



Guide to Visiting a Gurdwara

When visiting a new house of worship, begin with respect, mindfulness, and awareness. Here are some tips to help you be prepared when visiting a gurdwara, or Sikh house of worship.

When You Arrive at the Gurdwara

- Be sure to **wear clothing that covers your shoulders and knees**. Shorts and dresses are not appropriate. It is recommended that you opt for looser fitting clothing as **you will be sitting down on the floor**.
- All attendees **should cover their head with a bandana, cloth, or scarf** before entering the structure. A hat is not an appropriate head covering. If you don't remember to bring one, ask someone near the entrance inside—most gurdwaras keep extra head coverings on hand for visitors.
- All attendees should **remove their shoes and wash their hands before entering the prayer hall**. There will be an area for you to store your shoes; there may be a sink to wash hands outside the prayer hall, but if not, you can go to the bathroom near the entrance to do so.
- **All intoxicants, including alcohol, tobacco, or drugs (controlled substances) are prohibited on gurdwara premises**, including in the parking lot.
- There are **no restrictions** on women visiting the gurdwara during their periods.

Inside The Prayer Hall

- If it is the first time in the day that you are entering the prayer hall, it is customary to acknowledge the **Guru Granth Sahib (sacred Sikh scripture)**. Most do this by walking up to the front of the prayer hall and bowing before the scripture. You can watch people ahead of you and see how they bow—normally by placing their heads on the floor to show respect. If you do not feel comfortable bowing, it is appropriate to simply walk directly over to your seat and sit down.
- **Avoid turning your back or pointing your feet toward the Guru Granth Sahib** as much as possible.
- In many gurdwarae in the United States, **men sit on one side of the prayer hall and women sit on the other side**. This is not religiously based but rather a cultural norm as people may be sitting in tight quarters.
- **Be conscious of your use of flash photography** inside the prayer hall. Gurdwarae do not typically prohibit photography, but it is polite to ask.
- Be mindful of talking or speaking in the prayer hall, or using your phone. **Clapping is also not appropriate**.
- Do not walk up onto the podium or stage inside the prayer hall.
- As you leave the prayer hall, there may be people sitting next to the entrance offering **parshad (sweet offerings)**. It is customary to kneel down and accept the parshad with folded hands. Parshad may also be passed around by volunteers as services conclude; the same protocol for accepting it applies.



Langar

- **Any person can take part in *langar*, the free community kitchen and meal prepared by volunteers** that is typically served in the langar hall of the gurdwara during or after services. It is alright to politely decline food, especially if you are allergic or have specific dietary restrictions—consume what you are comfortable with. Be sure to still wear your head covering.
- In the langar hall, it is customary to sit on the floor on mats with everyone.



In general, know that you can always approach someone at the gurdwara for assistance or with questions—folks are usually more than happy to help, and even give you a tour!

Learn more by emailing community@sikhcoalition.org or visiting www.sikhcoalition.org.