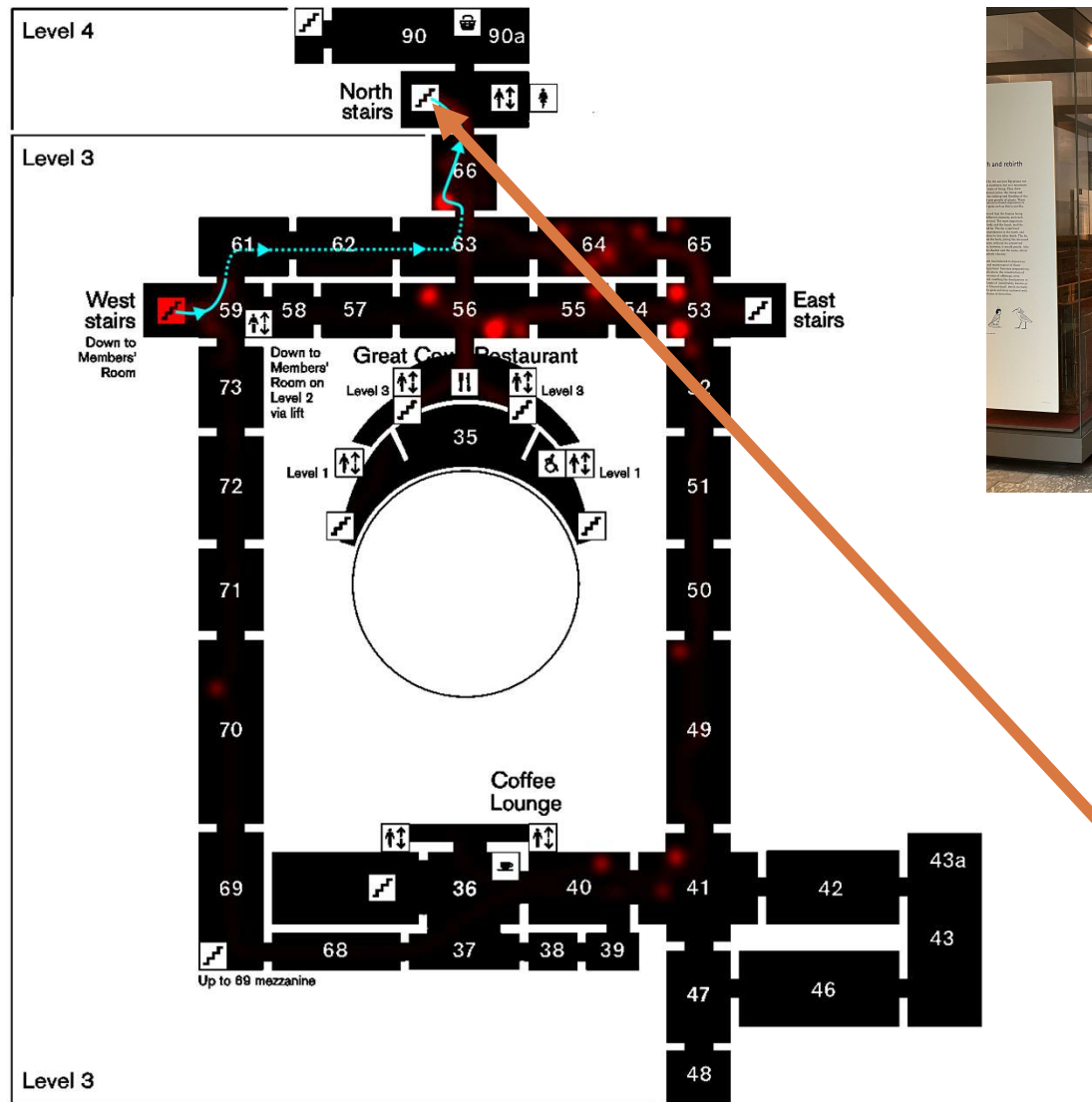
The typical ITG route



