 Retreat Handbook

“Every person needs a ‘retreat’, a dynamo of silence where he may go for the exclusive purpose of being recharged by the infinite.”

PARAMAHANSA YOGANANDA

Content

Introduction 2
Practical steps 2
  Organising alone or as a team? 2
  Getting the team together 2
  Notifying of a retreat 2
Organising 3
  Requesting information upon registration 3
  Communication 3
  Attendance 3
  Check-list 3
  Around the house:
    Welcome and farewell rounds 3
    Packing list 4
Food 4
  Buying the Food 4
  Cooking and meals 4
Spiritual program and Meditation 5
  The Altar 5
  Sequence of meditation 5
  Remarks to meditations 5
Financial help 6
  Advance Payment 6
  Refunding if someone has paid in advance and cannot attend 6
Retreat Schedule examples 6
Feedback 7
Ressources: 7

YOUTH OF GOLDEN AGE E.V.
Introduction
It is a blessed and wonderful opportunity to organise a spiritual retreat, during which devotees of our Guruji’s family can gather and spend a joyful and contemplative time together.

How then, to best go about planning a retreat?
We would encourage you to feel free to put forward your own ideas if you are inspired to do so; every retreat is different and there are countless ways a spiritual retreat can be beautiful.

However, there are a few tips that we would like to share with you. This short booklet aims to share the experience we have gathered in organising such auspicious events, so you don’t have to start from scratch. See it as suggestions rather than rules.

Practical steps

Organising alone or as a team?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ORGANISING SOLO</th>
<th>ORGANISING AS A GROUP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For a small retreat in a private setting</td>
<td>For retreats with more than ten yogis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncomplicated, as there is no team coordination</td>
<td>(more attendees = more organisers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some enjoy organising alone</td>
<td>Less work through sharing of the various tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The retreat is taking place on a private location</td>
<td>It’s fun together!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A property is rented for the retreat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Getting the team together
It is best that the organiser be present during the whole period of the retreat, and also available on his/her phone.

The organising team should have the following:
- Motivation and Joy
- Love and faithfulness to God and Guru and to the teachings of Self Realization Fellowship
- Time to organise and take part in the retreat - arriving first and leaving last from retreat

Notifying of a retreat
The easiest way to notify us of a retreat is to send the main information about the retreat or an invitation text, with a couple of pictures if you wish, to us: info@youthofgoldenage.de

Be sure to include these:
- Date
- Place
- Short description
- Contact details of organiser for registration and questions (name, email, mobile number)
- The program, or activities suggested
- “How to get there” information
- A cost per person estimate

→ We will then share the upcoming retreat on our website as well as in our newsletter.
Organising

*Requesting information upon registration*

Once yogis have confirmed they are attending, make sure to ask them the following:
- Date and time of arrival
- Mode of transportation
- If ‘by car’, ask where they are driving from (some other devotees might need a ride)
- Food allergies
- Vegan?

*Communication*

It can be a good idea to create a common Telegram group (or Whatsapp, Facebook group...). This facilitates communication between attending devotees and is a practical way to share pictures with each other after the retreat.

*Attendance*

The organisers should convey to all the benefit of enjoying the entirety of the retreat. This will help foster a higher vibration and a convivial atmosphere.

Due to the disturbing nature of constant arrivals and departures, we recommend that the devotees staying for a short while organise themselves their arrival and/or departure.

*Check-list*

If you are renting or staying in a house together, it is probably wise to have a walk around the house, to check the rooms and the common spaces. Double check the following before the retreat:

- **Around the house:**
  - Electricity is on, lights are working
  - Necessary cleaning items (broom or hoover, mop...)
  - The hot water is working

- **Bathroom:**
  - Soap at the sinks
  - Toilet paper in each bathroom + toilet brush

- **Kitchen:**
  - Washing-up liquid
  - Sponge and cleaning utensils

*Welcome and farewell rounds*

**Beginning of the retreat:** Arrival, relaxing after the trip and replenishing energy. Introducing one another, getting to know each other. Presenting or deciding upon the retreat program.

