



FAQs about IMCC Residential Retreats

Does a silent retreat mean total silence? All the time?

Our retreats are held in what's known as "Noble Silence," which means that unless there is an emergency, retreatants maintain silence. For some participants, this includes not making eye contact with others. This enables retreatants to immerse themselves in the meditative process.

There is often a time each day for participants to ask questions, as well as opportunities for meetings with the teachers, either as part of a group or individually, depending on the length of the retreat. Comprehensive meditation instruction and talks about the Buddha's teachings are offered daily. In addition, group or individual meetings with the teachers about meditation practice take place at regular intervals.

Why are retreats held in silence?

'Noble Silence' is a quieting of the body and voice that helps cultivate a calm and peaceful retreat environment. This powerful tool greatly enhances the deepening of concentration and awareness. Noble Silence also fosters a sense of safety and spiritual refuge.

Our teachers request that you not engage in other forms of communication while on retreat. Please turn off your cell phones for the duration of your stay, and leave behind your laptops, iPods, iPads and other communication devices so that you can commit to your retreat wholeheartedly and reap the benefits of that commitment. Noble Silence includes not reading, writing, keeping a journal, receiving mail, or otherwise keeping busy and distracted. By leaving at home the many activities and communications that worldly life entails, you offer yourself the gift of stillness.

Is a retreat appropriate for me at this time?

An intensive silent retreat can be a positive and life transforming experience. At the same time, meditation practice can be strenuous, and requires some stability of physical and psychological health.

If you have recently experienced considerable trauma, significant depression or anxiety, or are currently experiencing strong PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder), a silent retreat may not be appropriate for you at this time in your life. A therapist can help you assess the

wisest retreat duration for you, or if it's best to wait before signing up. Meanwhile, daily life practice may be more beneficial.

What if I can't sit for that long?

You will be experiencing much more meditation practice than you are used to, and with it can come some physical challenges. It is up to you how you manage them. If you need to move from a cushion to a chair, that's fine. Sometimes you may want to stand during a meditation period. There is no expectation for you to endure serious discomfort in stillness.

What is teacher dana?

IMCC teachers are continuing the ancient Buddhist tradition of freely offering the teachings. What this means, is that our teachers receive no compensation for teaching at IMCC, and rely instead on the generosity of course participants for a sustainable income.

There is an opportunity to offer contributions to the teachers at the end of your retreat.

What if I cancel my registration?

If you need to cancel your registration, please contact us as soon as possible. Cancellation fees are \$50 if you cancel four or more weeks before a course begins; if you cancel less than four weeks before your retreat begins, your full deposit is forfeited. All cancellation fees support the IMCC Frederick Meyer Scholarship Fund.

How do I pay my balance?

You can pay by check or online via PayPal.

To pay by check: Make check payable to Insight Meditation Community of Charlottesville with a notation that payment is for Spring Retreat Registration. Checks may be mailed to: Insight Meditation Community of Charlottesville, P.O. Box 182, Charlottesville, VA, 22902.

To pay online you must have or create a PayPal account. Your registration receipt (sent to your email address) will have a link to your online invoice. From there, you can select 'Pay Online.' You will be directed to the PayPal website and can authorize payment for the balance of your registration fees.

What will I eat?

The kitchen at Serenity Ridge serves tasty, varied, nutritious vegetarian meals that often include dairy and eggs. All meals are served buffet style. A selection of caffeinated and herbal teas is available at all times, as well as milk, soymilk and sweeteners. Light snacks are available in the dining hall 24 hours a day.

If requested upon registration, vegan and gluten-free options will be made available throughout the retreat. You are responsible for managing other allergies. Please note these allergies on the registration form so that Serenity Ridge may indicate such items near the dish on the buffet table.

After each meal, we ask that you rinse and load your dishes onto dishwashing racks. Dishes are then washed and sanitized by Serenity Ridge staff.

If you need to eat between meals, you are welcome to save part of a meal for later, or take a piece of fruit with you from the dining hall. If you have special dietary needs beyond what Serenity Ridge is offering, please plan ahead and bring any necessary foods or supplements with you to the retreat. These can be stored in the guest refrigerator in the dining hall, in sealed containers marked with your name. Serenity Ridge kitchen will not be available to you for any meal preparation, though there is a microwave available in the dining hall.

What clothing should I pack?

There are two mottos for clothing during your retreat – “Be prepared” and “Be comfortable.”

Weather in Virginia is seasonal and extremely variable, especially in the spring and fall, so we recommend that you come well prepared, with clothing selected for comfort rather than style. Outdoor temperatures may be warm enough for short-sleeves and cold enough for heavy coats, sometimes within the same day or week! The mornings and evenings can be very chilly, and daytime temperatures can be quite warm. There is always the possibility of rain.

For those who like to walk outside through the woods, we suggest you bring a pair of boots or hiking shoes. Please do not bring clothing in noise-making, rustling fabrics such as nylon. Please bring a sufficient supply of clothing for the duration of the retreat.

You will be removing your shoes each time you enter the Gompa, or meditation hall. You may appreciate having shoes that you can easily slip on and off.

Bathrooms are shared with all same-sex participants on the hall. You may want to bring a robe or other garment to wear between your room and the bathroom.

What other essential items should I bring?

- Any necessary special foods and beverages, as well as plastic containers for special foods. Serenity Ridge provides tasty, nutritious vegetarian foods. There are vegan and gluten-free options available if requested.
- Medicines, vitamins, supplements, etc. If you have an existing medical condition, bring enough of all prescription medicines to last throughout the retreat.
- Unscented personal hygiene products. This is extremely important, as some of our teachers and participants are chemically sensitive. IMCC provides unscented hand soap and shower soap. Please bring unscented shampoo and conditioner with you.

Please wash the items you bring with you (including meditation cushion covers) with an unscented detergent and softener before you come. Please do not wear any scented products on the day of your arrival and throughout the retreat. This includes essential oils. If you have pets, washing your items before you come will also make it possible for those with pet allergies to enjoy the retreat.

What other optional items might I want with me?

- Flashlight with extra batteries
- Your own meditation cushion or bench. Serenity Ridge provides basic zabutons (mat) and zafus (cushion). Chairs are available for those who prefer them. Please bring any extra meditation props you may need, such as additional cushions, a meditation stool, a shawl, or throw rug.
- Your own pillow for your bed, if that will make you more comfortable.
- A yoga mat for use in your room or during mindful movement.
- Umbrella
- Ear plugs
- Reusable water bottle and personal mug to minimize our use of disposables.

What should I not bring or use on retreat?

Please don't bring on retreat any scented hygiene or laundry products, since these can significantly affect fellow retreatants with chemical sensitivities. In addition, don't pack candles, incense or 'noisy', rustling clothing.

Once your retreat starts, we ask that you refrain from using cell phones or other communication devices. And please make sure your watch doesn't beep.

Accommodations at the Retreat Center

Serenity Ridge Garuda House is a two-story dormitory style building with single, double, queen, and bunk rooms. The rooms are simply furnished. There are no phones or televisions in the rooms, and with the exception of the queen rooms, bathrooms are shared with same sex residents on each floor. Camping is also available, and bathrooms are available for campers.

With gratitude to Insight Meditation Society for much of the above material.