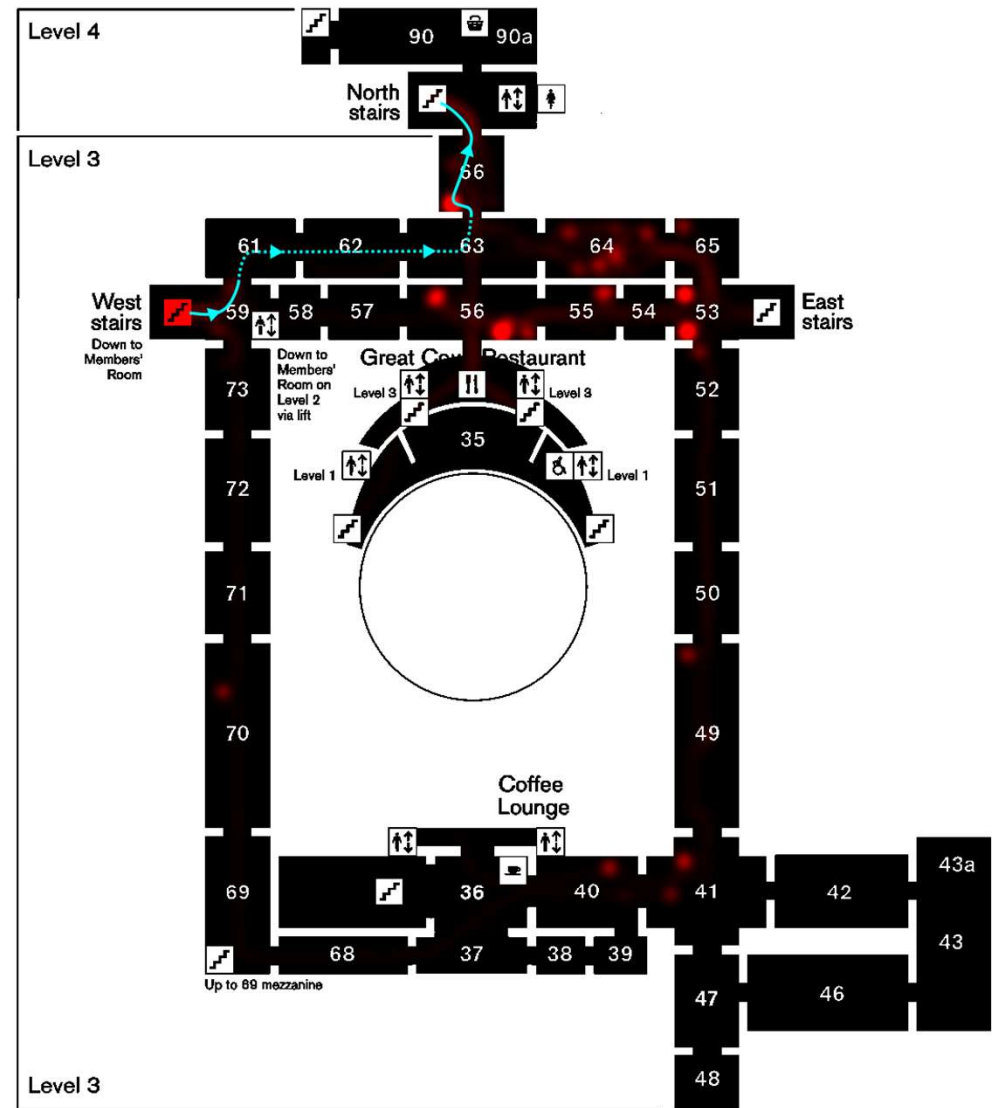
