



Staying at Wat Pah Nanachat - The International Forest Monastery

In 1975 Ajahn Chah established Wat Pah Nanachat (The International Forest Monastery) in order to give young men from foreign countries, who do not know Thai language and culture, the possibility of becoming a well trained Theravadin Buddhist forest monk. English serves as the primary language of communication and instruction here. Our monastic community consists of monks, novices and postulants from a wide range of nationalities. We are situated in a small forest in the Northeast of Thailand about fifteen kilometers from the fast growing city of Ubon Rachathani.

If you are interested in taking up monastic life in a traditional forest monastery you are welcome to come to Wat Pah Nanachat for a time of experiencing and testing yourself within the monastic lifestyle and stay as a visitor in our monastery. When both you and the community feels it is appropriate, your initial visit may be extended.

If you'd like to join the Wat Pah Nanachat community and practice as a layguest, we ask you to strictly follow the daily routines of the monastery, and join in with all communal meetings and work activities. We do not offer private meditation teachings or retreats and courses in meditation, but a chance to experience the challenging lifestyle of a traditional forest monk and learn from that. As the teachers of the Thai forest tradition stress, in monastic life, qualities like co-operation, respect and selfless service are essential both for communal harmony and individual growth in the practice.

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. Adaptation to this form usually is experienced as something not very easy, but our monastic community sees it as one of its tasks to give newcomers the opportunity to commit themselves to this monastic path. Life in Wat Pah Nanachat encourages development of simplicity, renunciation and quietude. It is the deliberate choice of renunciation that creates a community spirit 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. In order to make good use of the situation it is necessary to have had previous meditation experience and exposure to Buddhist teachings. The daily routine in the monastery is usually:

- 03:00 AM Morning wake-up bell*
- 03:30 AM Morning meeting: chanting and meditation*
- Dawn Monks go on alms-round. Lay guests sweep the monastery or help in the kitchen.*
- 08:00 AM Daily Meal*
- 09.30 AM Short daily Dhamma teaching ("Ovada")*
- 03:00 PM Chores period*
- 04:30 PM Afternoon drink*
- 06:15 PM Evening meeting: chanting and meditation*

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. The above schedule is mandatory for all guests and may be supplemented by periods of group practice, communal work or Dhamma instructions

according to the needs of the community.

Regarding meditation instructions at Wat Pah Nanachat, rather than solely utilizing a particular technique Ajahn Chah emphasized that 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. They require much self-discipline and devotion and willingness to adapt.

The five training precepts:

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

The three renunciation precepts:

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. To refrain from using high or luxurious beds or seats and from indulging in sleep. This supports wakefulness, mindfulness and clear awareness in all postures and during 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 the endeavor to cultivate the Noble Eightfold Path. They also promote harmony within the community and a sense of restraint and require much self-discipline. They are taken up as an act of deliberate personal choice and initiative.

Practicalities for Visiting Wat Pah Nanachat:

Day-Visits: Of course everyone is welcome to visit Wat Pah Nanachat during the daily opening hours from 6:00 am to 6:00 pm. Please spend your time quietly and maybe find a nice spot to practice meditation, or - during the morning hours - address one of the monks in the office area for some guidance. Please note that around midday until about tea-time you might not meet anyone, as the monastic community usually retreats to their huts for private practice during the day.

Overnight-Stays: Recommended minimal stay is one week and normally, the maximum length of stay for guests is 30 days (not including candidates for ordination).

First you need to write an email to the guest monk or alternatively a letter. It is usually helpful for us to know little bit about possible visitors here: particularly name, gender, nationality, age, your expected arrival date and proposed length of stay. In case of a letter you need to provide a postal address for reply so we can get back to you. If you do not receive any reply you can assume that we can not receive you, or that your email (letter) was not relevant to us. Writing well in advance gives us time to send a reply as appropriate. Also, during busy periods we may have to deny a place to those who have not sent their application early.

Regardless of how long you wish to stay, all guests are accepted initially for three days, and then can extend the visit with the permission of the guest monk or the abbot — generally up to one month, or after another talk even longer.

