

Information about Meditation Centers in Sri Lanka

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by

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Introduction

There are many monasteries and meditation centers in Sri Lanka, but only few of these are suitable for foreigners who are new to Sri Lanka and only stay for a short time. The following information is specifically intended for them. Both males and females can stay in all of these places, albeit separate.

The only place where strict, guided ten day courses are held is Dhamma Kuta Meditation Center. For those who are new to Buddhism, Nilambe Meditation Centre or Dhammakuta Meditation Centre will be suitable. The moderate climate in the hill country around Kandy is more agreeable to those who come from a cool or temperate climate.

Most lay meditation centers charge a small amount of money for the lodgings and food. In monastic meditation centers such as Kanduboda there are no charges, but a donation is appreciated.

If one is going to stay in a meditation centre, then it is important to bring all basic personal requisites, such as towels, bed-sheets, toiletry, soap, mosquito repellent, vitamins, medicines, alarm clock, torch, batteries, umbrella, etc., as they are probably not available in the centre.

It is important to respect the local customs and etiquette. Although in the big towns things appear very modern and westernized, Sri Lankan culture is still quite traditional. It is normal that laypeople who stay in Buddhist monasteries or meditation centers wear white clothes that cover the whole body. Please don't wear revealing dress, and stay aloof from members of the other sex. When visiting a monastery for the first time it is best to ask a Sinhalese friend to accompany one to give advice with regards the customs and appropriate conduct.

Sri Lanka is a good place to practice patience, simplicity, and renunciation. Conditions in meditation centers and monasteries can be simple and somewhat uncomfortable for those used to luxuries and comforts. The food is generally fairly plain and simple, and it can be quite spicy. Many people in Sri Lanka are vegetarian, therefore in many meditation centers and monasteries no meat or fish is served. In some centers fish might be served occasionally, but if one is a vegetarian one can easily refuse without offending anyone. Only a breakfast

and lunch are provided in meditation centers. Milk tea and perhaps biscuits will usually be available in the late afternoon or early evening.

There are few infectious diseases in Sri Lanka. However, in some areas, mostly around Colombo, there can be epidemics of dengue fever and chikungunya fever. These diseases are spread by mosquitoes that bite during the day time. It is therefore always good to protect oneself against mosquito bites by using mosquito nets and repellents. The drinking water is generally of good quality, nevertheless it is always safer to drink boiled water. The monastery or meditation centre one is staying in can help with finding a doctor or hospital if one needs medical care. It is advisable to use a mosquito-net while sleeping in forest and rural areas so as to keep away mosquitoes and snakes and other dangerous creatures such as scorpions, centipedes, etc.

Public transport is cheap and widely available in Sri Lanka, but one has to be prepared to undergo some hardships. Due to road conditions, hectic traffic and frequent stops it takes time to get to a place by bus. Cars or minibuses with drivers can be hired. There are many traffic accidents in Sri Lanka so it is important to wear seat belts and to avoid traveling at night. Three-wheelers are a convenient mode of transport for shorter distances but make sure to settle the price with the driver before getting into one. Trains are the most comfortable and safest way of traveling long distances.

The book *Sacred Island* by S. Dhammika—published by the Buddhist Publication Society (BPS)—gives detailed information regarding ancient monasteries, sacred sites and pilgrimage places in Sri Lanka.

Kandy District

Nilambe Meditation Centre

Nilambe, Galaha. Telephone 0777-804555 between 6pm and 9pm. E-mail address: upulnilambe@yahoo.com

Website: <http://nilambe.net/contact-us.php>

The most popular lay meditation centre in Sri Lanka for western travelers and backpackers. Both males and females can stay here. The center charges Rs. 800 a day to foreigners for lodgings and food. Although there is a relaxed and friendly atmosphere, there is a strict daily schedule and little talking. It is situated in an abandoned tea-estate on top of a mountain-range 15 kilometers south of Peradeniya, near Kandy. It is a quiet area with a cool climate and beautiful views. There is no electricity and conditions are simple. Normally one can come any day and join in, but occasionally short retreats are held. It is best to contact the centre at least two weeks before coming.

Godwin Samararatne, a respected meditation teacher, used to be the teacher here. Now the resident teacher is Mr. Upul Gamage. Other teachers also come occasionally.

