



# Guidance for Retreats



## Welcome

Welcome to an ALBA Retreat at the Amaravati Retreat Centre (RC). ALBA retreats are led by experienced lay Buddhist teachers. The main focus is the cultivation of mindfulness and insight through sitting and walking meditation, instruction, talks and discussion in the Theravada Thai Forest Tradition.

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## Programme

The programme for the retreat is created by the teacher. You will see these at the entrance to the RC, shrine room, kitchen and the dorms. There will be a wake-up bell and bells at the start of each session and end of walking meditation. You do not need to bring an alarm.

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## Donations

We are fortunate that we are able to hold ALBA retreats at Amaravati Retreat Centre. There is no charge for attending retreats at Amaravati. The teachings are given freely, as is the accommodation, food, and all the other facilities available during your retreat. This is in keeping with the Thai Forest Tradition as practised here at Amaravati. We are able to continue offering retreats due to the generosity of past retreatants, and all future retreats will be dependent on that generosity. Please do not feel under any pressure to make a donation, or to give a particular amount. Whatever you are able and inspired to give is gratefully received.

You can make a contribution towards the running of the Retreat Centre in the following ways:

- Card donation - at the beginning and end of the retreat (a machine will be provided in the RC and is available in the Temple and Sala, please chose 'Retreat center - ALBA/BWN' option when making a donation)
- Online card payment - once you get home (via the Amaravati website).
- Cash or cheque - at the end of the retreat in a donation bowl in the Retreat Centre. Cheques should be payable to the English Sangha Trust (we prefer people to donate by card or online if possible).
- Standing order – You can make a regular donation by standing order (a form can be downloaded from the Amaravati Retreat Centre website). Please write ALBA at the top.
- By bank transfer to the English Sangha Trust. The Retreat Centre bank details are on the Standing Order form.

Please gift aid your donation if you are a UK taxpayer.

When making a donation please choose the 'Retreat center - ALBA/BWN' fund and put ALBA in the reference if possible. It is helpful if you can make your donation on the same or the next day so this can be allocated as an ALBA donation.

It is also possible to offer generosity in the form of volunteering with ALBA, the Retreat Centre and main monastery. Please enquire at the end of the retreat.

Thank you for your generosity.

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## Mobile phones and messages

Mobiles, laptops, iPads, iPods etc. should not be used within the Amaravati grounds. You are not allowed to charge electrical devices in the RC. Please keep phones switched off, on do not disturb or airplane mode. In case of an emergency, if someone needs to contact you, they can call or send a text message to 07949319653. We do not have access to the RC office phone either before or during the retreat.

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## Noble Silence

'Noble silence' is an important part of the ALBA retreat experience. Noble silence gives us the opportunity to not engage in conversation with others unless absolutely necessary. This can be thought of as a gift that we have so rarely in today's society. It helps to quieten the mind and allows us to have the space and time to reflect inwardly and observe our minds, thoughts and feelings. The retreat will be silent except for periods set aside for discussion, activities or questions. Clearly you should use your judgment and speak if necessary. There will be opportunities to talk to others during the final mealtime.

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## Food

We provide breakfast and a main lunchtime meal. All food is vegetarian or vegan. Please let us know if you have a particular dietary requirement for medical reasons. If you require a light meal in the evening, this will consist of bread and cheese or your own food. Please note that retreat participants cannot use cooking facilities.

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## What to wear

Out of respect for the monastic community living on site and to not distract other retreatants, retreatants are asked to dress modestly. This includes:

- not wearing sleeveless tee-shirts, tops or dresses
- not wearing short or tight-fitting clothing or leggings without an outer layer of clothing
- not wearing low or plunging necklines or transparent clothing
- not wearing shorts, skirts, or dresses which end above the knees

It is advisable to wear comfortable, loose-fitting clothing for sitting meditation, and suitable outdoor clothing and footwear for walking meditation, according to the time of year. You do not need to wear white.

Washing machines are not available, but it is possible to hand-wash small items of clothing, and spin dryers and drying rooms (off both dorms) are available for retreatants to use.

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## What to bring

Please bring the following items:

- All retreatants are asked to bring a duvet cover, sheet, pillow case, and towels. (Duvet, pillow and blankets are provided, and there are communal towels for hand washing)
- Toiletries (non-fragranced); including, soap, shampoo, shaving items, sanitary items, toothbrush
- A small torch
- A watch (as you will not have your phone for telling the time)
- Thick, non-slip socks or slippers (Shoes are not worn indoors)

It may be useful to bring

- A hot water bottle in winter
  - A shawl for the shrine room
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## Sitting and walking meditation

For sitting meditation, we provide cushions, kneeling stools and chairs. You are also welcome to bring your own cushion or kneeling stool. Both sitting and walking meditation sessions usually last for 40 to 45 minutes. If you find that you are suffering from excessive discomfort, feel free to take up a standing posture. There are opportunities to sit in meditation for longer.

You are welcome to use the field at the back of the RC or the cloisters near the temple for walking meditation. Please do not enter areas marked 'private'. Do not use the temple or shrine room for walking meditation. If it is raining, you can use the south corridor of the RC.

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## Working meditation

Working meditation periods are an opportunity to practice mindfulness whilst doing a simple task in silence. The session lasts for approximately 40 minutes each day. Tasks include activities such as chopping vegetables, washing up and cleaning washrooms. Instructions for each task are provided. Health and safety information is provided as a separate document.

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## Mindful movement

There may be opportunities for mindful exercise during ALBA events. These may be Qi Gong, Yoga or similar exercises intended to encourage mindful presence. The organized exercises are voluntary and it is important that you respect any physical disabilities or health issues you may be experiencing and avoid movement that causes discomfort. You

also can use your room and lounge space for your own mindful exercise during breaks. You can do Qi Gong (but not inverted Yoga poses) in the field as well.

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## Questions and answers

There will be opportunities to ask the teacher questions about Buddhist teachings and meditation practice. If during your stay you have any queries about a housekeeping matter please approach the retreat manager or one of the organisers.

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## Eight Precepts

All participants are expected to keep the Eight Precepts whilst on retreat. They offer a way of living together morally, ethically and harmoniously, causing ourselves and each other as little suffering as possible.

1. Harmlessness: not intentionally taking the life of any living creature.
  2. Trustworthiness: not taking anything that is not offered.
  3. Celibacy: refraining from any sexual activity.
  4. Right Speech: avoiding false, abusive or malicious speech and idle chatter. Whilst on retreat keeping Noble Silence.
  5. Sobriety: not taking any intoxicating drinks or drugs that lead to carelessness.
  6. Renunciation: not eating after midday. (It is possible to have a light snack in the evening if you need to do so for medical reasons)
  7. Restraint: not wearing make-up, perfume, jewellery or immodest clothing; not texting, emailing, making telephone calls or using the internet; not playing or listening to music, or watching TV.
  8. Alertness: refraining from overindulgence in sleep.
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## Reading books on retreat

The retreat experience is an opportunity to be present with your own experience, rather than to read about the experiences of others. However, it is okay to read books about Buddhism in free time on the retreat if you find this helpful. A selection of books for free distribution are normally put out in the RC lounges.

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## Chanting and bowing

In Thai Forest monasteries in the West, including Amaravati, chanting during pujas is in Pāli\* and/or English. Chanting books are provided. Joining in with the chanting is completely optional. Bowing is also optional. Bowing to the shrine is done out of respect and gratitude to the Buddha, the Dhamma (his teachings) and the Sangha (those who have embraced his teachings); it is not an act of worship.

\* Pāli is the language of the scriptures of Theravada Buddhism.



*May the light of wisdom arise within you*