Please arrive during the morning hours, if possible. Most convenient is before 8:00 am, so you can take part in the daily meal, and afterwards speak with the guest monk. He is usually available between 9:00 am and 11:00 am. We normally cannot accept arrivals later than 4:00 pm. On arrival at Wat Pah Nanachat you need to register with the guestmonk with a valid passport and visa (or visa on arrival). Without these papers you can not stay at Wat Pah Nanachat. All guests need to prove that they are in good physical and mental health and to have health coverage or a travel insurance and sufficient funds for emergencies, possible visa extensions and further travel. If you have previously had any mental illnesses, including depressive phases and signs of psychotic episodes, we can not allow you to stay, as in the case of reoccurring symptoms there is practically no professional help available for foreigners in Ubon.

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.

While the monastery provides bedding and a mosquito net, guests are expected to supply other requisites (e.g. a good flashlight/torch, a classic alarm clock (not a mobile phone!), flip-flop sandals, candles, mosquito repellent and toiletries). A padlock for locking away personal valuables is very useful. There is no malaria at Wat Pah Nanachat. The monks are happy to share the food and drinks that are 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, tablets, 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 required to respect and be sensitive to these local traditions through being mindful of appropriate dress and deportment. Please note that the financial expenses of the monastery are completely covered by the donations out of faith and free will by our lay-community, whether local or international.

When staying as a lay practitioner at Wat Pah Nanachat it is not possible to use the internet unless you especially make a trip to town. For the sake of supporting the quietness of the monastery and in order to provide a certain amount of continuity in the monastic routine, our standard is to not leave the monastery more than once a fortnight, and it is necessary to ask for permission each time.

Food and lodging are given free of charge to Wat Pah Nanachat's lay guests as an extension to the ordained sangha. Please honour the faith and hospitality that Wat Pah Nanachat receives from the villagers and it's Thai lay supporters. You are welcome to benefit from these gifts for the sake of your commitment to the

spiritual path. Guests who do not show an attitude of training themselves within this path, display inappropriate, worldly behavior, or appear to be merely stopping over on a tourist trip, may be asked to leave, in order to not undermine the respect for our community.

People need 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 places that offer meditation retreats in Thailand are:

Dipabhavan Meditation Center (Ko Samui). Offers retreats in English language in the style of Suan Mokkh.

Dipabhavan was founded by Tan Ajahn Poh, the abbot of Suan Mokkh. www.dipabhavan.weebly.com

Wat Suan Mokkh International Dharma Hermitage (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-idh.org

Wat Khao Tham (Ko Pha-Ngan, Surat Thani 84280). 10-day retreats for beginners. Retreats begin mid-month, usually around the 13th or 14th of each month. www.kowthamcenter.com

Thailand Vipassana Centres offering 10 day retreats using the meditation technique of S. N. Goenka.

www.dhamma.org

Generally, **female guests** are welcome. It is advisable, though, to have some experience in meditation and to be able to practice self-reliantly, as there is no resident woman-teacher in our community. At present, there are no resident nuns staying at Wat Pah Nanachat. Women interested in a monastic commitment are invited to contact our affiliated nun's community at:

- The Female Monastic Community at Amaravati Buddhist Monastery, Great Gaddesden, Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire, HPI 3BZ, U.K. www.amaravati.org/about/female-monastic-community

If you would like to visit and stay at Wat Pah Nanachat, please **send and email** to our guest-monk, suggesting possible dates at watpahnanachat20@gmail.com or write a letter 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: There are various trains per day that depart from Bangkok central railway station to Ubon-Warin Chamrab (5 km south of Ubon Rachathani, close to Wat Pah Nanachat). 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, Meter-Taxis and Tuk Tuks are available all over Ubon. They can bring you directly to the monastery. Alternatively, you can take a songthaeow (a small public bus with two rows of seats in the back) from Warin Chamrab to Wat Pah Nanachat. The songthaeow passes close to Wat Pah Nanachat. Wat Pah Nanachat is just about 500 meters 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.