

Amaravati Lay Buddhist Association (ALBA)
INFORMATION FOR RETREATANTS

Please read this information carefully before booking on a retreat.

We recommend you print and bring this information sheet with you for reference during the retreat.

If you have any questions, please email us on buddhacommunity@gmail.com

Friday timetable:

- 5.00-7.00pm Arrival & Registration - retreat centre kitchen
- 6.00pm Light meal (soup)
- 7.15pm Orientation Talk - retreat centre kitchen
- 8.00pm Welcome, introduction & opening meditation - shrine room
- 9.30pm Own time – lights out at 10pm

Subsequent days usually start at 5.30am. Weekend retreats end at 4pm and 5 day retreats end at 2pm on the last day.

The monastery gates close at 9:30pm. If you are delayed and expect to arrive after registration ends at 7pm it is helpful to send a text to the emergency number, which you will find below. Should you arrive after registration has ended, please come to the retreat centre kitchen where accommodation arrangements are displayed on the board by the door. If you would like to arrive early to help prepare soup please let us know.

Please bring: Sheets, pillow cases and towels (blankets, sleeping bags and pillows are available), warm waterproof clothing and footwear, thick socks or slippers (no shoes are worn indoors), comfortable, modest and loose fitting clothing and a small torch.

Mobile phones and messages: Mobiles, laptops, iPads, iPods etc. should not be used within the Amaravati grounds and you are not allowed to charge mobile electrical devices in the Retreat Centre. In case of an emergency if someone needs to contact you they can send a text message to 0771 883 5958. We do not have access to the Retreat Centre office phone either before or during the retreat. A pay phone is available in the monastery.

Donations: We are very fortunate that ALBA retreats take place at Amaravati Buddhist Monastery. The Retreat Centre estimates the cost of running retreats at £60 for a weekend and £100 for a five-day retreat, including food. These costs are met out of donations made at previous retreats. We ask you to make a donation towards future retreats so that others may benefit. We welcome any donation, either greater or smaller than £60/£100, depending on what you can afford. No deposit is required. You will be invited to make your donation at registration by cash or cheque (cheques payable to The English Sangha Trust).

Retreat programme: ALBA retreats are led by experienced lay Buddhist meditation teachers. The programme for the retreat is created by the teacher. The main focus is the cultivation of mindfulness through sitting and walking meditation, instruction, talks and discussion. Newcomers to meditation and Buddhism are always welcome.

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.

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.

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

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.

Mindful movement: There are usually opportunities for mindful exercise during ALBA events. These may be Qi Gong, Yoga or similar exercises intended to encourage mindful presence. The 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.

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.

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 are available for retreatants to use.

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.

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 OK 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 Retreat Centre lounges.

Chanting and bowing: In Thai Forest monasteries in the West, including Amaravati Retreat Centre, 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.*