

Gurdwara (Sikh Temple)

A place of worship by Sikhs is called *Gurdwara* (gateway to the guru). It is also known as a Sikh Temple. A *Gurdwara* can generally be found in every Sikh community, and can range from a room in a house converted for the purpose of worship to magnificent marble buildings inlaid with gold, such as the Golden Temple in Amritsar, Punjab, India.

Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the holy scriptures of the Sikhs, is installed at a higher level than the congregation in the main hall. The Sikh religious services consist of *kirtan* (singing hymns in praise of God), *ardas* (community prayer led by one person, while every body stands with folded hands), and a *hukamnama* (the Guru's Command) for the day. Blessings for special occasions or events may be included in the *ardas*. The *hukamnama* is reading a randomly selected hymn from the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*. It is first read in the original Punjabi language and then translated into English or the main language of the congregation. It is followed by distribution of the *karah parsad* (sacred sweet pudding, made from wheat flour, sugar, water, and clarified butter), and is considered to be a blessing from the Guru. A *kirpan* (a small ceremonial sword) is used to bless the *karah parsad* and *langar* (community meal) during the *ardas*.

Before entering the prayer hall, everyone removes shoes and cover head as a sign of respect for the Sikh scriptures. In addition, hands are also washed. Regardless of status, everybody sits on the floor.

The *Gurdwara* complex contains a *Guru Ka Langar* (Guru's kitchen) that serves vegetarian meals to everybody visiting the *Gurdwara*. All people sit together and eat food as equals without discrimination of caste, creed, race, or sex.