

# FAQ & further information about our retreats in India

*I have written this document based on what people usually ask before signing up for our retreats. The first part covers information about the essence of the retreat and our teaching and the second part covers the more practical questions. I hope you find the information you seek! If not, feel free to send us a mail with your questions on [mail@santhiyoga.dk](mailto:mail@santhiyoga.dk). Warm regards from Anna Marie in India.*

## **What is Santhi Yoga?**

“Santhi” and “yoga” are two Sanskrit words. Santhi means peace and the meaning of yoga is “union”. The word “yoga” is often used as the practice of yoga-asanas (physical positions) but in the Indian spiritual frame “yoga” means spiritual knowledge about how to come closer to the highest union; not only by different yoga and meditation practice but also by experience, understanding, values and attitude towards living. It is actually a universal understanding but the journey starts on a personal level within us since life and universe are reflected and digested through our individual perceptions. In Santhi Yoga School we aim to bring about experience of both inner and universal “peace” with the tools of yoga and meditation. Through the experience of inner peace we wish to open up for awareness about the higher universal union which unites all living beings and all religions.

## **Is the retreat open for all and do I need to have experience with yoga and meditation?**

Our Retreats are open for all. A fundamental part of our approach is the understanding that spiritual development is individual. Your personal and spiritual need and search cannot be measured on any scale or compared with other persons with different background and life experience. Basic experience with yoga and meditation is good but even complete beginners can reach very deep layers of meditation if the motivation and “call” is strong. We often have beginners and yoga teachers getting along very well on the same retreat.

## **Which kind of yoga and meditation and how do you teach?**

### **Yoga Asanas**

We practice a lot physical yoga (yoga asanas) but the physical part is merely a tool to open up “what it is all about”: to make you to go deeper into the peace within yourself and to go further on your spiritual life path. With yoga asanas and the first level of pranayama (breathing exercises) we purify the body and stabilize the mind to make you able to sit comfortably in meditation. Yoga asanas and pranayama work on many levels and will also heal your psychological and physical problems as well as improve the depth and output of your meditation. You will learn the benefits of the positions and also get individual guidance in order to know which positions you need for your aims and challenges. Compared with the western classifications of yoga we may call it “*soft and deep hatha yoga*”. Each position is done calm in coordination with breath and with body-mind awareness as well as awareness about the effects on chakras and pranas (life energies). You don’t need a tuned and flexible body in order to get deep benefits – it is actually more important to have a neutral observing mind in order to go deeper into the positions.

## **Ancient Yoga Tradition**

Both Govind and Anna Marie went to deeper states of meditation through individual yoga and meditation guidance as practiced in the ancient Indian yoga tradition. Our teaching is based on this individual approach and it is crucial to us that each person will have different needs – both on the physical level but also in which way they approach to “yoga”. Some will be very interested in bhakti yoga (devotional approach), some are more into jnana yoga (mental and philosophical understanding) and in a retreat group people may have very different needs in terms of what tool of yoga is best suited for them. In this path you cannot

compare your results with the neighbor and you cannot compete in any way. Even in yoga asanas (the physical part of yoga) – it is not about trying to reach a physical posture. It is about getting the benefit of a position which works in subtle layers of your body and existence.

This may be new to people who have had a yoga practice where the physical result is the main focus. And it may be challenging as well. Most of us are people of goal orientated society where comparison and leveling is a fundamental thing. We often like to know *how far* we are from the goal or *how good* we do this or that or *when* we reach to this or that level. This takes us away from the actual progress in spiritual development. It limits our awareness of the present moment and limits our presence on the spiritual path by trying *to do* or *to become* instead of *to be*. We all actually already have the knowledge and wisdom inside. We just need to turn to our deeper awareness inside and discover it. That may not be the easiest thing to do. But we serve as instruments to help you in this process.

### ***Meditation***

Meditation is the strongest tool in the path of yoga. The process has many levels. On a personal level you may describe it as an individual journey towards your inner layers of existence. You learn to observe the mind and you start to experience how your experiences, emotions and life relations are controlled by the mind and highly affected by the level of “unneeded traffic” in mind activity. You get closer to an understanding of your personality both through the actual practice and also through one of the main benefits: increased awareness and more neutral observation of you actions, reactions and relations in daily life. You strengthen the path to your intuition and hereby the contact to the part of your existence which is beyond your *ego*. This work brings about inner peace and serves to get ready to go deeper into the question about “*who am I*”.

The experiences from this point will be individual and we prefer not to describe the deeper states too much since it is very hard not to enter a mode of comparison and “desire to experience” rather than desire to mature throughout the kind of experiences that naturally comes during the individual practice.

