



# Govinda Valley Ashram & Yoga School Student Manual

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### **The Buddha was asked**

“What did you gain from meditation?”

**He replied,** “Nothing, however let me tell you what I lost: Anger, depression, anxiety, insecurity, fear of old age and death.”



## Welcome to Govinda Valley (GV) Ashram & Yoga School

Welcome to Govinda Valley Ashram & Yoga School! We are excited to learn and grow with you.

Our foundations lie within the Yoga tradition and are built on the traditional principles and practices of yoga as derived from ancient authoritative texts, such as the Yoga Sutras, Bhagavad-Gita, Srimad-Bhagavatam, etc.

In particular, we are committed to a sattvic lifestyle and service (*seva*). 'Sattvic' is a yogic term that refers to that which allows you to operate at your **fullest potential** through harmony and balance with nature and thus promotes your psychological, physical, and spiritual health. This will be further explored during your time here.

*Seva*. The essential spirit of yoga is one of selfless service, and the practice of such service lies at the core of everything we do at Govinda Valley.

At GV, **all** activities - speech, thoughts, behaviour, and appearance should reflect the mode of *sattva* (mode of clarity). Therefore, every thought, speech, and behaviour should reflect kindness, truthfulness, and consideration, with no coarse language or action to be used on the premises.

Our intentional school of yogic studies is focused on inward discovery and spiritual enhancement for the purpose of self-realisation. It is our aim to provide a clean, supportive, and safe educational space for our guests, students, and faculty. This allows us all to realise ourselves into a higher level of self-awareness, personal alignment, and commitment to contribute to the greater good for all.

## Purpose of Student Manual

This Manual details the practical operations and cultural expectations we require of students during your enrolment at Govinda Valley Ashram & Yoga School.

## Govinda Valley Context

Govinda Valley is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to educating and training people in the yogic way of life. This means the lifestyle and knowledge shared in the Yoga School will be reflective of the yogic worldview (i.e., based on ancient yogic sciences).

## Expectations of the Student Body

For Govinda Valley Ashram & Yoga School to operate in a manner that is most beneficial for the growth and education of its students, we expect the following:

1. That you abide by the moral principles expounded by the *yamas* and *niyamas* (see Govinda Valley Ashram & Yoga School Code of Conduct)



2. That you cooperatively engage in your service (see Govinda Valley Ashram & Yoga School Code of Conduct)
3. That you engage in your *sadhana* (prescribed spiritual practice) (see Govinda Valley Ashram & Yoga School Code of Conduct)
4. That you attend and engage in your course according to the Course Outline and the Govinda Valley Ashram & Yoga School Code of Conduct

## Time Away, Sick Leave, Pastoral Care, Overnight Stays

During your time at Govinda Valley you are likely to experience the most profound personal growth. For the sake of the process, we do not encourage students to take any extended time away including overnight leave. For many of you, this will be the first and only time you are truly dedicated to introspection. In other words, in the current modern world, we are inundated with information and pressures from various sources such as family, peers, work, advertising companies, and so on. We very rarely find a moment of stillness or even realise that we should truly discover what our identity and the true purpose of life is.

You may not have an opportunity to be removed from familial, work, social, economic and political pressures, distractions or suggestions like this again. Therefore in being at an *ashram*, you are given a rare opportunity to dive deep into stillness and modest living which creates the time and the mental, physical, and emotional space required for your deep personal analysis and reflection. Please use this opportunity wisely.

Notably, people often experience a rollercoaster of emotions given such a drastic change in lifestyle or you may be working through issues and beliefs that are painful or deeply held.

Rather than isolating yourself or being engaged in distracting activity, we recommend working through the challenges with the support and understanding of the Management. In this regard, the Student Administrator is in charge of Pastoral Care, and will be available to give emotional support where required. That being said, we understand that sometimes things come up that can get in the way of our spiritual and personal journey. If this happens and you do need time away, please see your Department Head first so arrangements can be made to cover services in your absence.

The dates and times of any breaks must always be made in agreement with your Department Head.

In cases where you choose to prematurely leave (departure before the initially agreed departure date), your bond will be forfeited.