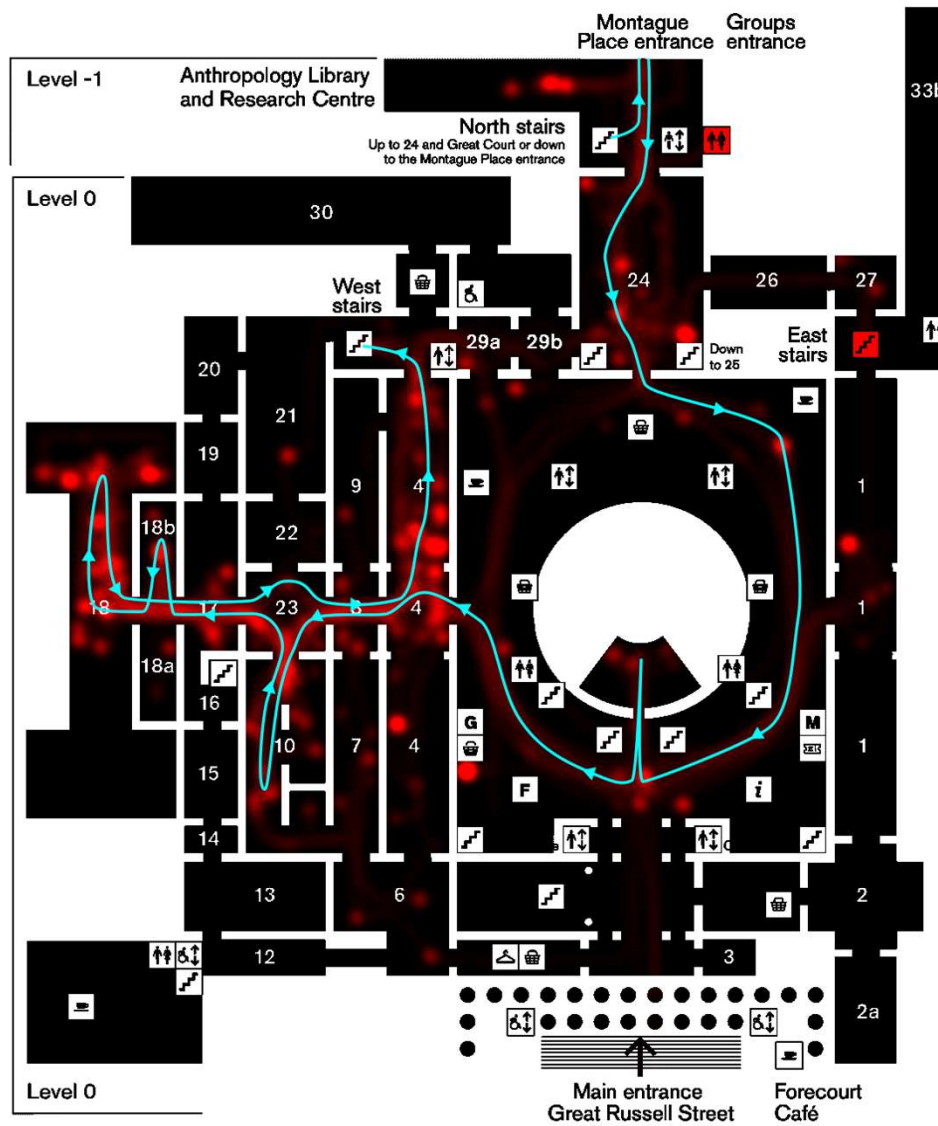
The typical ITG route