On the retreat we teach meditation techniques that will suit both beginners and experienced meditators in the group classes. We use mantras and japa-malas as tools to focus the mind and we go through a cleansing and healing process with a “pancha prana kriya – technique”. You will get guidance according to your needs and challenges in the individual session and can also seek advice in the reflective talk after group classes.

### ***Can I attend the retreat if I have special concerns or needs?***

Our philosophy is that everyone can attend and we like to make room for everyone. But it is important that you are aware of your own potential limitations in the retreat program. Fx: if you have food regulations you may have to bring supplements on your own or if you have major physical difficulties then you may have to skip the hiking trip in the mountains or even skip some parts of the asana classes. Contact us and we can discuss your situation and if the retreat suits you.

### ***Language?***

We mainly speak English during the retreat so you need to be able to have a good understanding of basic English. There will always be Danish people to help you to ask questions etc. but we don't translate full classes into Danish since it will disturb the flow.

### ***Retreat Program***

Since parts of our program involve different locations and guest teachers in India the final program is often adjusted up until the very day before the retreat (that's a fundamental "unwritten rule" in India: always expect changes). So the final retreat program will be handed out upon your arrival in India. You may have a look at the program for our last retreat in 2013 to get a feeling of how your program may look. [See the program here](#)

### ***Which kind of people come for our retreats?***

Because of the focus on individual guidance we have people with various backgrounds, ages and life experiences getting along very well. In a retreat group of 12 – 14 participants the ages usually range from 21 years to 72 years but we find that the different ages and backgrounds play a very minor role in the way people bond. We enjoy the diversity of people and feel privileged to meet men and woman with different personalities, backgrounds, life stories, ages and nationalities in each group.

### ***Basic facilities and accommodation***

We chose to stay far away from the tourist path in order to give you a unique experience of "inner India". You start out in the beautiful little NGO village Mitraniketan. This is not only a chance to enjoy picturesque green nature but also an opportunity to soak in the friendly spirit and peaceful atmosphere that only the country side can provide. The guest house in Mitraniketan is built for volunteers who work and provide all the activities in the NGO area and the guest house offers neither "room service" nor shiny tiles so it is important for you to be able to adjust to quite simple surrounding. In this first part of the retreat you will all get a single room (unless you ask to live with your friend/partner in double room) with your own balcony and basic furniture: a bed, a table, a chair, shelves and a fan in the ceiling. You share a bathroom with your neighbor (from the retreat group): a toilet (Western or Indian), a sink and two buckets with a mug. Most Indians use the traditional "bucket bath": you simply dip the mug in the water and pour it over the body. The same buckets are used when you wash your clothes. Instead of using toilet paper Indians use water to clean after toilet visits. You may use toilet paper but since the Indian drainage system is not built for paper you will have to dispose it in a bucket. We also kindly ask you to bring your own toilet paper since the paper available here is very rough and some times out of stock in the village since it is not a common thing to use. We supply mosquito nets to those who want. However, if you follow some basic advice you can avoid mosquitos in the room during night time and even sleep with the window open and enjoy the fresh breeze (there is no malaria in South India so you need not be afraid of mosquitoes). You have to clean your own room, wash your own clothes and help the group with small practical tasks such as cleaning the yoga hall and cleaning the dishes so a good group spirit is required.

### ***Food***

We serve Indian vegetarian food which is freshly prepared with local ingredients. The spice level will be adjusted to our "group level" and there will almost always be multiple choices on the buffet. When a family cooks for us there will be natural limitations for special considerations but on all our previous retreats, the participants have praised the very highly.

### ***Flight and transportation***

Santhi Yoga School does not arrange flight travels. We have selected a good route and direct all participants to Grace Tours who arrange the group flights. The prices vary and are usually higher for December departures due to peak season charges. Prices usually increase the later you book your ticket. Contact Grace Tours on 33117117 in order to enquire about prices and to make reservation. Ask for Karen (or Trine) and inform them which retreat you wish to join (Dec-jan or Feb).

### ***From and to the airport***

We use local travel agencies to transport you from and to the airport. Before you leave Denmark you will be informed about who will pick you up in the airport (either Govind or one of our retreat helpers). The transportation from and to the airports is included in the price if you travel with the group. If you arrive alone we can help you to order taxi but you will have to pay for this yourself. (Arrival from Trivandrum airport to Mitraniketan: around 200 kr., 1 ½ - 2 hours. Departure from Tiruvannamalai to Chennai: around 400 kr. 4 hours).