**End of the retreat:** A farewell round gives everybody the possibility to share their experience with the group and to give thanks. This can also be an opportunity, if desired, to obtain feedback about the retreat and decide how to improve those in the future.
**Packing list**
You can also suggest a packing list to the attendees. Naturally, the necessary items to be packed depend on the kind of retreat, the season, and the activities that are to be shared. There are some items that should be on all lists however:

- According to use, arm-rest, kriya beads, meditation blanket and pillow
- Good walking shoes and a rain jacket (outdoor activities always take place)
- Pen and paper
- Personal hygiene items (toothbrush, toothpaste, shower gel...), towel
- Sleeping bag, and iso mat if needed
- Swimming trunks
- Musical instruments
- Camping equipment: cutlery, plate, cup, pocket knife, pocket lamp

**Food**

**Buying the Food**
The food is vegetarian and/or vegan. Food intolerances should be asked upon registration.

Before you decide what to buy, identify what cooking means you will have during your retreat, and plan accordingly (ovens, hot plates, stove...).

A great solution is to drive to a farm before the retreat, and purchase vegetables, eggs, and dairy (cheese, butter and milk) from there. Buying in one go, from a small local producer or two, will ensure the quality of the products, is cost efficient and environmentally friendly (no transport/packaging/storage...).

When buying from the shops, prioritise local, fresh, seasonal, fair-trade, and organic products, whilst remaining within a budget.

**Cooking and meals**
After the morning meditation, it’s time to share a brunch! Having brunch spares preparing lunch and there is then time for activities until the evening meditation. For very large groups it is good to have cooking teams assigned for different meals who can prepare the food during the meditation.

The gap between brunch and supper can be a little long, so make sure you buy food for tea-time and nibbles (fruits, nuts & raisins, whole grain biscuits...). You may want to provide a selection of herbal teas also.

**Brunch suggestions:** Orange juice, fruit juice, plenty of fruit (fruit salad), milk, oatmeal (porridge), eggs (omelette, hard boiled, scrambled...), salad, tomatoes, whole bread, jam, honey, yoghurt...

**Supper suggestions:** Whole grain rice, potatoes, polenta, whole grain pasta, vegetables (aubergine, leek, carrots, beans...), salad, cheese, desserts...
Spiritual program and Meditation

The morning and evening meditations are the backbone of the retreat. All activities should be arranged so that these meditations can take place at the same time every day. Make sure the afternoon’s activities still leave the yogis with plenty of strength to concentrate for the evening meditation.

The Altar

Preparing the altar is a beautiful task. Choose a pleasant room with enough space and air. You can use an SRF travel altar or larger pictures of the Gurus. If possible place the altar so that people will be turned Eastward in meditation. You can place a sheet over the altar table. Light candles if front of the altar or of the pictures and place flowers also.

Sequence of meditation

- Energising exercises together (15 min)
- Maha mudras individually (10-15 min)
- Opening prayer
- Cosmic chants
- Short reading (a text by Guruji, the Bhagavad Gita,...)
- Meditation (45 to 60 minutes)
- Healing service
- Closing prayer

Remarks to meditations

It is advisable, and wonderful for all, to hold at least one long meditation (3 hours) during a retreat.

If there are younger devotees, or devotees relatively new to meditation, it can sometimes be helpful to divide longer meditation periods (1 hour and more) by having a chant after, for example 35 minutes. The person leading the meditation can announce the length of the meditation periods before meditation.

Through the choice of texts and chants, meditations can focus on certain themes such as peace, joy, Divine Mother, or tuning in to the vibrations of one of the Gurus.

It can be a nice touch to have the service in two languages if a situation lends itself to it (ie. German and English devotees). The leader of the meditation can read and sing in German and English alternately.
Financial help
If before a retreat, certain costs are due for the renting of the accommodation or for the purchase of food, you can ask for an advance payment from the participants. You should set a deadline for the advance payment (the deadline should be before the date at which the organisers have to pay these expenses).

For this, you can either give your bank details, or after contacting our treasurer (treasurer@youthofgoldenage.de) you can give the bank details of the organisation.