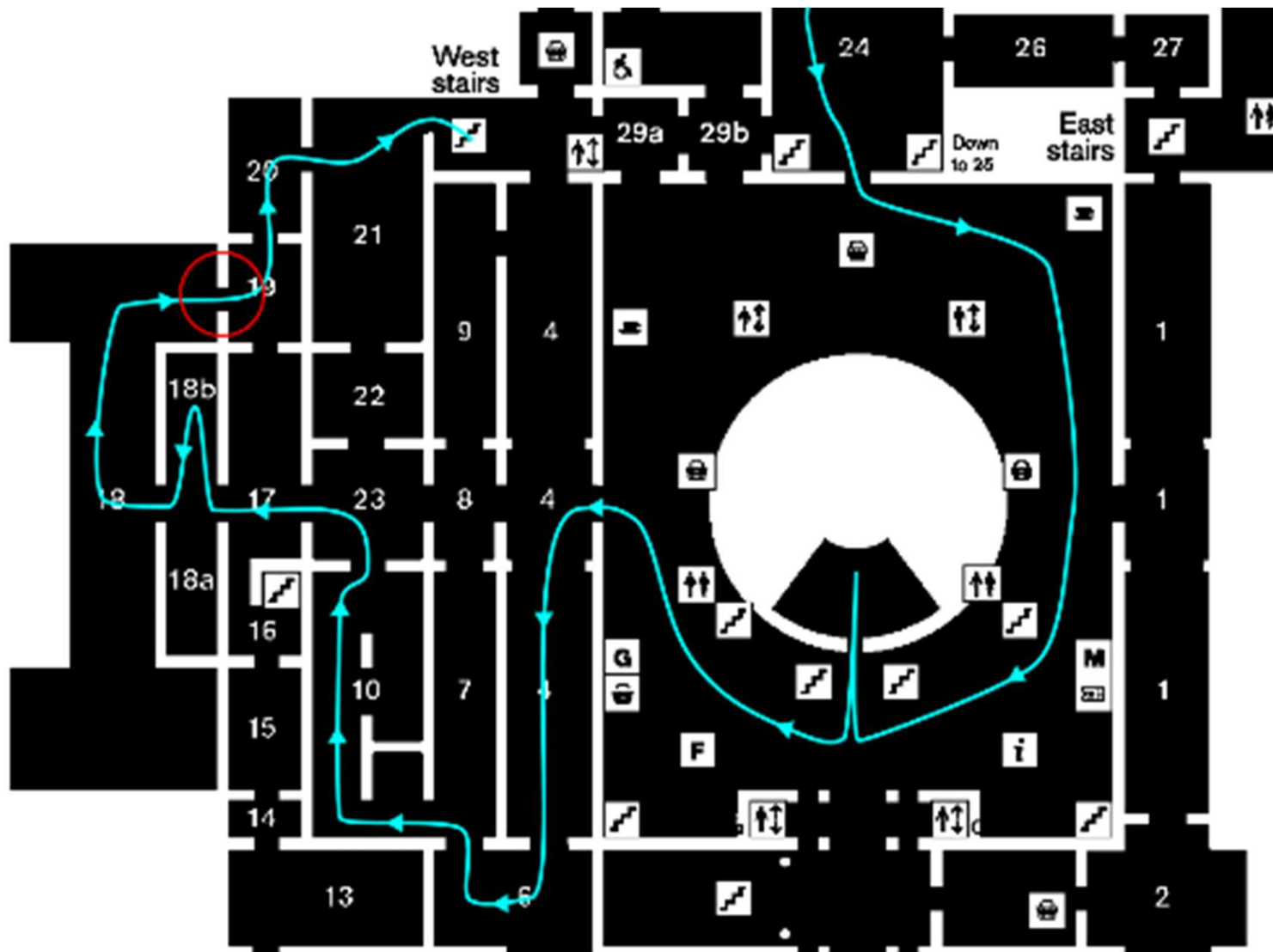
The typical ITG route



