

## Gurdwaras

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### What is a Gurdwara?

During the times of the early Gurus, Sikh places of worship were referred to as dharamsalas. They were a place where Sikhs could gather to hear the Guru speak or sing hymns. As the Sikh population continued to grow Guru Hargobind introduced the word Gurdwara, meaning the gateway through which the Guru could be reached. Thereafter all Sikh places of worship came to be known as Gurdwaras. Any place where the Guru Granth Sahib is installed and treated with due respect can be referred to as a Gurdwara, whether it is a room in ones house of a separate building. Three main functions are carried out in all public Gurdwaras. One is Kirtan which is the singing of hymns from the Guru Granth Sahib, another is Katha which is reading of the Guru Granth Sahib and explanations. The third main function which is carried out at every Gurdwara is the Langar, free community kitchen for all visitors of all religions. Along with these main functions Gurdwaras around the world also serve the Sikh community in many other ways including, libraries of Sikh literature, schools to teach children Gurmukhi and the Sikh scriptures and charitable work in the community on behalf of Sikhs.



### Gurdwara Protocols

When entering the Gurdwara one is expected to remove the shoes and cover ones bare head as signs of respect towards the sovereignty of the Guru Granth Sahib. Hands are washed and in some Gurdwaras there are also feet washes. Approaching the Guru Granth Sahib one is expected to bow down and touch the floor as a sign of further respect towards the Eternal Sikh Guru. Offerings of cash are usually made at this time to help carry the expenses of running the Gurdwara and community work carried out by the Gurdwara. These offerings are voluntary and not compulsory. All people irrespective of their status sit on the floor as a sign of equality as opposed to chairs and the Guru Granth Sahib is always installed on a higher level. One may enter or leave the congregation at any time. Men and women do not generally sit together but on separate sides of the room, both at an equal distance from the Guru Granth Sahib. All people are expected to stand facing the Guru Granth Sahib when the Ardas (common prayer) is read out. Gurdwaras are open to all people of all religions and are generally open 24 hours a day. Some Gurdwaras also provide temporary accommodations for visitors or pilgrims. In the Langar all sit on the floor and food is cooked and served by volunteers, this food is available at all times. Only vegetarian food is served so that no person may be offended and all people of all religions can sit together to share a common meal irrespective of any dietary restrictions.

### [Darbar Sahib and Five Takhts](#)

### [Historical Gurdwaras of Punjab](#)