### Sick

If you are unwell, we recommend you take time off to recuperate. You are not required to make up these hours. Please check in with your Department Head so that they understand what is happening. If you need a doctor or some personal help with your situation, contact your Department Head or the Student Supervisor.



\* Important Note: If you have been diagnosed with a mental health disorder or significant trauma, please consult with your primary care provider before beginning meditation or our program. While the program and practice of meditation is suitable for most people, it can bring up uncomfortable emotions/sensations.

## Pets

To preserve the health of the natural environment, no animals or pets are to be introduced onto the property at any time.

## Heart & Soul Retreats

The Govinda Valley schedule largely operates around the needs of Heart and Soul Retreats. Heart and Soul Retreats comprises the retreat business that provides the economic foundation for the whole project. The retreats involve clients who stay on premises for various periods of time for the sake of healing and restoration based on yoga practice and various healing modalities.

## Schedule

You are welcome to engage in the workshops and classes offered to guests at Heart and Soul Retreats provided they are not private bookings and that guests are given priority first.

You can find the schedule for classes and workshops at the Reception desk and outside the Solar Room.

## Reception Back Office

This is typically where mail is received. If you have a package posted, it is likely to be here at the Reception Back Office or in the mailbox at the property entrance.

You will also find stationery and office supplies here. Please organise items in their assigned places to ensure the area is clean, and retrieval of items is quick and seamless for the Reception Team.

## Use of Healing Centre

Services at the Healing Centre such as Reiki and Massage can be accessed by students at a discounted rate. Please discuss this with the Reception Team.

## Use of Laundry and Associated Equipment

Laundry is used by the Housekeeping Team for Heart and Soul Retreats from 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM.

- You are free to use the laundry and its equipment outside these hours provided they are returned for use within service hours.
- Please make sure you remove your items before 9:00 AM so that the Housekeeping Team can begin their service without delay.

## Noise and Use of Electronics

To maintain the serenity of Heart & Soul Retreats, we ask that you:

- Remain mindfully Silent and refrain from playing any music from 9:00 PM until 7:30 AM throughout the property.
- Refrain from using the communal showers after 9:00 PM.
- Refrain from playing any loud music at any time in public spaces.

## Dress Code

At Govinda Valley, dress should be simple, modest, and comfortable for all cultural, spiritual, and interpersonal circumstances of *ashram* life. Tight, transparent, revealing clothing (e.g. ripped shorts, short skirts/dresses, or cropped clothing) should not be worn. This is important in order to minimise distraction to others.

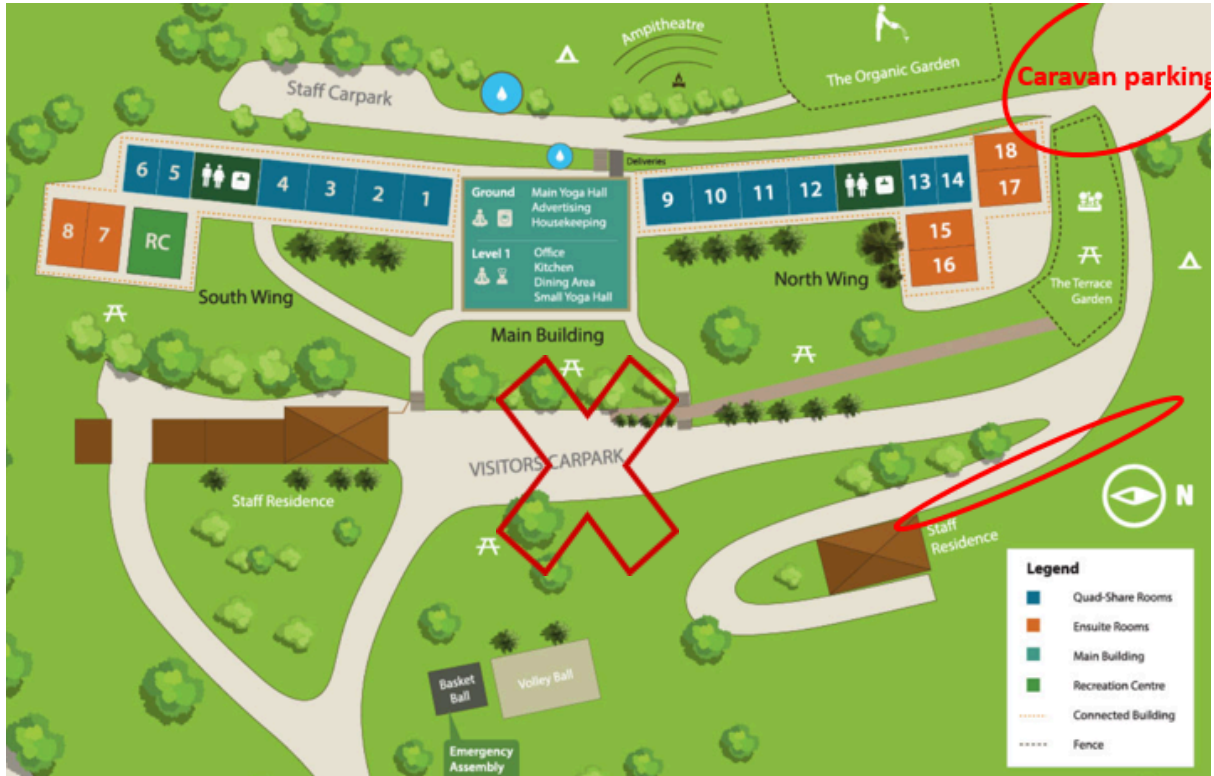
- Sunbathing and partial nudity are not permitted.

