



# A VISIT TO A SIKH GURDWARA served by GURU NANAK NISHKAM SEWAK JATHA

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## WELCOME TO THE GURDWARA



The **Gurdwara** (sometimes spelt **Gurudwara**) is a Sikh place of worship. It is open to visitors of any faith, culture, gender or background. '**Sikh**' means life-long **learner** or disciple. The gurdwara is like a school to remind us of life's greater purpose. Sikhs come here to learn the values of being prayerful, hardworking and selfless, by listening to wise teachings, singing God's praises and serving Gods' creation.

A guiding motto for the Sikh way of life is: **Pray, Work and Share.**

## AT THE FRONT ENTRANCE

### THE DOORS

Find this emblem:



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'**Guru**' means teacher or enlightener. '**Dwar**' means gateway. '**Gurdwara**' or '**gurudwara**' means gateway to the Guru's home. Inside the Gurdwara you will find the sacred scripture, which Sikhs regard and treat as 'Guru'.

This Sikh emblem, pronounced **Ik Oankar**, is in the Gurmukhi script. It tells us that God is One and All is God, since the Creator is ever present in creation.- . '**Ik**' in Punjabi means 'one'.

### THE KHANDA



Visitors may notice this **Khanda** emblem. It has three parts reminding Sikhs that:

- God has no beginning or end and embraces all creation (the circle)
- We must strive to uphold goodness and remember God's infinite power (the double-edged sword in the middle)
- We must let the strength of wisdom and goodness guide our actions in the world (the two outer **kirpans** or 'swords of grace and dignity').

## IN THE LOBBY

You may hear Guru Granth Sahib Ji (the sacred scripture) being recited. Look out for Sikhs exchanging greetings with folded hands. One short greeting - 'Sat Siri Akal' - reminds Sikhs that God is Truth and that God's spark is in each person you greet. Did you also notice people touching the outside steps as they enter, or dusting shoes on the shelves? This shows respect and honour to those who have come to pay respects to the Guru.



## A FEW HOUSE RULES

Inside the Gurdwara is the **Darbar (the prayer hall)**.

It is a very sacred place, so before entering:

- we cover our heads
- we remove our shoes
- we wash our hands

These actions help us to show respect and keep the Darbar area clean. Sikhs understand that by removing any dirt, we remember to cleanse our mind and heart. By covering the head, we remember to stay humble. This prepares us to absorb the Guru's teachings and let the goodness within us grow.

(Another important rule is not to bring into the Gurdwara any alcohol, tobacco, meat or cigarettes)

In the Darbar, we walk up the centre aisle to pay our respects to Guru Granth Sahib Ji.

- Sikhs will kneel and let their forehead touch the floor; other visitors may pay respects in their own way (e.g. with a slight bow).
- Usually women will sit on one side of the aisle and men on the other, at an equal level.
- We sit on the floor cross-legged, so that our feet don't point towards Guru Granth Sahib Ji.
- All sit quietly, listen, reflect, or pray with folded hands.



## IN THE VISITORS' ROOM



The Sikh faith is based on the teachings of the 10 Sikh Gurus. They founded the Sikh faith between 1469 and 1708 in the Punjab region (divided today between India and Pakistan).



The photograph shows the world famous Gurdwara, Sri Harmandir Sahib, also known as the 'Golden Temple', in Amritsar, Punjab.

Can you see which features in the photograph are similar to this Gurdwara in Birmingham?

**THE PANJ KAKAARS (THE FIVE KES)** These are worn by initiated Sikhs as a reminder of the high standards of thinking and behaviour they have promised to uphold.

**KES:** Uncut hair is one way Sikhs show they accept what God has given them. Men (and sometimes women) tie the Kes in a top-knot under a **turban**.



**KANGHA:** A wooden comb to groom and tidy the hair twice daily - a reminder to untangle the mind of negative thoughts.



**KARA:** A steel wristlet – a reminder that one's every action should be guided by noble values.



**KIRPAN:** A small sword to inspire courage, responsibility, service to others, based on the values of kindness ('kirpa') and dignity ('aan'). It is secured in a sash called a **gatra**.

**KACHERA:** Special undershorts tied with a drawstring to help Sikhs to be modest and disciplined.



## IN THE DARBAR (PRAYER HALL)

**Darbar** means Court. Here you will see the sacred scripture on a throne (**takhat**) under a canopy, wrapped in beautiful fabrics, like royal robes.



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**What else do you notice to suggest the scripture is being treated with special reverence?**  
In the Darbar, you will hear the scripture being recited as part of a 48 hour continuous reading.