From Kandy take a bus to Deltota or Galaha and get off at the Nilambe Bungalow junction, 17 kms after Peradeniya (conductors know the place). From there it is a fairly steep but scenic 40 minutes walk through tea plantations, or one can take a threewheeler. It takes about more than an hour to get to the Nilambe junction when traveling by bus from Kandy.

Dhamma Kuta Vipassana Meditation Centre

Mowbray, Galaha Road, Hindagala, Peradeniya.

Tel.: Phone: [94](0)81-2385774; (0)81-3837800. Email: info@kuta.dhamma.org. Website:

<http://courses.dhamma.org/en/schedules/schkuta>

A meditation centre where Vipassana meditation courses are given in the tradition of Sayagi U Ba Khin, as taught by S.N. Goenka. The centre is located in an abandoned tea estate on a mountain slope. Beautiful views and cool climate. Only intensive 10-day meditation courses are held here, both for males and female. One is not allowed to talk during the courses, except for interviews with the teacher, and there are several group sittings during the day. There are no fixed charges for the courses, but donations are welcome. It is best to book well in advance as the courses are often booked out. One can not stay here before and after courses.

There are two other Vipassana Meditation Centres in the low country, one, called Dhamma Sobha, is at Kosgama near Avissavella (see <http://www.sobha.dhamma.org>), and the other one, called Dhamma Anuradha, is at Kurundankulama near Anuradhapura (see <http://courses.dhamma.org/en/schedules/schanuradha>).

About 5 km from Peradeniya. Take a Deltota or Galaha bus from Kandy and get out Mowbray, Hindagala. From there take a threewheeler up the mountain or walk, which is more than half an hour walking.

Colombo District

Siyane Vipassana Meditation Centre or Kanduboda Vipassana Meditation Centre

Kanduboda, Delgoda. Tel. 011-2445518; 011-2570306.

E-mail: siyanevipassana@yahoo.com

Website: <http://www.insight-meditation.org>

A meditation centre and monastery with a long tradition of offering meditation instruction to Westerners. Meditation is taught according to the Burmese meditation tradition of Mahāsi Sayādaw. Women stay in a separate area. There are a few large buildings with rooms and some separate huts. It is surrounded by coconut plantations. Warm and humid climate.

The daily schedule and discipline is more relaxed than in the Mahāsi centers in Burma and there is more individual meditation than group meditation. There is no charge for the lodgings and food, but donations are welcome.

The centre is approximately 20 kms east of Colombo. From the CTB Bus Station at Olcott Mawatha, Pettah, take the 224 bus to Pugoda which stops outside the monastery. The 207 bus from Gampaha goes there. The bus trip takes more than an hour.

Sumatiphala Meditation Centre

Hibatgala Rd, Kanduboda, Delgoda. Tel: 011-2402805.

The abbot and teacher of this centre located next to Kanduboda Vipassana Meditation Centre is Venerable Pemasiri, a popular and experienced teacher in the Mahāsi tradition. He is the author of *Walking the Tightrope*, published by the BPS. He is helpful and friendly to foreigners. Besides the Mahāsi method he also teaches other traditional methods of meditation. The place is mainly for laypeople, but monks do stay here too. The female yogis and nuns have their own separate area. The facilities are nice and spacious. There is no charge for the lodgings and food, but donations are welcome.

The directions are the same as for Sumathipāla Meditation Centre, above.

Other Buddhist Resources

Buddhist Publication Society (BPS), PO Box 61, 54 Sangharaja Mawatha, Kandy.
Tel: 081-2237283. <http://www.bps.lk>

The BPS has a bookshop with a large assortment of Buddhist books. There is also a reference library.

Buddhist Cultural Centre (BCC), 125 Anderson Road, Nedimala, Dehiwela.

A large bookshop. There is a branch bookshop at the junction of Baudhaloka Mawatha and Sarana-road in the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress compound.

The Buddhist Publication Society

The BPS is an approved charity dedicated to making known the Teaching of the Buddha, which has a vital message for all people.

Founded in 1958, the BPS has published a wide variety of books and booklets covering a great range of topics. Its publications include accurate annotated translations of the Buddha's discourses, standard reference works, as well as original contemporary expositions of Buddhist thought and practice. These works present Buddhism as it truly is—a dynamic force which has influenced receptive minds for the past 2500 years and is still as relevant today as it was when it first arose.

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