

Guest Guidelines for Aloka Vihara Forest Monastery

This information is intended as a support for your visit. You can use these guidelines to help make the decision to visit, to help prepare for your visit and to help you during your time at the monastery.

Our aim is to provide an environment conducive to Dhamma practice and service, in a skillful and harmonious way. This is made possible through the active co-operation and participation of all who live and visit here.

Please read the following items thoroughly and direct any questions/concerns that arise to the Guest Coordinator before confirming your visit. You will be asked to agree with the Guest Guidelines before a visit can be confirmed.

Considerations before your visit:

The items explained below will be helpful in making the decision for a visit as well as when you prepare for your visit to the monastery.

➤ Living on Eight Precepts

All guests are asked to keep the Eight Precepts during their stay. The Precepts are given during a simple ceremony by one of the Guest Nun and taken by guests as a commitment to living together in a community that fosters trust, harmlessness and simplicity. We encourage you to enter into the spirit of monastic life and renunciation while you are at the vihara. In this way, you can reap the full benefits of the experience and use it as a means of 'letting go'.

1. I undertake the precept to refrain from taking the life of any living creature.
2. I undertake the precept to refrain from taking that which is not given.
3. I undertake the precept to refrain from any kind of sexual activity.
4. I undertake the precept to refrain from false and harmful speech.
5. I undertake the precept to refrain from consuming intoxicating drink and drugs, which lead to carelessness.
6. I undertake the precept to refrain from eating at inappropriate times.
7. I undertake the precept to refrain from entertainment, beautification and adornment.
8. I undertake the precept to refrain from lying on a high or luxurious sleeping place (not indulging in sleep).

➤ Length of Stay and Arrival Dates/Times

The minimum duration for staying at the vihara is one week. The maximum duration for a new guest is three weeks, with a community review after the first week to ensure a mutually beneficial visit.

We ask that guests arrive and depart between Wednesdays and Sundays. Please plan your arrival/departure times to be between 8 am to 6 pm. If you will not be driving yourself to the monastery, you will need to discuss Public Transportation options with the Guest Coordinator.

➤ Accommodations

There is space for up to three female guests in a dormitory. This is on the second floor of the building next to the main house, accessible by a flight of stairs. A sense of privacy is created with the use of room dividers. The dorm currently does not have a bathroom. Guests can either walk over to the main house to use the guest bathroom or a portable 'potty' can be provided upon request.

Please let us know **if you snore loudly**, as our dorm is a shared sleeping place and we may need to make other arrangements.

Our comfortable trailer is a private space, which is available for individual use by a man or a transgender person.

➤ Weekly Schedule

All guests are expected to join in the daily activities as outlined in the Weekly Schedule (attached at the end of this document). The following is the typical daily schedule:

5:00am – Wake Up

5:30am – Morning Puja (meditation and chanting)

7:00am – Breakfast

7:45am – Morning Community Meeting

8:30am – Work Offering

11:00 or 11:45am (DST) – Main Meal & Washing Up

1:00pm – Open Period (for personal practice and study)

7:00pm – Evening Puja (chanting and meditation)

Please Note: there is no Morning Community Meeting on Mondays and Tuesdays, when the vihara observes Quiet Days.

The schedule provides a strong support for life at the monastery. Arriving to activities in a timely manner contributes significantly to the supportive environment. Being able to tolerate changes in the schedule is also important for harmonious living.

➤ What to Bring/Dress Code

We suggest that all guests bring the following: a sunhat, sunscreen, sunglasses, flashlight, work clothes and walking shoes. Footwear that can be easily put on/taken off are useful to have with you as well, as shoes are not worn indoors. Warm things and rain gear are needed during the winter months and lighter clothing during the summer. A light shawl can be brought to be worn during meditation periods.

If you are driving yourself to the monastery, please bring one of each of the following: fitted sheet, top sheet, pillowcase and bath towel for your personal use.

Please dress modestly and pack your clothing accordingly. We ask that you refrain from wearing tank tops and any skirts/shorts that fall above the knee.

➤ **Internet/Phone/Cell phone Access**

There is no WiFi access for guests at the vihara. If there is need to go online, you can use the Guest Computer for up to two hours per week, between 3-6 pm on Wednesdays to Sundays. This limitation is to support your time here, being an opportunity for inner contemplation and slowing down. If you need to print a boarding pass or other tickets, you may do so with the assistance of the Guest Coordinator.

We also recommend keeping phone calls to a minimum to support quiet introspection. Currently, there is limited coverage for some cell phone providers only. If you need to make a phone call during your visit, you may use the vihara landline.

