



MOUNT
MADONNA

YOGA DIWALI INDIA

CUSTOMS & ETIQUETTE IN INDIA & AT SRI RAM ASHRAM

GENERAL CUSTOMS & ETIQUETTE

A little cultural preparation goes a long way in India. While locals are generally gracious with visitors, understanding basic customs is a meaningful way to show respect and connect more deeply with the people and places you encounter. The tips below are a starting point — when in doubt, follow the lead of the Indian people around you.

The Left Hand:

The left hand is considered unclean in Indian culture. Avoid using it for eating, shaking hands, paying for purchases, receiving temple offerings, or other public interactions.

Feet:

The soles of the feet are also considered unclean. Avoid pointing them toward people, altars, or deities.

Temples:

Women should bring a scarf or shawl to drape over their head, shoulders, and chest when entering a temple. Give and receive offerings with your right hand only, and be mindful not to point your feet toward the altar.

Winking:

Winking is considered inappropriate in India and should be avoided.

CUSTOMS & ETIQUETTE AT SRI RAM ASHRAM

How to Give & Interact with the Children, Residents, & Staff

The Children:

The best gift is your visit. Nothing replaces human contact, and as all parents know, the key to good parenting is showing up — so, thank you for showing up!

Bring something of yourself to share. If you're a dancer, bring photos or, better yet, music and a readiness to dance together. The children are curious to learn about anything and everything about you. Bring a game, a children's book to read aloud, an art project, or a sport you love, or simply join in with whatever's happening.

As in all families, jealousies can occur. If you plan to bring gifts, please bring something that can be distributed equally, such as a group gift or items that management can hand out. Always consult with management or your group leaders before giving anything to the children or staff. Donated clothes and other items should be given to management for later distribution.

Diwali Gifts:

Diwali is their "Christmas" — the big annual gift-giving celebration. Each child receives a small amount of cash in a special envelope for the beloved "Shop til You Drop" outing, when all the children head to Haridwar for a day of shopping (and yes, you'll be going too!). They also receive a gift bag on the day of Diwali, with contents that vary each year depending on donations and what the ashram has prepared.

If you'd like to contribute to the Diwali gift bags, here are a few ideas:

- Punching balloons
- Candy (Reese's cups, Tootsie Pops, small Hershey bars, Snickers, M&M's)
- Stickers
- Socks
- Lip balm
- Or money toward a group gift

Another favorite is a group outing to a movie, done once or twice a year and always a huge hit with the kids. This can be gifted if everyone contributes \$25.

The Staff:

Staff members receive annual gifts of cash and clothes distributed by management. Please do not give gifts or tips directly to staff. If you wish to thank them with a tip, your trip leaders can collect cash at the end of the trip for even distribution. This is not necessary or expected.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Do the Children have a curfew?

Yes, though it tends to crumble during festival season. They're generally expected to be in their rooms soon after dinner, around 8:30 p.m., unless they're working on an activity. When visitors are staying at the ashram, we tend to let them hang out a bit longer after dinner with guests.

Do we live with the children?

The children have their own wing. The buildings are shaped like a "U" surrounding a courtyard — guests stay in Om Bhavan, one arm of the U, while the children and staff live in the other sections.