

**Retreatant’s Guide**

**Welcome**

Thank you for joining us on retreat at Sunyata. These guidelines will help with the smooth running of your retreat, if you have further questions, speak to a team member. Please take a few minutes to review the contents and use as a reference guidefor your stay here**.**

**Sunyata Centre Tradition**

The centre is primarily devoted to the teaching of Vipassana or Insight Meditation as taught in the Thai Forest tradition of Theravada Buddhism in the lineage of Ajahn Chah and Ajahn Sumedho. Sunyata centre has a close practice relationship with Amaravati and Chithurst Buddhist monasteries in the UK.

Sunyata is a registered charityand run by a volunteer board of trustees. Everyone involved at the centre gives of their time, energy and dedication on a voluntary basis.

**Precepts**

These precepts are offered to guide the ethical behaviour of the Sunyata community. Retreatants, staff, teachers, board members, and volunteers are all expected to do their best to cultivate these precepts while at the Centre. They are intended as standards we can internalize as a foundation for our practice. Living by the precepts is an act of great generosity to all beings.

1. Harmlessness: not intentionally taking the life or hurting any living creature.
2. Trustworthiness: not taking anything that does not belong to you or has not been freely offered.
3. Celibacy: refraining from any sexual activity.
4. Right Speech: retreatants are asked to maintain ‘noble silence’, that is not engaging in any talk with each other, or anyone else, unless it is necessary.
5. Sobriety: not taking any intoxicating drinks or drugs.

**Monastic (retreats led by a monk or a nun) residential retreats adapt three additional precepts:**

1. Restraint: not wearing make-up, perfume or strongly-scented deodorant, jewellery or immodest clothing; not playing radios, music tapes or musical instruments.
2. Alertness: to refrain from overindulgence in sleep.
3. Refrain from eating after main meal

**Retreat Protocols**

**Noble Silence**

Most retreats at Sunyata are carried out in Noble Silence. This means that when the retreat begins the retreatants do not engage with each other in any kind of verbal communication until the end of the noble silence period (usually on the last day of the retreat). Retreatants are asked to refrain from all forms of communication with other retreatants and with the outside world, including phone calls, text messages, and internet. To minimise distraction for all, we ask that all mobile phones be switched off for the duration of the retreat.

If there are practical concerns relating to the above please speak with the managers. Also during work periods it may be necessary to speak briefly with the managers or with another retreatant in order to complete tasks. Requests to, for example, “pass the salt, please” are ok.

The teacher may invite questions during the retreat, either spoken or written, so you are welcome to respond accordingly in these instances. Common sense should prevail. With emergencies or in cases when it is deemed necessary and beneficial to say something then speech is appropriate.

We ask you respect other retreatants’ practice and their wish to remain in silence. Remember the retreat team is always available if you need to speak about something or find the silence overly challenging or would like to better understand its purpose.

**Monastics**

Nuns and monks abide by a code of conduct which limits interactions with members of the laity. As such the appropriate way of greeting a monastic is a simple smile and “hello” or if you feel so inclined, bringing your hands together in ‘Namaste’ and bowing slightly as a mark of respect. Please do not to offer a handshake or hug. This can unwittingly place the monastic in the uncomfortable position of rejecting your gesture or breaking one of their conduct rules.

Monastic rules forbid nuns and monks from being alone with a member of the opposite sex. Please be aware and sensitive to this. If conditions for this happen to materialize please check with the monastic if they would like to have a same sex team member present.

**Meditation Hall**

The meditation hall in Sunyata is a beautiful and respected place of practice. We ask that you help maintain the special qualities of the space and retreat by adhering to the following:

