



AGHOR FOUNDATION

Personal Retreat at Bal Ashram

Dear Friend,

We are looking forward to your visit to Bal Ashram in Varanasi, India. In anticipation of your stay, we are providing some information that may be helpful to you as you plan your visit.

Who We Are:

In addition to serving as Babaji's home in India, Bal Ashram is a nurturing safe home for approximately 20 boys and young men ranging in ages from 14 to 19. The Ashram is also headquarters for the Aghor Foundation, which oversees and administers social service programs in Varanasi, and serves as a platform for the Foundation's spiritual, cultural, vocational and social programs. Next door to the Ashram grounds are Anjali School and the Vision Varanasi Eye Hospital.

The Ashram welcomes day visitors from all over India and around the world throughout the year and has accommodations for short or longer-term stays.

Main Contact information:

- **Teijbal Pandey: +91 98398 46938 (Phone & WhatsApp)**
- **Sudhanshu: +91 78976 29400 (Phone & WhatsApp)**

Where We Are:

Maheshnagar Colony, Samne Ghat
Lanka, Varanasi U.P. 221005

- Bal Ashram is situated in the southern part of Varanasi. The city, also referred to as Benares or Kashi, is known as the "City of Shiva". It is the oldest continuously habituated city in the world, and is considered to be the spiritual capital of India. Varanasi attracts thousands of pilgrims throughout the year and yogis have mediated

on the banks of the sacred Ganges River since time immemorial. The stillness and silence here is palpable and you can connect with it at any moment, even amidst what appears to be a bustling and chaotic city.

- The nearest airport is Varanasi (Lal Bahadur Shastri) International Airport, approximately 20 miles from Bal Ashram. Due to heavy traffic through the city center, it can take up to 1.5 hours to reach the Ashram by taxi, depending on the time of day. We highly recommend allowing us to arrange your transport as the Ashram can be difficult for unfamiliar drivers. Please send your flight details to arrange an airport pick-up. The approximate charge is between 1,000 to and 1,200 rupees (about \$15-20 USD). Please note that if your flight is delayed, the cost could be higher. We can settle the payment with the driver on your behalf and you can reimburse the Ashram during your stay.
- Bal Ashram is located in the district of Lanka, approximately 1.5 miles from Assi Ghat, the start of the main tourist area of Varanasi, which is accessible by walking or a short rikshaw/tuktuk ride. The Ashram is also close to Benares Hindu University, the largest academic institution in Asia and a beautiful campus which is worth visiting while you are here.

What We Are:

In addition to being home for Babaji and the resident young men, Bal Ashram is an “ashram”, a place where visitors come to offer their greetings to the Guru and divinities and where spiritual seekers are practicing their *sadhana*. Bal Ashram provides an opportunity to engage in *seva* and learn more about the social service projects established by Babaji that are supported by friends like you. Bal Ashram’s campus also includes Anjali School, Shakti Project Workshop & Beauty Facility, Vision Varanasi Eye Hospital.

In this spirit, we provide some basic guidelines to be mindful of which will help to maintain the right environment for all:

- Dress modestly. Avoid tight or revealing clothing. Short or long-sleeved tops are preferable to tank tops or sleeveless shirts. It is customary for both men and women to wear shawls when they are in the temple and in the presence of Babaji.
- Speak softly. We aspire to maintain a place of peace for all. Throughout the day, the boys living at the Ashram have dedicated responsibilities as well as school work to attend to. Individuals come to the Ashram for meditation, prayers and puja (worship) in the temple or around the grounds throughout the day. When Babaji is in residence,

many come for *darshan* - to speak with him and receive his blessing. We ask that guests to the Ashram respect the sacredness of the space and the activities throughout the day by being mindful of when, how and what they are speaking.

- Walk gently. The Ashram grounds are sacred to those who visit and those who live here. If possible, remain without shoes while on the Ashram grounds, particularly in the temple area, *darshan* areas, and main building.

What happens at the Ashram:

- The Ashram day starts early! Most days the boys start their day at 5:00am with exercise, yoga, seva and breakfast before heading to school each day.
- You are welcome to attend any yoga classes and meditation in the temple. Please ask Sudhanshu for the current schedule.
- We would be pleased to give you a tour and additional information on any of our service projects, including the Anjali School, Vision Varanasi Eye Hospital, Shakti Project (Women's Empowerment), Shanti Niketan Girls Hostel (approximately 1/2 mile from the Ashram) and the Amrit Sagar Eco-Center.
- Morning and evening meditation take place in the temple and are open to all. Approximate times are: 8:00am and @6:00pm.

Meals at the Ashram

- Breakfast foods are self-serve and are available in the upstairs kitchen and in the downstairs dining hall.
- Lunch and dinner are served in the downstairs dining hall and are announced with a bell.
- Please let Tejbal or Sudhanshu know if you will be outside of the Ashram for the day and/or will not be joining us for the daily meals.
- Please use caution when dining outside of the Ashram. When dining out, the best is to purchase bottled water. We recommend that you specifically avoid drinking any lassis, poured unbottled cold drinks, raw chutneys, or uncooked/raw products unless you are at a trusted place. Please ask Tejbal or Sudhanshu for suggestions.

What we have & what you should bring:

The Ashram rooms will be accommodated with sheets, towels and toilet paper. **We ask that you are modest in your use of all three in respect of resources.** All rooms are furnished with locks and lockable drawers for securing your belongings. We also have a small kitchen with a refrigerator and gas stove that is available for guest use.

While all basic necessities are available in India, we have found that it is helpful to bring the following.

- Bug spray: Depending on the time of year, there may be mosquitos at evening time.
- Coffee: We have a small French press that is available for guest use. As U.S.-style coffee can be expensive and hard to find in Varanasi, we suggest you bring ground coffee with you if you wish to have coffee during your stay.
- Easy on-off shoes: As general custom in India, shoes are not worn inside ashrams, temples, homes and many shops.
- Plug adaptor. Note: The voltage in India is 220 volts, which is different from U.S. voltage. Please keep this in mind when selecting which appliances to bring
- Water bottle: The Ashram has filtered water that is available for all throughout the day.
- Shawl: It is a custom to always wear a shawl in the temple and around Babaji.

Other helpful tips:

- There are cash machines for local banks throughout Varanasi, however they are not always reliable. It is best to bring cash and plan to exchange when you arrive. Please ask Tejbal for assistance with exchanging any currency to rupees. He always gets the best rate!
- The availability of fresh fruits and green vegetables can be varied and limited. As such, you may wish to bring Vitamin C tablets or powdered vitamin drinks/supplements if you will be in India for an extended period.
- Laundry service through a local provider is available. You may also handwash your clothes at the Ashram and line dry. Please ask Tejbal or Sudhanshu for additional information
- The Ashram has WiFi service available for guests. As we need to control the number of users on the network, we limit access to the WiFi password. We can provide the current password to you when you arrive. Please do not share it with anyone.
- A nice way to see and travel to downtown Varanasi is by boat. Please speak to Tejbal or Sudhanshu to organize.