## Cleanliness and Space Consideration

- Please clean up untidy places as you come across them. For example, wipe up a missed spill or fluff up cushions as you pass.
- Please remove your shoes before entering any room in the Men's/Women's Ashrams or Solar, Lunar, and Lotus Room.
- Return misplaced items as you come across them. For example, return library books to the book shelf, return cushions and bolsters in the yoga rooms, crockery in the dining hall, etc.
- All crockery and cutlery must be cleaned and sanitised before being returned to the Dining Hall after use.

## Parking

- Please do not park at guest parking spaces. Instead you may park in the areas circled in red below.



## Interpersonal Interactions

To ensure that we maintain an environment that is conducive to your learning, spiritual growth, and study, the nature of interactions at GV must be held to a high standard and professional. It is expected that:

- All interactions with others are harmonious, respectful, courteous, and uplifting
- You refrain from discussions that can be classified as gossip, unconstructive criticism/complaints, bullying, harassment or discriminatory. In other words, speak in a way that creates positive change, any speech that does not uplift yourself and those around you should be avoided!
- You do not physical abuse any individual
- You do not offer or receive massages or services of a physically intimate nature across the sexes. This includes those for a healing or altruistic purpose.
- You do not cultivate any new emotional or physically intimate relationship with another individual beyond friendship. Emotional and physical intimacies can be highly distracting for all involved which can impede upon your growth and studies during a time where this is your sole priority.
- Men and women are not to access the Ashram of the opposite sex without:
  - Required as a service task, OR



- Approval from the Department Heads (e.g. to participate in a student event held at the Men's/Women's Ashram)

*Note:* When this occurs, you must alert the student body that you are entering the Men's/Women's Ashram (with sufficient notice of at least 10 minutes) through the Student Chat and knock and announce your presence before entering. This is to ensure that all members of the Men's/Women's Ashram who are present are sufficiently prepared for the presence of another (for example, an individual may be showering or journaling in private and can prepare to move).

## Internet Usage

The following are not approved as appropriate use of the Govinda Valley Ashram and Yoga School connectivity service. We ask that you do not engage in the following:

- Piracy (illegal downloads of any kind)
- Cyber harassment and bullying

## Minimal Use of Fragrance

- Exposure to perfumes and other scented products can trigger very serious health reactions in individuals with asthma, allergies, migraines or multiple chemical sensitivities. The health effects of fragrances – ranging in severity from mild to debilitating – can include: headaches, migraines, dizziness, nausea, fatigue, shortness of breath, and wheezing. Fragrances can be found in a wide range of products including soaps, shampoos, deodorants, hairsprays, and cosmetics.
- To protect our students and retreat guests with chemical sensitivities, we ask for your cooperation in helping to create a 'scent-free' environment: Avoid wearing strongly and/or artificially scented personal care products such as perfume, ittar/attar, body oils, cologne, aftershave, scented lotions or creams for the body, face or hands. Most brands have fragrance-free products available.
- You may be asked to limit your use of a particular scented product or refrain from using it entirely during your time here.