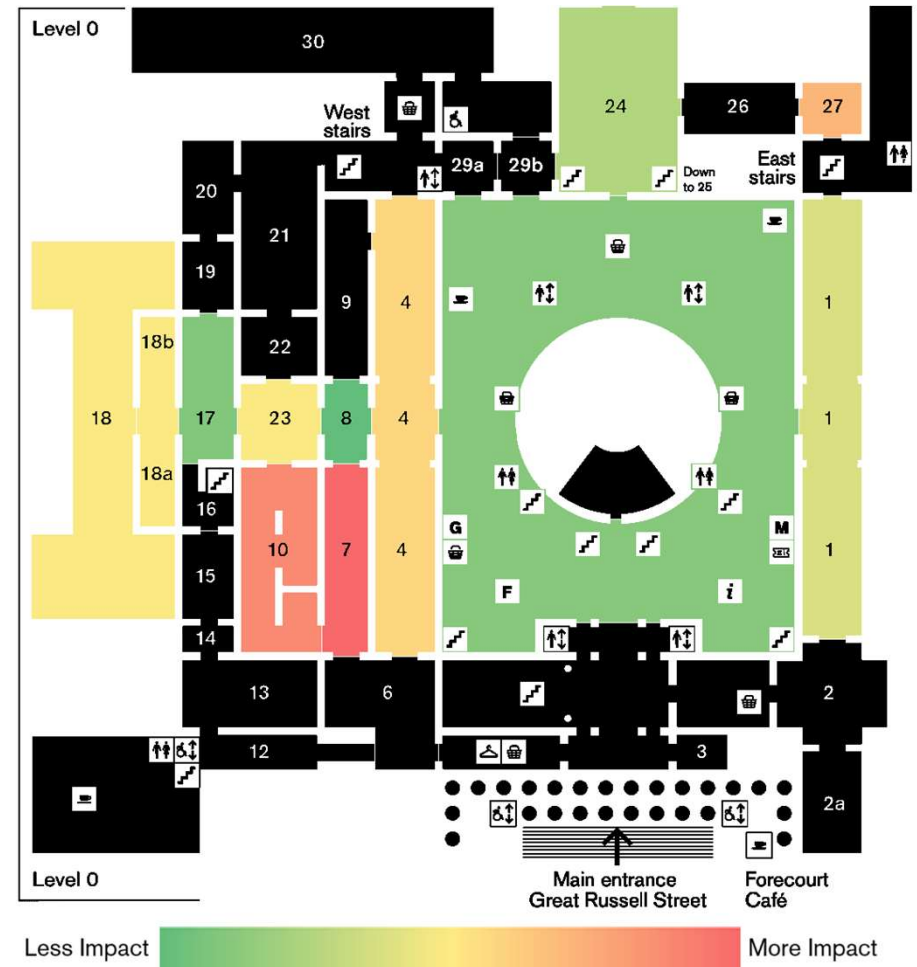
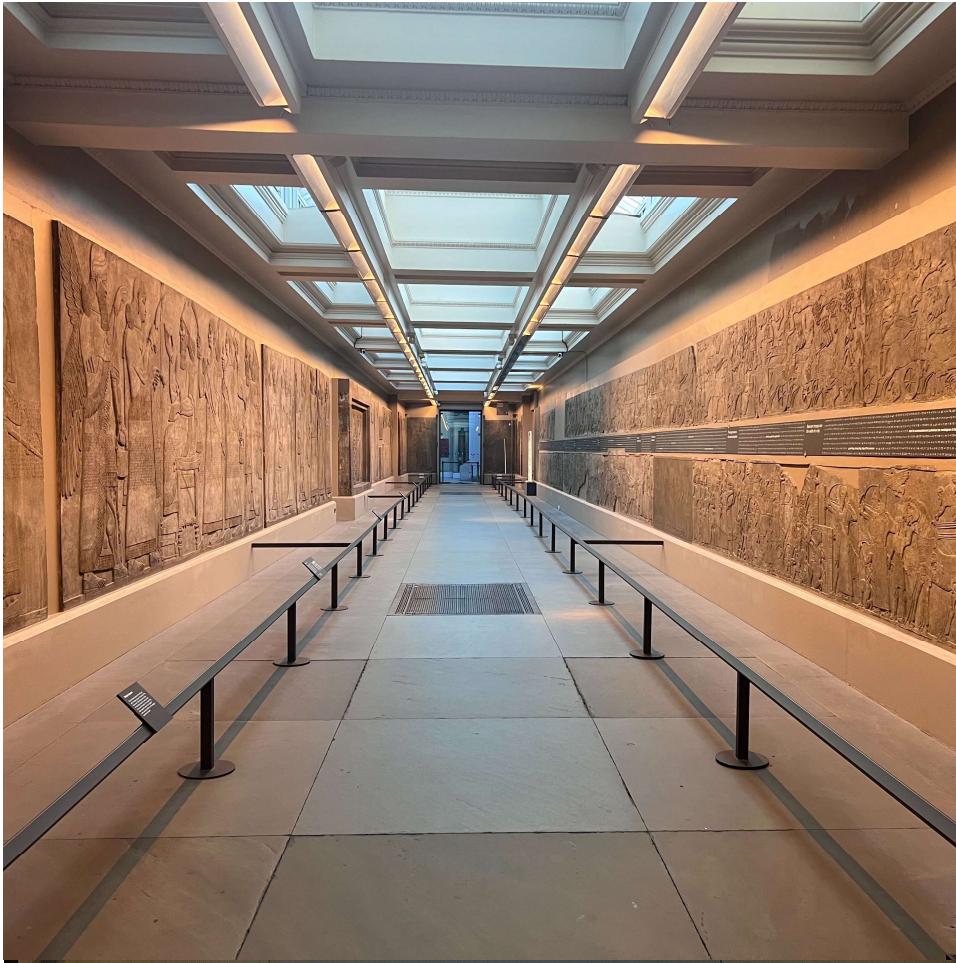
The typical ITG route



