

Etiquette in Buddhist Temples

You'll enjoy the experience even more if you remember the following rules.

Show respect: Turn off mobile phones, remove headphones, lower your voice, avoid inappropriate conversation, remove hats, and no smoking or chewing gum. You are likely entering an actual consecrated area, where locals go to commune with the sacred; any hint of irreverence might cause deep offense.

Remove your hat and shoes: Shoes should *always* be removed and left outside of the main worship area. The pile of shoes is an obvious indication of where to leave them.

Cover yourself: Shoulders should be covered and long pants should be worn rather than shorts.

Respect the Buddha Statues: Never touch, sit near, or climb on a Buddha statue or the raised platform. Get permission before taking photographs and never do so during worship. When exiting, back away from the Buddha before turning your back.

Don't point: Pointing at things or people around the temple is considered extremely rude. To indicate something, use your right hand with the palm facing upwards. When sitting, never point your feet at a person or image of Buddha.

Stand up: If you happen to be sitting in the worship area when monks or nuns enter, stand to show respect; wait until they have finished their prostrations before sitting again.

Interacting With Buddhist Monastics

Monastics are some of the friendliest people you will meet during your travels. The monastics that you see sweeping the temple stairs may be less concerned about dirt and more interested in removing the insects so that no one accidentally steps on one!

Eating: Monastics do not eat after noon; be mindful about eating or snacking around them.

Body language: If a monastic is sitting, show respect by sitting before starting a conversation. Avoid sitting higher than a monk if you can help it. Never point your feet at any Buddhist while sitting.

Right hand only: Only use your right hand when giving or receiving something from a monastic.

Going a Little Extra

While certainly not expected, these gestures will show that you took the time to research Buddhist customs before your visit.

Best foot forward: Enter the shrine with your left foot first, and exit by leading with your right foot. This gesture symbolically represents a whole.

The reason: The traditional greeting for a monastic is to place the hands together in a prayer-like gesture and give a slight bow. The hands are held higher than usual (near the forehead) to show more respect to monks.

Give freely: Nearly every temple has a small metal box for receiving donations from the public. These donations keep the temple running, usually on a very thin budget. If you enjoyed your visit, giving a small amount would mean a lot.

Visiting Carolina Vihara:

Please call, write or email to make an appointment:

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