1. Talking in the meditation hall, should be kept to an absolute minimum as people like to spend time there because of its silence and stillness.
2. Please refrain from any contact with the shrine. Its aesthetic simplicity is part of the beauty of the space. All of this will be taken care of by the teacher and centre team.
3. Don’t take anything out of the meditation hall, such as blankets, cushions, stools, mats chanting books etc.
4. Please use the hall for meditation practice only. Please refrain from lying down or sleeping in the meditation hall. Should you be tired or stiff from meditation, avail of all the various tools to assist you in your meditation, such as chairs, meditation seats etc. If you would like to engage in yoga or other practices while here then have a chat with the centre team. We will find a spot for you.
5. Sitting with the soles of your feet pointing at the shrine or the teacher is considered disrespectful.
6. Arrive early to the practice sessions, at least five minutes before practice is due to start.
7. At the end of a practice session the protocol is to remain seated until after the teacher leaves the dharma hall.
8. Covered water bottles are permitted in the meditation hall. All other food or beverages are not permitted in the hall.
9. No footwear permitted in the meditation hall.

**Walking Meditation**

Walking meditation in this tradition is practiced by walking back and forth along a walking path. Choose a path maybe 15 to 20 paces long with a clear beginning and clear end, like a tree or rock so that you know when you have come to the end of the path. The idea of a defined path is to keep the mind contained and as free from distractions as possible.

**Meals**

All vegetarian meals are prepared by volunteers. Please ensure you have notified in your application of any dietary requirements you may have.

**Retreat Managers**

The retreat team are all experienced mediators. If you find yourself ‘struggling’ during the retreat and don’t feel like going to the teacher, please feel free to chat with a team member for support. They will be happy to help in any way.

**Personal Protocol**

**Clothing**

Please wear modest and comfortable clothing.

**Smoking**

Smoking is not permitted on the grounds of the centre or near the entrances. Many people avail of a retreat to let go of smoking so please be sensitive to the presence of others.

**Candles and Incense**

It is not permitted to burn candles or incense in any of the rooms. You may place and light these offerings only at the (outdoor) stupa in front of the meditation hall.

**Scents and Fragrances**

**Please be sparing with the use of all products with a fragrance**. Many teachers and attendees, we have learned, are allergy sensitive and have strong reactions to perfumes. Please minimize or eliminate the use of all scented products.

**Sundries**

We have some toiletry items like toothpaste, shaving cream, paracetamol, etc. available from the office for a small donation. If you notice before we do that a toilet needs paper or a clean towel, please let a team member know.

**Developing Sunyata Buddhist Centre**

Sunyata is run by volunteers. We are always happy to receive offers of generosity in whatever way they are expressed. If you are willing to offer a skill, expertise or some of your time to help with the maintenance and development of the centre, please leave your information with a team member at the end of the retreat.

**Donations**

We’re often asked about guidelines for donations toward the cost of retreats. We’ve calculated that the yearly cost of running the Centre is approximately €45 per retreatant per day. Please give more if you can! The Centre relies totally on the generosity of those who come – it is our only source of income. We have a €300,000 mortgage in place. The centre is run by volunteers so whatever you give will go toward the upkeep of Sunyata. We most gratefully appreciate your donations.

**Safety,Fire Assembly and First Aid**

* The location of the fire assembly point is the car park.
* A first aid box is in the lobby below the dining area just beside the centres office

**Departure**

Retreatants are asked to stay until the scheduled end of the retreat. This consideration supports the continuity of the environment and minimizes disruptions caused by packing and departure activities while others are still in retreat. Early departures of a non-emergency nature fall outside the retreat centre guidelines. If you have to depart early please inform the centre team and they will let the teacher know.

**Additional Information**

**Walks**

At the top-end of Sunyata, through the woods, there is a river and waterfall. The pathway and steps to get there can become quite slippery so please walk with care and attention. There is a long signposted walk called the 12 o’clock hills. To complete the full loop is about a 2 – 2 ½ hrs walk. It’s steep and can become muddy and slippery. If you would like further information about it please ask a centre team member. For safety reasons, if you are going to do the walk please let a team member know before heading off.

**Reading Materials**

All Dharma books and audios on the shelves in the entrance section of the meditation hall are available to take away with you. These are offered free of charge. Please note that it is disrespectful to place Dhamma written materials or Dhamma objects directly on the floor. Place them on your cushion, a cloth etc.

***Enjoy your stay with us and make the most of it. Please let us know of anything that will help improve the retreatant’s experience.***