Layout changes could improve flow



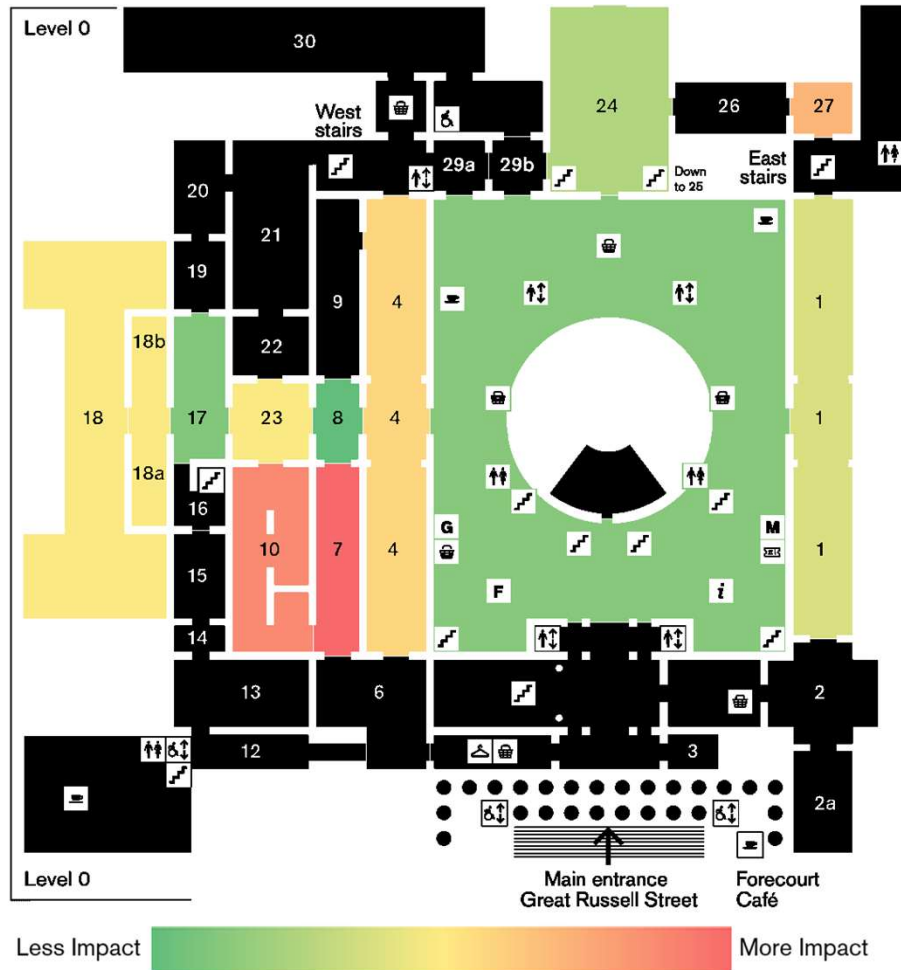
Visitors are impacted most in the Assyrian Galleries



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ITGs had the most friction with other private tours

Interviewed guides reported that it was **difficult to share space** with large tours.