## Safety

- The Emergency Evacuation Point is the Basketball Court. This will be indicated to you during your Initial and Official Induction and is also present on all maps around the property.
  - In the case of emergencies, please follow the direction of Department Heads and Directors.
- GV is susceptible to fire dangers – The Fire Safety Plan will be communicated to you throughout your enrolment in the course.
  - Fire protocols are also posted in all student rooms and Men's/Women's Ashrams for your information.



- Please follow the instructions of the Fire Brigade or Fire Wardens (those wearing hi-vis vests) during any fire emergency and do not operate according to your own whims.
- Water  
GV has two water sources:
  - Creek water – Non-drinking water. This is used typically in showers and toilets.
  - Rain/filtered water- Drinking water. All drinking water taps are labelled and this includes bubblers/water fountains around the property.

Note: GV runs on a greywater (septic tank) system. That means items that enter the drainage must be greywater safe! Please ensure you use/buy soaps, detergents, etc. that are appropriate for septic systems..
- Weir  
GV is nestled in the Royal National Park and is accessible by driving or walking over a heritage weir/causeway. In times of high or sustained rainfall, getting in and out of the property may be difficult over the weir. Please do not cross the weir either by foot or vehicle if it has been flagged as unfit for crossing by Management. This will typically be communicated via the General Student Chat. If you cannot see the red indicator the weir is not safe to cross.

## Bond and Respect for Property

A150AUD bond is required upon your arrival. In cases where damages, breaches of the Code of Conduct or premature departure occurs, your bond may be held. Upon course completion, the bond will be returned.

## Kitchen

As with all the areas within the property, the Govinda Valley Kitchen is a sacred space. The kitchen is deemed highly important as the yogic tradition views that the subtle reality always pervades the external reality. That means the energy and vibration of the space directly enters the food that is produced from the kitchen and thus enters your physical body.

In other words, "what you eat, you become" or "what goes in must go out". All students are likely to enter the kitchen at one point. To maintain the integrity of the space, we stipulate that when within kitchen boundaries:

- The kitchen is only entered for service-related purposes
- All sound vibration in the kitchen is as sacred as possible
  - Conversations should be of an uplifting, positive nature
  - Music played is mantra meditation only and produced by listed artists only (list found within kitchen)
  - Singing in the kitchen is of mantra meditation only
  - No earphones or headphones are to be worn at any time
- You do not eat or drink
- You do not bring any personal items or eating ware into the kitchen. For example:

- Cups
- Earphones / Headphones
- Drink bottles
- Journals

Note: Further Kitchen Rules are stipulated in the Code of Conduct.

## Safety and Hygiene in the Kitchen

If you are working within the kitchen, please arrive

- Wearing closed shoes
- With hair tied back into a tight bun
- Wearing a sleeved shirt that covers the armpits

## Weekly General Meeting

Typically, the entire student body, faculty, and management meet weekly to discuss updates, protocols, philosophy, and concerns. The details are below.

**Time and Day:** 9:00 AM Tuesday

**Location:** Lunar Room

**If you have input/questions:** Please submit this to your relevant Department Head who will raise these at the meetings

## Weekly Department Heads Meeting

Typically, Department Heads meet weekly to discuss a range of topics. For example, system updates, concerns, student health and wellbeing, and upcoming events for the efficient and practical operations of the Govinda Valley Project.

Please note, student reviews amongst the Department Heads are completed on a weekly basis to ensure that the health, wellbeing, and safety of students are maintained. If a student has expressed a concern that indicates they or another may be at risk of harm, bullying, harassment or discrimination this will be raised at the Department Heads Meeting.