Advance Payment
If you’re concerned that you personally will have to take on some of the costs, because you have made an advance payment and you aren’t sure that enough people will attend the retreat, the organisation - after prior consultation and discussion - can take on these costs. Please bring this up with the treasurer.

Refunding if someone has paid in advance and cannot attend
Generally you should only make a refund if the attendee has done a written cancellation himself. In these cases, we recommend, depending on the size and the costs of the retreat to offer the possibility of refunding between 2 and 4 weeks before the retreat starts. Until that date a complete refunding of the prepaid amount will take place. After that date, this can only happen if another person signs up and takes that particular spot.

There are always exceptions. If you are unsure, you are welcome to contact us.

Retreat Schedule examples

**NEW YEAR’S RETREAT SCHEDULE EXAMPLE (80+ ATTENDEES)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>29.12 Arrivals</th>
<th>30.12 Day Out</th>
<th>31.12 New Year’s coming!</th>
<th>01.01 New Year’s here!</th>
<th>02.01 Guru Day</th>
<th>03.01 Shine forth!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Set up</td>
<td>8h EE + long meditation</td>
<td>8h EE + meditation</td>
<td>9h EE + semi-long meditation</td>
<td>8h EE + meditation</td>
<td>8h EE + meditation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set up</td>
<td>11h45 silent Brunch</td>
<td>9h30 Brunch</td>
<td>11h30 Brunch</td>
<td>10h30 Brunch</td>
<td>10h Brunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set up + arrivals</td>
<td>13h Nature Outing</td>
<td>11h different workshops and activities</td>
<td>13h30 outing, hatha yoga, swimming...</td>
<td>12h Workshops 15h Guru procession</td>
<td>Packing and Cleaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17h EE + meditation</td>
<td>17h EE + meditation</td>
<td>16h30 EE + meditation</td>
<td>17h EE + meditation</td>
<td>17h EE + meditation</td>
<td>Departures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19h30 Dinner</td>
<td>19h Dinner</td>
<td>18h Celebration Dinner</td>
<td>18h30 Dinner</td>
<td>19h Dinner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21h Welcome round, games, intro</td>
<td>20h Dance / Kirtan practice</td>
<td>19h45 introspection 21h30 Kirtan + Meditation into New Year</td>
<td>20h Y.O.G.A. meeting, social time &amp; film night</td>
<td>Final round, social night, viewing photos</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23h Rest</td>
<td>23h Rest</td>
<td>00h30 Party!</td>
<td>23h Rest</td>
<td>23h Rest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

YOUTH OF GOLDEN AGE E.V. 6
**EXAMPLE OF A WEEK-END RETREAT (10 DEVOTEES)**

(activities such as hatha yoga, kirtan, silent walks, listening to a talk by Guruji, are also great additions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Friday</th>
<th>Saturday</th>
<th>Sunday</th>
<th>Monday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8h EE + meditation</td>
<td>8h EE + long meditation</td>
<td>7h30 EE + meditation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cleaning / preparing</td>
<td>10h brunch</td>
<td>11h30 brunch</td>
<td>10h brunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>arrivals</td>
<td>visiting holy place - walk in nature - tea</td>
<td>long hike - tea</td>
<td>leaving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18h30 EE + meditation</td>
<td>17h EE + meditation</td>
<td>18h EE + meditation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20h15 dinner</td>
<td>19h30 dinner</td>
<td>20h dinner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>DVD: SRF Talk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Feedback**

We are always very glad to receive your feedback after a retreat. You are also welcome to send us a couple of nice pictures from the retreat ([info@youthofgoldenage.de](mailto:info@youthofgoldenage.de)). These will be integrated to our end-of-the-year review and shown to all during our New Year’s retreat.

**Ressources:**

**WORLDWIDE PRAYER CIRCLE:**

**UNDREAMED OF POSSIBILITIES:**

**AFFIRMATIONS:**
[http://www.yogananda-srf.org/Affirmations.aspx#.WxmNTkIFMlU](http://www.yogananda-srf.org/Affirmations.aspx#.WxmNTkIFMlU)

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[https://www.youthofgoldenage.de/en/home-3/](https://www.youthofgoldenage.de/en/home-3/)