Noise was a **consistent problem** for guides.



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Interviewed guides reported that it was **difficult to share space** with large tours.

Noise was a **consistent problem** for guides.

“I would skip objects if there are other groups around them or other guides taking a long time in front of it.”

“...there were lots of schools at the same time, so I had to scream a little bit.”

Changes to the tour guidelines could lessen impact of ITGs

Encourage use of amplification systems



Recommend shortening stops to 5 minutes



Restrict guiding in rooms 7 and 10

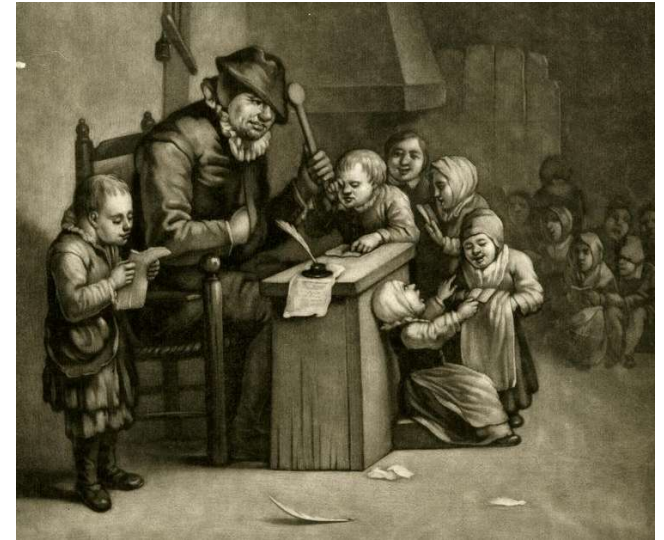
Further research is necessary to better contextualize the behaviour of ITGs



Summer research



Visitor perspective



School groups

This project would not have been possible without the help of:

British Museum Staff:

Stuart Frost, Natasha Furey,
Lisa D'Agostino

WPI Staff: Chrys Demetry, Rick
Vaz, Lorraine Higgins, Dominic
Golding

All guides we interviewed
and observed



Thank you for listening

Any questions?



References

Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (UK). (2024). *Number of visitors to the British Museum in London, England from 2011 to 2023 (in 1,000s)* [Graph]. Statista. <https://www-statista-com.ezpv7-web-p-u01.wpi.edu/statistics/422343/british-museum-visitor-numbers-uk/> (2)

British Museum: Overseas visitor numbers 2023. (n.d.). Statista. Retrieved December 6, 2024, from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/422375/british-museum-overseas-visitor-numbers-england-uk/> (2)

Guidelines for visiting as a tour group. (n.d.). The British Museum. (5)

Image Credits

Title slide (BM exterior): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:British_Museum_from_NE_2.JPG

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Slide 3 (guide illustration): <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/image/8220001>

Slide 4 (Map): <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/image/790091001>

Slide 7 (pillar statue): <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/image/1580905001>

Slide 8 (eyeglasses): <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/image/1508858001>

Slide 8 (spyglass): <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/image/462852001>

Slide 11 (Astrolabe): https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1909-0617-1

Slide 13 (interview illustration): <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/image/323548001>

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Slide 41 (Wall Panel): <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/image/184156001>

Slide 42 (summer picnic): <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/image/1613428698>

Slide 42 (National Gallery interior): <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/image/435129001>

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Slide 43 (Seated Buddha): <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/image/801348001>

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