

07 BRIEFING Visiting a Hindu Temple: A Quick Guide

Hindu temples are sacred spaces as well as important centers of community life.

- 1 **Use the word mandir when appropriate.** Mandir is a common Hindu term for temple.
- 2 **Temples vary in appearance and worship.** Some are dedicated to a particular deity or guru; others honor several deities.
- 3 **Remove shoes before entering the worship area.** Follow posted directions or your host's example. Wear socks if you prefer to keep your feet covered.
- 4 **Dress modestly.** Cover shoulders and knees, and avoid shorts, short skirts, and revealing clothing. Some temples ask visitors not to wear leather items such as belts.
- 5 **Ask before taking photos.** Many mandirs do not allow photographs of the murtis or the shrine area. Follow posted signs and your host's guidance.
- 6 **Expect sacred forms or images called murtis.** Once consecrated, murtis are treated as sacred embodiments or forms of the Divine and are central to worship in many temples. You may see images of a guru, one deity, or several deities.
- 7 **Observe before participating.** Bells, lamps, incense, flowers, chanting, offerings, and circumambulation engage the senses in Hindu worship.
- 8 **Receive a garland or scarf respectfully if one is offered.**
- 9 A **tilak** — made with kumkum, sandalwood paste or another sacred substance — may be placed on your forehead.
- 10 **Prasad (blessed food) may be offered.** Receive it respectfully with the right hand or both hands.
- 11 **Addressing clergy:** Ask your host which title the priest or spiritual leader prefers.
- 12 **Offerings:** Ask the host before bringing an offering; fresh fruit or flowers are appropriate at many temples.

FOR PUBLIC LEADERS Ask the host for protocol in advance. Practices vary by temple and tradition, and respectful questions are welcome.