

FWBO weekend retreats - specimen venue checklist

Some things to look for when planning a weekend retreat or visiting a possible venue

first draft, Lokabandhu, October 2009 - suggestions welcome...

Booking a venue

If possible, start looking for somewhere a YEAR in advance! Places really do get booked that far ahead. If you're looking for somewhere at short notice - why not set next year's date now and look for that as well...?

There's various (UK-based) websites that can help you find a venue -

www.groupaccommodation.com - excellent site with many large venues in UK and Europe

www.escape-to.co.uk - UK Youth Hostels available for group hire

www.stilwell.co.uk - UK cottages, camping, and Youth Hostels

Cost and retreat budget; cashflow and deposits

You'll need to draw up a basic retreat budget - income and expenditure.

Check whether the venue is hired at a **variable cost** of so many pounds/person/night or a **fixed cost** for the whole place. It will make a big difference to the risk you are taking in organising it!

If you're on a fixed cost basis, work out your break-even.

Cashflow may be an issue as you will likely have to pay a substantial deposit some time in advance - it may be a long time till you get it back in again.

Taking bookings

You'll need a clear record of people's contact numbers; deposits paid and balance due

Consider making discreet enquiries as people book to check they know what sort of retreat it is and they are the right sort of people - eg men not women or vice versa!); friends not beginners, etc...

If the venue is not immediately accessible by public transport and you're not all arriving together eg by minibus; then you might need to ask if people can offer lifts when they book. Bear in mind people will need lifts at the end as well.

Likewise special diets - you need to know these before you go shopping!

Arrival and departure

Check out public transport on Friday; and ALSO public transport on Sunday - it will be different!

Some useful websites are -

<http://maps.google.com> - a great way to see where you'll be and compute driving directions

www.traveline.org.uk/index.htm - good for local public transport

www.transportdirect.info - alternative to Traveline, better in some ways

www.thetrainline.com - train tickets

www.nationalexpress.com - coach tickets

Check out arrival times, key collection and where to leave the key on departure.

Check out how thoroughly you are expected to clear the place and make sure you have time for this.

Check out emergency information eg where is the nearest hospital/doctor and what their phone numbers are. Check out your precise location (eg house name/postcode) in case you need to summon an ambulance. Best not leave it till the accident happens... Check out whether anyone coming has First Aid qualifications and whether they're able/willing to be called upon if needed.

Shrine room

You'll need a shrine room of course. Check for -

- Permission/ability to shift furniture to clear floor space
- Likely outside noise
- Likely overhead noise (eg bedrooms)
- Floor covering - will you need mats?
- Noise of central heating - noisy central heating can be a real pain and is easy not to notice until you sit down to meditate!
- Creaky hinges (bring a can of WD-40!)
- Cushions and mats - where are these coming from? And how will you transport them?
- Any special equipment eg laptop/audio/projector

If the shrine room is in a separate building to the accommodation do you need a system for locking doors and hiding the key when you meditate?

Team roles

You'll need to cover most or all of the following -

- Leader
- Organiser
- Shopper
- Cook
- Shrine room
- Giving talks
- Anything else

Program

See separate sheet for a sample weekend retreat program - this will of course depend on exactly what you're doing!

Kitchen

Check what you'll need to provide out of the following -

- Crockery
- Cutlery
- Pots and pans
- Kettles
- Enough good knives and chopping boards (you'll probably want several choppers working together in the work period)

You may want to make an inventory of what the venue provides - it could save confusion later!

See separate sheet for a sample shopping list - this will of course depend on numbers and what you cook for the main meals.

Accommodation

Check the number of beds you'll need and make sure they work out ok between men's and women's room and bathrooms/toilets. If the retreat is likely to be popular ask about other options eg camping - but make sure the rest of the facilities can cope with greater numbers.

It's worth being clear who else if anyone will be on site besides yourselves, and whether members of the public are likely to be around.

Sitting room

Is there a place people can sit and 'hang out'? Do you need to rearrange chairs etc? Or hide the TV?

Walks

Where can you go for walks in the immediate vicinity?

Where's the nearest shop/supermarket if you need a bit of emergency shopping?