## Grievances or Conflict Resolution

We hope that your time here will be as peaceful and harmonious as possible! However if you have any concerns or grievances at all, please:

1. Discuss this with the Department Head or submit your concern into the Student Correspondence Box on the General Management Office door. Your Department Head will attempt to support you in your concerns.
2. If discussion with your Department Head is not sufficient, please raise it with the Student Administrator.
3. If that is still not sufficient, please alert a Director. We will do our best to support you.



## Communication Channels

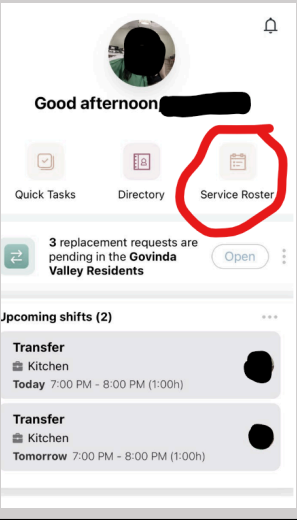
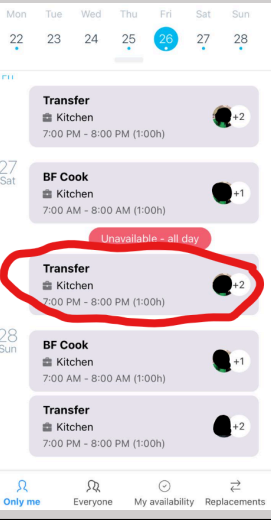
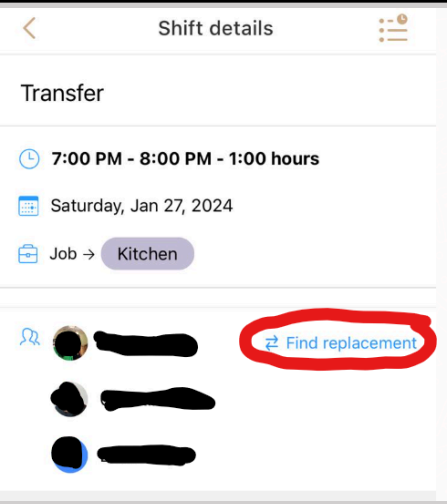
This is a big student body! We typically communicate via:

- WhatsApp
  - Purpose: Non-service related items such as general discussions, group events planning, etc.
- Connecteam Team Management App
  - Purpose:
    - Service-related items
    - Major Announcements (such as emergency declarations)
    - Rostering Arrangement

## Requesting a 'Shift Swap' on the Connecteam App

A **'Shift Swap'** is when another person takes on a shift assigned to you or vice versa. In these cases, please make sure your hours throughout the week are balanced to still equal 28 hours (unless for some unusual circumstance which you must communicate to your Department Head should you wish your hours to be accounted for in coming weeks).



	
<p>1. <b>Open</b> the Connecteam App on your console.</p> <p>2. <b>Press</b> 'Service Roster'.</p>	<p>3. <b>Press</b> on the shift you would like to have replaced/swapped.</p>
	<p>Nil image.</p>
<p>4. <b>Press</b> 'Find replacement'</p>	<p>5. <b>Click</b> on the member you would like to request assume your shift (best to discuss with them beforehand in person!)</p> <p>6. All finished!</p>

## Misc: Local Shops/Stores

You will get to know Otford and surrounding suburbs and areas throughout your stay here. However, just to get you started in case there are items you need to purchase:

- Helensburgh
  - Our closest set of stores. Helensburgh is a local suburb about 8 minutes drive from the property. You will find general facilities such as:
    - Grocery store
    - Bakery and Deli
    - Clothing stores
    - Pharmacy
    - Medical Centre
    - Post Office
    - Restaurants
    - Library
    - Op Shop
    - Surf Shop
- Binnars Farm
  - A local fruit and vegetable shop
- Other local towns/suburbs include:
  - Thirroul
  - Coledale
  - Stanwell Park
  - Gymea

## Misc: Public Transport

The closest train station is Otford Station (5-minute walk from property). There are trains approximately every 2 hours that run toward Sydney.

Helensburgh Train station is the next closest train station (~10-minute drive from the property).



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The wise who searched deep within their heart  
could discern between that which is and that which is not.

- *Rig Veda*