➤ **Expectations for Work Offering**

At the Morning Community Meeting, the Work Nun will explain the work offerings for the morning. As a guest, you may be asked to cook on some of the days during your visit. Or you will be involved in projects needing attention around the vihara. You will have the opportunity to discuss with the Work Nun any physical limitations you may have so that you are offering the kind of service that is aligned with your abilities.

If you are asked to cook, the Kitchen Manager will guide you in the preparation of the meals on the days you are assigned to cook. You will also be expected to help with Washing Up and other light chores during your visit.

You may also be asked to help with driving for the monastery using the vihara's car.

Guests staying for more than one week will be offered one day per week that is free of responsibilities.

During your Visit:

➤ **Who to ask when you have a question**

For questions concerning your accommodations, keeping Eight Precepts, etiquette, dietary restrictions and other issues regarding the monastery, please direct them to the Guest Nun.

For questions concerning the Work Offering, please direct them to the Work Nun.

For questions concerning the meals, evening allowables and cooking duties, please direct them to the Kitchen Manager.

➤ **Food/Evening Allowables**

Food is offered at Breakfast and the Main Meal. We expect guests to keep the Eight Precepts with regards to not eating after midday. Certain items, such as dark chocolate, cheese and crystalized ginger, can be eaten in the evening as an "allowable". If you are in need of these evening allowables, we ask guests to bring their own supply.

If you have a medical need for non-allowable food in the evening, an exception can be made after discussing it with the Guest Nun. If you have food allergies or any other dietary restrictions, please let the Guest Coordinator know as you confirm your visit.

Guests should not help themselves to food in the fridge or cupboards. Hot drinks and soymilk are available in the afternoons.

➤ **Monastic Etiquette**

Buddhist monasteries have certain social conventions intended to support mindfulness and a sense of respect in everyday interactions. For people visiting the monastery who are unfamiliar with the etiquette, it can sometimes feel intimidating. Please know that a well-intentioned attitude is much more important than getting all of the details right. You can always ask one of the nuns or a lay supporter if you have any questions regarding monastic etiquette.

- When addressing a nun, it is appropriate to use the title “Ayya” or “Sister.”
- It is not in accordance with the training rules for a nun to be alone with a man or to hug a man.
- A nun cannot receive or handle money. Instead, lay supporters manage donations that are offered to support the nuns.
- In the monastery, it is traditional to “pay respect” (bow three times) to the image of the Buddha when entering or leaving the shrine room. This is a suggestion, but not a requirement.
- In Buddhist cultures, it is considered impolite to extend one’s legs and point one’s feet to a Buddha statue or towards people.
- Lying down in the shrine room is also considered inappropriate, unless for health reasons.

➤ **Needs outside of the monastery**

If you are in need of any supplies that require a trip into town, please inform the Guest Nun. Either the items can be purchased for you on the next shopping trip or you will be permitted to drive yourself to acquire what is needed.

If you need to perform computer-related work that requires your personal computer, please discuss this with the Guest Nun. There are cafes nearby and in town with WiFi that can be visited for this purpose.

We ask that you limit your time outside of the monastery to a minimum to support slowing down and inner reflection.

➤ **Laundry Access**

Guests may use the washing machine once per week, after a resident has instructed them on its use. There are no dryer facilities at the monastery. There are two clotheslines near the guest dormitory for drying your laundry. Handwashing is also available for smaller loads/items.

➤ **Things to be aware of**

The long-term residents maintain stewardship over the land and requisites provided to the monastery. There are several ways to help us be mindful and careful with the limited resources of Mother Earth:

- Please use only the necessary minimum of energy and water during your visit.
- Remember to turn off lights if you are the last to leave a room. There are nightlights situated throughout the vihara, which will turn on when the main light is switched off.
- Buckets are placed in each bathroom to capture “grey” water from your shower. You can then use the collected “grey” water to flush the toilets or water outdoor plants.

There is both poison oak and ticks on the property. We will help educate you in taking the necessary precautions.

There are many animals that share the land with the residents of the monastery. Be mindful of your surroundings and tread lightly on the land.

➤ **The practice of giving is the beginning of the Path**

At Aloka Vihara your presence and practice are valued and appreciated. We are continuing the rich and vital interdependence between lay people and monastics, as set forth by the Buddha. Everything here, from tea to electricity to the house and land itself, is the result of the generosity of many people. To the extent that you are able, we would be grateful for your contribution, which will benefit you, the monastics and those who come after you.

No one will be turned away for lack of a donation.

Last Words

One who transforms old and heedless ways

Into fresh and wholesome acts

Brings light into the world

Like the moon freed from the clouds.

Dhammapada 173