

## Staying at Wat Pah Nanachat

May we welcome you to Wat Pah Nanachat (**The International Forest Monastery**). Our monastery is situated in a small forest in the Northeast of Thailand about fifteen kilometers from the city of Ubon Ratchathani. In 1975 Ajahn Chah established it in order to give foreigners who do not know Thai language and culture the possibility of a traditional monastic training. English serves as the primary language of communication and instruction. Our community consists of monks, novices and postulants from a wide range of nationalities.

Although Wat Pah Nanachat is not a meditation centre, there are facilities for a limited number of male and female guests to stay at the monastery and practise with the resident monastic community. We would like our guests to follow the daily routines of the monks as much as possible, and join in with all communal meetings and work activities. As the teachers of the forest tradition stress, in monastic life, qualities like co-operation, respect and self-sacrifice both facilitate communal harmony and individual growth in the practice. Generally, the training at Wat Pah Nanachat aims to follow the Dhamma-Vinaya, the teachings and code of monastic discipline as laid down by the Buddha, respecting both the letter and the spirit. The monastic life encourages development of simplicity, renunciation and quietude. It is a deliberate commitment to this way of life that creates a community environment where people of diverse backgrounds, personalities and temperaments can co-operate in the effort to practice and realize the Buddha's path to liberation.

### Practice Schedule

In general, guests have many hours a day for study and meditation practice on their own. To make good use of the situation it is necessary to have had previous meditation experience and exposure to Buddhist teachings. The daily routine is usually:

3:00 AM	Morning wake-up bell
3:30 AM	Morning meeting: chanting and meditation
Dawn	Monks go out to surrounding villages on alms-round. Lay guests sweep the monastery or help in the kitchen.
8:00 AM	The meal
9:30 AM	Chores period
4:00 PM	Afternoon drink
6:15 PM	Evening meeting: chanting and meditation

The schedule may be supplemented by periods of group practice, communal work or Dhamma instructions according to the needs of the community. After the meal the abbot or a senior monk is available to receive visitors and resident guests and answer questions. Four times in a lunar month, on the Wan Pra (the Buddhist Holy Day), the community observes a late-night vigil, during which time there is the opportunity to discuss aspects of Dhamma practice with one of the senior monks.

Much of the day is reserved for private practice, using the time for sitting and walking meditation either in one's private hut in the forest or one of the meditation halls. Regarding meditation instructions at Wat Pah Nanachat, rather than solely utilizing a particular technique, we aim our practice to include all aspects of daily life, however simple and ordinary, as opportunities to develop mindfulness and other spiritual qualities such as diligent effort, joy,

contentment, patience and faith. In time, the virtuous qualities that grow out of such a training gather strength and contribute towards deeper peace and concentration leading to insight and the growth of liberating wisdom.

## **The Buddhist lay-training guidelines (precepts)**

Lay guests who stay at Wat Pah Nanachat are expected to abide by the traditional eight Buddhist precepts. The first five form the basic guidelines for conduct leading to harmony and self-respect. The other three precepts encourage a spirit of renunciation and simplicity and are among the fundamental principles of monastic practice.

### **The five training precepts:**

- Harmlessness: to refrain from intentionally taking the life of any living creature.
- Trustworthiness: to refrain from taking anything that is not given.
- Chastity: to refrain from all sexual activity.
- Right Speech: to refrain from false, abusive, malicious or disharmonious speech and worldly gossip.
- Sobriety: to refrain from taking intoxicating drinks or drugs; smoking is prohibited at all times at the monastery.

### **The three renunciation precepts:**

- To refrain from eating after midday. The monastery practice is to eat one meal a day in one bowl at one sitting. This frees time for meditation and enhances simplicity of life.
- To refrain from using entertainment such as music, dance, playing games, and beautifying or adorning the body with jewelry or makeup. This assists in focusing the mind's attention inwards towards Dhamma.
- To refrain from using high or luxurious beds or seats and from indulging in sleep. This develops the qualities of wakefulness, mindfulness and clear awareness in all postures and in all activities throughout the day.

These training precepts are guidelines for good conduct in body and speech and provide a necessary foundation for the development of mindfulness, clear comprehension and meditation in our endeavour to cultivate the Noble Eightfold Path. The precepts serve to promote harmony within the community through restraining unwholesome speech and action. These fundamental principles of training cultivate the self-discipline necessary for spiritual development and are taken up as an act of deliberate personal choice and initiative.

## **Staying as a guest**

If you wish to come and stay at Wat Pah Nanachat, you need to write in advance to the guest monk and allow several weeks in which to receive a written response. We only have limited space for guests and are often booked up, so it is good to write well in advance. Please understand that it is the wish of our community to not have e-mail and internet in the monastery. Guests are accepted initially for three days. If they wish to stay longer, they can consult the guest monk or the abbot. The best time to arrive is before 8:00 am in order to take part in the meal and meet with the guest monk.

Resident lay guests in Wat Pah Nanachat wear traditional Thai lay monastic attire: loose white and long trousers with a white shirt for men, and a white blouse and long black skirt for women.

Men staying longer than one week are asked to shave their heads, beards and eyebrows. Guests are advised to be in good physical and mental health and to have health coverage or travel insurance. If you have previously had any serious mental illnesses, please inform us openly about them, so we can be sure that your stay in the monastery won't give rise to major problems for you and the community. There is no malaria at Wat Pah Nanachat.

