

Dear xx,

In light of your planned IMS retreat, we're getting in touch regarding practice at IMS.

It is the responsibility of the organization's Guiding Teachers (GTs) to create a harmonious environment at our two centers – the Retreat Center and the Forest Refuge – where all who come to practice meditation feel welcome, safe, included and cared for.

This is addressed quite clearly in IMS's Diversity Vision Statement:

"In offering a spiritual refuge for awakening, IMS is committed to cultivating a community that reflects the diversity of our society and our world. We believe that all members benefit from diversity, as a wide range of human experiences and viewpoints broadens and enriches the understanding of all. We seek to promote the inclusion and participation of people of diverse identities, including those of all races, ethnicities, cultures, sexual orientations, gender identities, classes, religions, abilities, and ages, that all may feel welcome, safe, and respected within this community."

We are well aware of the debt we owe to the Ordained Sangha in preserving the Buddha-Dhamma over the centuries, and we strive to ensure that meditators from the Ordained Sangha have the opportunity to spend time on retreat at our centers.

And, we also have a responsibility to care for the staff who run the centers. Their work is often invisible to course participants, and yet without our staff, retreats could not happen. We value the wonderful people who serve in staff roles, and have a duty to ensure that excessive demands are not placed on their time and energy.

In keeping with our responsibilities, we offer the following guidelines and suggestions, and ask that you consider these before arriving for your retreat.

Offering of Meals

IMS does its best to provide high quality, vegetarian food as well as gluten and dairy-free alternatives.

The Kitchen has established a standard when offering food to those in robes. The food table(s) will be offered in a simple way to a member of the Ordained Sangha who will accept the offering on behalf of all. Ordained Sangha will serve themselves before the table is made available to lay people. Please plan to arrive a few minutes early for the meal offering, so that the meal service can take place in a timely manner. Of course, it is always fine for you to simply go through the meal service line along with the lay retreatants, if you prefer.

Once the timing for offering the meal has been agreed on by an Ordained Sangha teacher or retreatant, together with the Kitchen, please accept the meal at that time. This may mean eating after the local clock time of 12:00 noon. However, if you feel this would compromise your relationship to the Vinaya, please speak to the IMS retreat manager about your concerns, prior to arrival.

Seating in the Meditation Hall

IMS seeks to be a safe and welcoming place for all, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. We ask that you refrain from requesting special seating that would mean rearranging the existing set up in the meditation hall. If you feel you need to sit in a particular place in the hall that would require a rearrangement

or asking another retreatant to move, please check with the manager before making changes. Please bear in mind we may not be able to accommodate your preference.

Expressions of Seniority

We understand and respect that, according to the Vinaya Pitaka, all bhikkhus are 'senior' to all bhikkhunis, irrespective of years in the order. You may be aware, however, that this is often seen by lay people in the West as indicative of gender inequality. With this in mind, we respectfully ask that you bring as much sensitivity as possible to situations where expressions of seniority may be a factor.

Modesty of Attire

IMS does its best to encourage some degree of modesty of attire for all retreatants, staff and teachers. However, please bear in mind that the guidelines we suggest will undoubtedly be subject to individual interpretation, and may not always meet your expectations.

Patience

Many of those who attend IMS retreats have little or no connection to the monastic tradition, and may be confused about appropriate etiquette when in the presence of Ordained Sangha. Your patience and forbearance is greatly appreciated.

In closing, we ask that you contact IMS if you have questions about these guidelines, or if any points are unacceptable to you.

With appreciation for your reflection and thoughtfulness on this,
The Guiding Teachers – Guy Armstrong, Rebecca Bradshaw, Christina Feldman, Joseph Goldstein, Narayan Liebenson, Kamala Masters, Sharon Salzberg, DaRa Williams and Carol Wilson