### ***What does the Retreat Price include?***

The retreat price includes all expenses in India except food on the break days on the beach. In the first part all participants will all stay in single room and on the beach and in Tiruvannamalai you will be accommodated in double rooms. If you choose to stay in the village Mitraniketan then all your expenses are included in the retreat price. Due to environmental concerns we prefer to serve filtered or boiled water which is safe to drink instead of leaving a pile of plastic bottles behind to be burned. There may be days where you for practical reasons have to buy your own drinking water (one liter costs 2-3 kr.) Additional costs could be:

- if you choose to stay in single room at the beach or choose to add air-condition in the beach hotel (normally not required at this time of the year though).
- Snacks and souvenirs

### ***Smoking***

In India smoking is considered to be bad and impolite. So smoking in public should be done with care and never in front of temples or nearby houses and places we visit. We accept if you need to smoke but we ask you do it in private and in a distance to the group. We like to support you to cleanse your body and go deeper into breathing techniques (which smoking puts certain limitations to) so inform us if you need help to cut down or stop smoking :o)

### ***India and stomach problems***

Many people connect a trip to India with unavoidable upset stomach. This is not true. We rarely have participants with stomach problems since we select your dining places with care and only serve fresh, vegetarian local food. We always advice participants to take probiotics two weeks before the journey and during the weeks in India since you optimize your stomach to receive the new diet consisting of more rice and more spices than most westerners are used to.

### ***What do I need to get on my own?***

- **Insurance:** We always recommend you to have both **travel insurance** and **cancellation insurance** (not the same). Often your own insurance company will be able to offer you a good price for a yearly insurance covering 3 months of "world-travelling" – but remember to tell them that you are travelling to India. Gouda Rejseforsikring and Europæiske offer insurance based on the amount of days you are travelling. Notice that you have to buy your cancellation insurance around the same time that you purchase your flight tickets! Some banks in Denmark offer you a free travel insurance if you pay the retreat by MasterCard (ask your bank).

- **Visa:** Visa is required and you should apply for visa 3 weeks before your arrival in India. You may apply earlier but notice that the 3 or 6 months visa period starts the date of issue. You must apply for tourist visa. [Read more about visa here.](#)
- **Vaccination:** Always double check what your doctor suggests regarding vaccinations. We have experienced many doctors thinking that India is “one place” and that you will need vaccinations for all possible diseases. You do not! Vaccination may give a good protection towards diseases but they are also hard on your body. Make sure you look for South India and also be aware that you are travelling for a short time as a tourist. You will not enter remote areas or travel like a backpacker. See the recommendations of [Statens Seruminstitut here.](#)  
**Homeopathy** offers good alternatives if you, as we do, prefer to use more natural forms for medicine without side effects. You can buy the medicine at [www.homeotek.dk](http://www.homeotek.dk) (or call and enquire or visit them on Rathsacksvej 27, 1862 frederiksberg, ph: 33241736). We have very good experience with homeopathic remedies both in daily use and for travelling.

### ***Backpack or suitcase?***

You are not going to carry your luggage much so it doesn't make much difference which kind of luggage you bring as long as you are able to carry your luggage for a short distance.

***What shall I bring:*** [Down load the list of what to bring here](#)

***Medicine:*** You don't need to carry much medicine but we recommend some basic remedies. [Download our recommended list here \(Danish file\).](#)

### ***Dressing in India***

India has an old unique culture which is important to respect if you want to get the most out of it. It is therefore very important to follow the Indian dress code: women: cover legs and shoulders and you should not wear deep cut t-shirts. Men should not wear shorts in the temples. When we are “on campus” you may dress more western but women must always cover their legs from the knees and up. A shawl to cover the shoulders is also fine. Synthetic and tight clothes are not advisable in the heat so try to bring loose cotton clothes. You will find traditional Indian clothes in Mitraniketan – it is very comfortable to wear in the warm climate. It may take some days before you can buy clothes, so make sure that you have clothes for the first couple of days. Clothes are very cheap in India – you can get a nice set for 25-50 kr. (pants, top and shall).

### ***After the retreat***

After the retreat we will invite you to a reunion meeting when we are back in Denmark (April, May and June each year) and you can always contact us if you have questions regarding your spiritual practice. As a former retreat participant you are also welcome to come back to India and stay with us in our little Sadhana Guest House.

### ***Sadhana Guest House***

When you have attended a retreat you are welcome to return and stay in our Sadhana Guest House to continue your yoga and meditation practice and with guidance from us. We have a limited amount of rooms so please contact us in good time. The best season to come is August – February (it is very hot from march – july). You may stay for weeks or months – contact us and we can talk about your stay.