While the monastery provides bedding and a mosquito net, guests are expected to supply other requisites (e.g. a good flashlight/torch, an alarm clock, flip-flop sandals, candles, mosquito repellent and toiletries). A padlock for locking away personal valuables is very useful. The monks are happy to share food and drinks that is offered to them with the layguests each morning, but as it is part of the renunciant tradition to accept whatever is offered, they are unable to arrange any special diets for the guests or residents. Please do not bring electronic gadgets like mobile phones, portable computers, cameras, etc. with you, or lock them away in the monastery safe. These things create a worldly atmosphere which impinges on the simple, meditative lifestyle in the monastery. Also, this is a strictly non-smoking monastery.

The very existence of Wat Pah Nanachat is due to the faith and goodwill of the Thai people. The society of rural Northeast Thailand is culturally conservative and still upholds many of their unique traditional values. Guests are asked to please respect and be sensitive to these local traditions through being mindful of appropriate dress and deportment. Since the community is entirely supported by donations, there is no charge for visiting or staying at Wat Pah Nanachat. During the months of March and April, the major part of the community of monks goes on retreat to the mountains of western Kanchanaburi province. At this time the number of lay people accepted may be limited, so it is best to write in advance. Also, Wat Pah Nanachat receives a lot of visitors around January 12<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> and around June the 16<sup>th</sup>. Accommodations are likely to be full around these days, so drop-in guests who arrive around these dates might not be able to stay overnight.

People need some experience with meditation before coming to Wat Pah Nanachat, preferably a meditation retreat. Doing a Buddhist meditation retreat is like putting in the foundation, which can be built upon during your stay at Wat Pah Nanachat. A typical meditation retreat for beginners lasts about 10 days.

### **Some good places to do a meditation retreat in Thailand are:**

- **Wat Suan Mokkh** (Chaiya, Surat Thani 84110). (Meditation retreats are every first 10 days of the month, please arrive early on the last day of the previous month. No need to reserve or write in advance.) The meditation teaching is in the style of Ajahn Buddhadasa. Retreats last 10 days. [www.suanmokkh.org](http://www.suanmokkh.org)
- **Wat Khao Tham** (Ko Pha-Ngan, Surat Thani 84280). Teachers: Steve and Rosemary Weismann. 10-day retreats for beginners. Retreats begin mid-month, usually around the 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> of each month. [www.watkowtahm.org](http://www.watkowtahm.org)
- **Thailand Vipassana Centre** (1. Dhamma Kamala: 200 Baan Nerrnpasuk, Tambon Dongkeelek, Amphur Meuang, Prachinburi 25000 Tel/fax: 037-403515; Email: [sutthi@ksc.th.com](mailto:sutthi@ksc.th.com); 2. Dhamma Kuta : c/o Mrs Pornphen Leenutaphong, 929 Rama I Road, Pathumwan, Bangkok; tel/fax: 02 – 216 4772 fax: 02 – 215 3408). These two centers offer 10 day retreats using the meditation technique of S. N. Goenka.
- **Sorn-Thawee Meditation Centre** (Bangkla, Chasoengsao 24110. Tel: 038-541405). The meditation teaching here is based on the technique of Mahasi Sayadaw. Visitors here are encouraged to do a 20-day retreat.
- **Wat Ram Poeng** (Tambon Suthep, Amphur Meuang, Chiang Mai 5000. Tel: 053-278620 e-mail: [watrampoeng.hi5.com](mailto:watrampoeng.hi5.com); [watrampoeng@hotmail.com](mailto:watrampoeng@hotmail.com)). The meditation teaching

here is based on the technique of Mahasi Sayadaw. Retreats can be anything from 10 to 26 days depending on how long one wishes to stay.

- **Wat Sanghathan** (Bangphai, Muang, Nonthaburi 11000, Thailand, located just north of Bangkok) *Tel: (02) 4471766 or 4470799 e-mail: vimokkha@hotmail.com website: [www.vimokkha.com](http://www.vimokkha.com)* 7 day intensive Meditation Retreats are held at the “Khao Yai Saeng” Meditation Center, which is a branch of Wat Sanghathan in the “Khao Yai” National Park about 250 km northeast of Bangkok. Contact Wat Sanghathan for the address.

For more information on these (and other) retreat places in Thailand and Asia, read the booklet [Retreats in Asia](#) and have a look at the blog [wandering dhamma](#).

At present, there is no permanent nun's community at Wat Pah Nanachat. Women interested in a monastic commitment are invited to contact our affiliated nun's communities at:

- Amaravati Buddhist Monastery in England (Great Gaddesden, Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire, HPI 3BZ, U.K. / [www.amaravati.org](http://www.amaravati.org); e-mail: amaravati@ndirect.co.uk)

If you would like to visit and stay at Wat Pah Nanachat, please write a letter (suggesting possible dates) to:

The Guest Monk  
Wat Pah Nanachat  
Bahn Bung Wai  
Warin Chamrab  
Ubon Rachathani 34310  
THAILAND

### **How to get to Wat Pah Nanachat:**

- By train: three fast trains per day depart from Bangkok central railway station (Hualamphong) to Warin Chamrab (5 km south of Ubon Rachathani). There are also several night trains.
- By airplane: There are a number of flights a day between Bangkok and Ubon, even with budget-airlines and quick internet booking.
- By bus: There are many air-conditioned long-distance buses with reclining seats that depart from the Northern Bus Terminal 'Mor Chit' in Bangkok. Taxis or tuk-tuks will be waiting once you arrive in Ubon. They can bring you directly to the monastery. Alternatively, you can take a songthaew (a small public bus with two rows of seats in the back) from Warin Chamrab to Wat Pah Nanachat. The songthaew passes close to Wat Pah Nanachat. Wat Pah Nanachat is just about 500 metres away from the road, in the forest behind the rice fields, with a white wall around it.

*May your stay at Wat Pah Nanachat be fruitful and happy.*