

Hillwalking Retreats

Walking, Mountains and Meditation

About the retreat

Nature is for many of us a vital source of spiritual nourishment in an increasingly busy world. On these retreats, we will combine traditional Buddhist teachings with the simple practice of spending time walking in the rich and beautiful landscapes that surround Dhanakosa. We will cover an introduction to two traditional Buddhist meditations: the mindfulness of breathing and the development of loving kindness (Metta Bhavana), as well as a solid introduction to the principals of meditation. We will also be exploring some of the broader aspects of traditional Buddhism to get a flavour of how these might be relevant to our modern lives. But, perhaps most of all, we will be enjoying a reflective and companionable week in the richness and beauty of nature. Exploring how our connection with the natural world supports us to be more fully ourselves.

The retreat will include three days of guided walks, spread throughout the week. We will normally offer three walks on each of these days to suit a range of levels of fitness and experience. All walks are in the local area but some require a short drive to get to the starting point. You can of course also go on your own walks and our walk leaders will be able to advise you. Please note, appropriate clothing is essential for many of the guided walks – see “Is there anything special I need to bring?”

These retreats are suitable for complete beginners to meditation, and those who already have some experience.

A note on led walks

Typically, we will offer led walks falling into three categories; easier, medium, and more difficult. The relative difficulty is often not in the length of the walk but the steepness of the walk and the difficulty of the terrain under foot.

- Easier walks – Typically 8 to 13 km along hill tracks, but also using quiet roads, made paths, and sometimes short sections of unmade paths. Typically climbing between 100 and 300m over the course of the walk
- Medium grade walks – Typically 8 to 13km using a combination of hill tracks, unmade paths and open hill. Typically may climb between 300 and 600m over the course of the walk.
- More difficult walks – Typically 8 to 13km. Will generally be a combination of unmade paths and open hill, including steeper or more challenging sections. Typically may climb between 600 and 900m during the course of the walk.

Participants who may find the easier graded walks challenging are welcome to attend the retreat and we will offer advice on where they can walk in the local area on walk days but cannot guarantee being able to offer lead walks.

Experienced hill walkers with expectations of longer walks over the higher mountains are also welcome, but we invite them to moderate their expectations to fit into the “retreat walking day” (max 6 hours) so as to fully participate in the retreat programme.

Is there anything special I need to bring?

Yes!

A pair of well fitting walking boots with good grip and ankle support is essential for the medium and difficult graded walks as many of these walks include sections of uneven ground. Our guides will not take you on a walk if they consider your footwear unsuitable.

- Waterproof jacket and trousers.
- Water bottle and sun cream.
- Suitable clothing: Light weight trousers (not jeans), an under-layer that will “wick” moisture away from the skin (preferably not cotton), and a fleece for warmth. Have a spare top for additional warmth as well. A hat and gloves are essential.
- A small rucksack.
- Tupperware box or reusable sandwich wrapper for your lunch.
- If you are planning to go for your own walks make sure you also have a map (Explorer 365 -the Trossachs is best) and a compass.

What can you expect from the programme?

The retreat day starts at 7am with a rising bell and a meditation at 7.30.

Meditation sessions will begin with some instruction and will normally last for between 20 and 30 minutes. On walking days, we will meet after breakfast to organise the day’s walks, returning to the centre in the afternoon for another meditation before the evening meal.

In the evening there will be a mix of talks group discussions and an exploration of Buddhist chanting. On non-walking days there will be opportunities for deeper engagement with meditation practice and periods of reflection – often taking advantage of the surrounding natural environment.

There will be periods of silence on the retreat to support reflection. These will normally be overnight but may also include substantial periods during the day.

About the retreat team

These retreats will be led by our retreat leading team. Each retreat will have a main meditation teacher and two or three walk leaders, a retreat organiser and a cook.