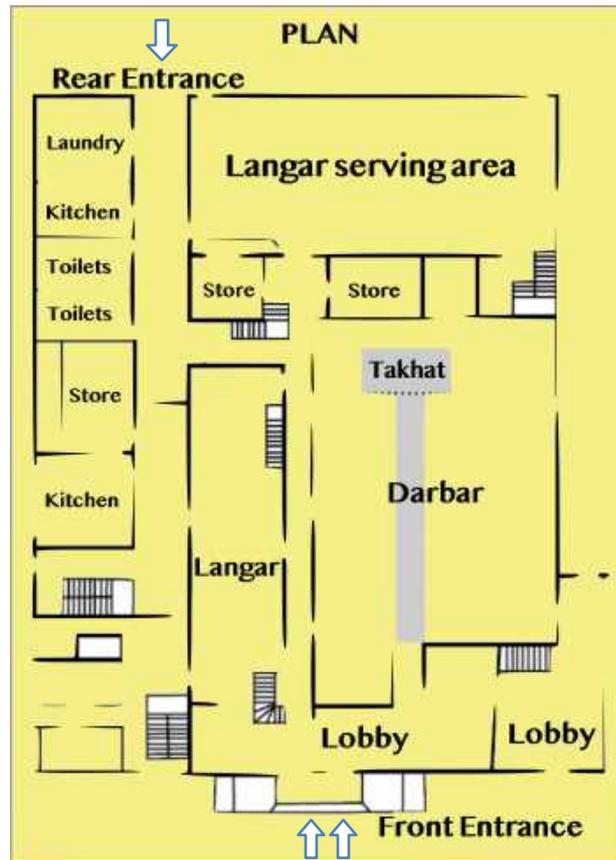
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## PARSHAD

As they come to pay respects to Guru Granth Sahib Ji, visitors offer donations (such as money, food or flowers).



Once sitting on the floor, everyone is offered a small portion of sweet **parshad** to mark the Guru's grace and hospitality to all. It is made of butter, flour, sugar and water and is received with cupped hands.



## IK OANKAR

Did you notice again this **Ik Oankar** emblem, set inside the rays of a sun?



This emblem appears throughout the scripture, which is written in the Gurmukhi script. Do you remember what it stands for?

## LANGAR (Communal meal served to all)



**Langar** is a vegetarian meal, provided free of charge for all visitors. It is one way Sikhs practise serving others, being generous and seeing God in all.

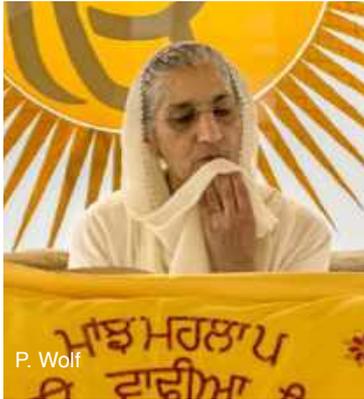
The cooking, serving and cleaning are done by volunteers doing **sewa** (selfless service). As they work, they sing prayers. Sikhs believe that this makes the food nourishing for the mind, body and soul.



Everyone sits at the same level to show that everyone is equal.  
The word **langar** is also used for the area in which the langar is prepared and served.

## CEILING

The mirror work was done by a Muslim master craftsman, Mohammad Jabbar, who hand cut 130,000 mirror pieces to create a complicated, symmetrical pattern. It took him seven months.



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Here too, trained volunteers recite from Guru Granth Sahib Ji. The verses of the sacred scripture are organised according to musical styles known as **raags**. When these sacred verses are sung to music it is called **Kirtan**. **Ragis** are the musicians who perform Kirtan.



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## MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

A **Harmonium** has 12 notes and works like an accordion. Air is pumped in and keys are pressed to create the sound. **Chimtay** is a set of two cymbals. **Tabla** is a set of two drums. Tabla is the main instrument for keeping rhythmic beat patterns in traditional Sikh music. It establishes rhythm for Kirtan. There are 17 different complex patterns called **taals**.



## BEFORE YOU LEAVE

### CORRIDOR

Some visitors might notice an 8 pointed star within a circle. This is not a Sikh religious symbol. Interestingly, however, it is often used across faiths and cultures to symbolise the unity of God.

The **Khanda in the steel bowl** represents how **amrit** (holy water) is prepared. Special puffs of sugar are dissolved with the motion of the **khanda** (the double-edged sword) while prayers are recited. The **amrit** is used to initiate Sikhs into the Khalsa order.



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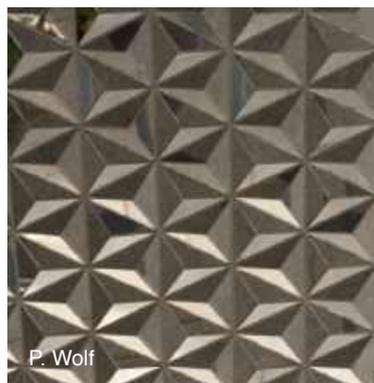


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### PORCH

The beautiful ceiling was made by the Muslim craftsman who decorated the dome from hand-cut mirror glass.

**NISHAN SAHIB (flag)** is always flown outside every gurdwara. It is a sign of welcome and hospitality and features the **khanda** emblem. There are two of these just outside the small dome Darbar.



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Every gurdwara is unique, but we hope your visit has introduced you to key features found in gurdwaras around the world – and to key values behind emblems and activities you may notice. For Sikhs, these values are shared to help people build more peace and goodness together. Thank you for joining us.

*Three short films and a quiz accompany this guide . See websites below.*

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