

VISITING A GURDWARA

Usually, a Gurdwara is open all day to public, including any non-Sikh visitors. However, one is expected to observe the following etiquette before entering the prayer hall or the Langar hall (eatery).

One must appropriately cover his/her head; a scarf or a large handkerchief is regarded as preferable to a hat or a cap for a non-turbaned visitor. Most Gurdwaras have a free supply of suitable scarves, which may be borrowed during the visit. Visitors must take off their shoes and place them on the racks or space provided at the entrance.

Under no circumstances should a visitor be in possession of any tobacco product, alcoholic drink or drug, nor should he/she have consumed any, or be under its influence, at the time of the visit.

On entering the prayer hall, it is obligatory for every Sikh, young and old, to show the utmost respect to the holy book, Guru Granth Sahib Ji. Sikhs usually bow down on their knees, often touching the floor with their foreheads.

(However, a non-Sikh visitor may do so by a simple bowing gesture, or standing still for a second and then moving away with a respectful nod).

It is regarded as discourteous to sit or stand with one's back to the Guru Granth, or to stretch one's feet towards the holy Granth while sitting. Similarly, clapping is not allowed in the congregation hall.

Groups of students and teachers from local school and colleges intending to visit the Gurdwara must apply to the management in advance.

The Sikh Missionary Society U.K. is a registered charity, with the sole purpose of providing knowledge and information on Sikhism, i.e. Sikhs' religious philosophy, history, heritage, culture and traditions etc. Its new building has provision for holding seminars, conferences, Akhand Paths, Panjabi language classes, gurbani music classes etc.

The National Sikh Resource Centre presumably the largest in U.K., is housed in the Society's premises equipped with thousands of books, artefacts and other audiovisual materials on Sikhs and Sikhism, both in Panjabi and English produced by reputable persons.

The Society also publishes its own Sikh literature and quality books in learning Panjabi language, as well as greeting cards for the new year and such occasions.

Every year the society organises a highly successful **Gurmat Camp** for young Sikhs which promotes Community living the Gurmat way and consists of lectures, talks and discussions; indoor and outdoor activities.

Situated at **8 -10 Feather Stone Road, Southall, (UB2 5AA)** The Sikh Missionary Society U.K. has been serving the global Sikh community for nearly four decades.

Our knowledgeable staff members have many years of experience in the Sikh faith and are committed to providing expert knowledge whilst dealing with the public enquiries personally.

Students and staff from schools, colleges and universities are welcome to seek information on Sikh faith and culture during its opening hours, daily from 11AM to 6PM

For further information, please phone **020 8574 1902**. or **www.sikhmissionarysociety.org**
email: info@sikhmissionarysociety.com

Who are the **SIKHS?**

ਮਾਨਸ ਕੀ ਜਾਤ ਸਭੈ ਏਕੈ ਪਹਿਚਾਨਬੋ ॥
RECOGNISE HUMAN RACE AS ONE



**Sikhs are a warm,
affectionate and progressive community
with a global outlook.
Their faith stands for
love, harmony, equality, service and charity.
This global outlook
makes them proud and
faithful citizens of the country
they live in.**

Sikhism, the youngest of major religions of the world, was founded by **Guru Nanak Dev Ji** in the 2nd half of the 15th century. It is a positive, spiritually oriented and life affirming philosophy as manifest through the divine sermons inscribed in the holy Guru Granth Sahib Ji.

The holy scripture of the Sikhs is called **Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji**, which is all in verse and in praise of God. Its key message is related to the realities of life and our existence in this world.

The basic belief of the Sikhs is, that there is only one God, the Truth, The Creator, the Timeless being, not-incarnate, but self existent. The popular Sikh word for God is **Waheguru** (wonderful Lord).

A Sikh place of worship is called a **Gurdwara**. A Gurdwara is open to all visitors, whether Sikhs or non-Sikhs, as long as one is not under the influence of a drug, tobacco or alcohol. Tea and warm vegetarian meals, called **Langar**, are readily available to everybody.

The holiest Sikh place in the world, is **Sri Harmander Sahib**, popularly known as the Golden Temple. It is situated in the holy city of Amritsar, which is in Panjab, India.

The Sikh Articles of Faith are popularly known as **5K's**, namely **Kesh** (uncut hair), **Kangha** (comb), **Karra** (steel bangle), **Kachh** (special pair of shorts) and **Kirpaan** (sword), which are symbolic of Sikh identity and belief. It is imperative for an **Amritdhari** Sikh to wear these 5K's, which stand for humility, cleanliness, restraint, continence and dignity, respectively.

The Sikh Identity is generally associated with well kept hair, beard and turban. However, due to some adverse influences, not all male Sikhs are seen wearing turbans. Sikh women use a long scarf or a **dupatta** as a head cover.

The Sikh turban is most respected part of a Sikh attire. It is fairly distinct and easily recognisable for its snugness and shape. It can be of any colour, blue, black, white, red, orange etc. Sikh women may or may not wear turban.

The homeland of the Sikhs is Panjab, India. There are about 20 million Sikhs in the world. At least 12 million live in Panjab, the rest in other parts of India and abroad e.g. U.K., U.S.A., Canada, Europe, Australia, Malaysia, Singapore etc.

The Heritage Language of the Sikhs is **Panjabi**. It is written in the original indigenous script, later named as **Gurmukhi**, which indeed is derived from the ancient Indian script called **Brahmi**.

The Sikh Community in general, constitutes very energetic and enduring people, who are also well known in India for their outstanding contribution in farming, sports and military services. Hospitality as well as chivalry remains an integral part of their social life. In the words of Sir Alexander Burnes: *"The Sikh nation is very large hearted. In spite of racial differences they co-exist with others happily and remain kind hearted."*

THE SIKH GREETINGS

**Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa,
Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh!**

(Literally, the Khalsa belongs to God, the victory belongs to God)

Sat Sri Akal

(Literally, Truth is God or God is Truth – having an implied message to remember God, remember Truth whatever the time state or circumstances.)

GURPURB & NAGAR KEERTAN

A Sikh festival or holy day is called **Gurpurb**. It is a 'Remembrance Day' celebrated in honour of the Guru. The occasion reminds and inspires Sikhs of Guru's teachings and good deeds. Among Sikhs, a Gurpurb generates a lot of religious fervour and enthusiasm, producing a feeling of joy and happiness, fellowship and devotion.

One of the ways, Sikhs like to celebrate a Gurpurb, is by sharing their joy and excitement in the open, with the wider community, in the form of a hymn singing procession or carnival through the major streets of the town. This is called **Nagar Keertan**. (By the way, this provides a good opportunity to let all communities know who are the Sikhs?).

The Nagar Keertan requires lot of planning and discipline, as well as, co-operation of the local police. In general, it involves hundreds and thousands of Sikh men, women and children, who are walking, reciting holy hymns and enjoying the festive occasion.

The procession is led by Guru Granth Sahib Ji, seated in a **Palki** (a kind of decorated throne) on a purpose built float, escorted by a body of troopers constituting 5 specially dressed 'beloved Sikhs' called **Panj Piaray**.

The whole long procession is dotted with a number of other activities, depending upon the strength and commitment of the Sikh community in the area. In general, these activities include hymn singing, playing drums and displaying Sikh martial art, **Gatka**.

All along the route of this slow moving procession, a variety of refreshments are made available freely by volunteers to the walking congregants, as well as the street on lookers, irrespective of their faith or faculty.