



Sacred Space

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Visiting sacred spaces is primarily associated with learning in religious education where young people engage with living religions and meet members of faith communities to learn about their beliefs, rituals of worship and celebrations. However, such activities may also be part of local geography or history fieldwork, with churches in particular traditionally being the focal point of a village or town and providing evidence of the local population through registers of births, marriages and deaths. Apart from places of worship for different Christian denominations (e.g. Methodist or Baptist churches, or a Salvation Army citadel), mandirs, mosques and gurdwaras mark religious, geographical and historical changes in the local area and in the use of buildings, with, for instance, a fire station becoming a gurdwara or a church becoming in turn, a synagogue and a mosque.

Regional and national sites would include cathedrals, many — such as Liverpool, Coventry and Chichester — of architectural and artistic renown, places of pilgrimage such as Canterbury and Walsingham, and religious communities such as the Hindu community at Bhaktivedanta Manor (Watford) or the Samye Ling Tibetan Buddhist Monastery (Eskdalemuir).

'Sacred spaces' might also include special exhibitions of religious paintings, icons, religious artefacts or sacred texts, and museums such as the Victoria and Albert Museum in London with its new 'Islamic Gallery'. Sites such as Glastonbury and Stonehenge would also be included in this category or other places with cultural or spiritual significance can also be visited to explore the nature of faith.

Other examples of sacred spaces also include memorial or peace gardens such as the Beth Shalom Holocaust Memorial and Education Centre in Nottinghamshire.

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Learning opportunities

Whether their purpose is religious education, history, geography, art or citizenship education, visits to sacred spaces provide an exciting and powerful stimulus for learning, a sensory experience involving sights, sounds, smells, touch, and even on some visits, tastes.

For **religious education** the context for a visit to a sacred space will be determined by the locally agreed or diocesan syllabus. These will identify or suggest which religions are taught at each Key Stage.

The non-statutory framework for religious education makes recommendation that at all four Key Stages and the Foundation Stage there are curriculum opportunities to visit places of worship. The focus of these experiences is developmental according to Key Stage, should include both learning *about* and *from* religion and give opportunities for personal reflection.

Foundation Stage:

- Children visit places of worship
- Having visited a local place of worship, children learn new words associated with the place, showing respect

Key Stage One:

- Visiting places of worship and focusing on symbols and feelings

Key Stage Two:

- encountering religion through visitors and visits to places of worship, and focusing on the impact and reality of religion on the local and global community

Key Stage Three:

- visiting, where possible, places of major religious significance

Key Stage Four:

- visit places of worship, interfaith centre and other centres, observing or taking part in worship or rituals as appropriate



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Visits to a sacred space will develop a young person's knowledge and understanding about:

- beliefs: how beliefs about God, the world and others make a difference to people's lives
- teachings and authority: the teaching of sacred texts and other sources about God, the world and human life
- worship, pilgrimage and sacred places: where, how and why people worship
- the journey of life and death: beliefs and rituals associated with key events in human experience
- symbols and religious expression: how religious and spiritual ideas are expressed through ritual, art and architecture
- religion, family and community: how individuals, families and communities practise their faith and the contribution this makes to local life
- beliefs in action: how religions respond to global issues of human rights, social justice and responsibility for the environment.

For geography a visit to a place of worship contributes to a young person's *Knowledge and understanding of places*, teaching them:

- to identify and describe what places are like
- the location of places and environments
- to explain why places are like they are
- to identify how and why places change and how they may change in the future
- to describe and explain how and why places are similar to and different from other places.

For history a visit to a place of worship can contribute to:

- local history study: investigating how the local area has changed over a long period of time.

For religious education, geography and history visits to sacred spaces enable the development of skills of:

- enquiry
- investigation
- collecting and recording evidence
- interpretation
- communication.



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For all subjects visits to sacred spaces make a significant contribution to:

- citizenship education, enabling young people to learn about the range of different communities within their local and national community
- personal, social and health education, developing communication skills as young people relate to a wide range of people in their neighbourhood
- the school's focus on community cohesion, fostering attitudes of respect for difference
- young people's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, fostering a sense of awe and wonder in sacred space, an understanding of the range of social groupings and moral responses, and cultural similarities and differences.

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Range of provision

- **Local sacred spaces:** for example, churches (Roman Catholic, Church of England, Methodist, Baptist, Pentecostal), synagogues (Orthodox, Reform, Liberal), mosques, mandirs, gurdwaras and viharas. Most local authority websites or local SACRE (Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education) websites will include addresses and contact details.
- **Regional sacred spaces:** for example, cathedrals, monasteries (Christian and Buddhist), places of pilgrimage. Most venues have their own website.
- **Other sites:** for example, graveyards, sites of historical interest (e.g. standing stones), museums, libraries and galleries.

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Learning support

Most sacred spaces wish to encourage visits from schools and many venues have education officers or volunteers trained by local authority education advisers to enable them to support learning appropriate to each key stage.

Visits to sacred spaces involve acknowledging rituals of respect in different faith traditions: for some, young people will need to remove their shoes (in gurdwaras, mandirs and mosques), girls or both



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sexes will be asked to cover their heads (mosques and gurdwaras) or asked not to sit with feet facing towards the holy book (gurdwaras).

Sacred spaces are designed to accommodate a range of needs: most will have toilets and wheelchair access, many will agree to partially sighted young people using touch as a means of developing their learning.

When booking, teachers should ask about the dress and behaviour expected of visitors and about provision for young people with disabilities or special educational needs.

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Factors to consider when taking young people to sacred spaces, or on other (including residential) visits

Local Authority and school guidelines and policies should give teachers clear advice about sensitive issues when taking young people out of school.

Some visits need to be handled carefully when they involve young people from faith communities. For example, it would be inappropriate for young people from certain faiths to visit a brewery, or, on a visit to a farm, young people from particular religious groups were encouraged to touch or stroke pigs, although learning about them would be acceptable.

Some parents may be sensitive about their children visiting a sacred space outside of their own faith tradition. There is no valid religious reason to prevent young people from any faith taking part in educational visits to other places of worship. It is important to reassure parents of the values and purposes of such visits and the educational benefits of learning about other faith traditions.

It is essential that a visit does not compromise religious beliefs. For example, the day of the visit may exclude some young people (e.g. Friday, if it were not possible for Muslims to perform midday prayers, or if in winter Jewish young people had to leave school early to prepare for Shabbat). Consideration should be given to organising visits that coincide with the opening of the fast of Ramadan.

There are some places of worship that would ask girls not to visit during their menstrual period. In addition, Muslim girls must not visit a mosque during this time, but may be able to visit other sacred spaces. It is recommended that advice be taken locally. Because of the sensitivity of speaking about this issue, discussion man-to-man or woman-to-woman is preferable.

All parents are concerned about the safety of their children when on residential visits, but there are additional religious considerations when taking young people on such visits. There should be opportunities for the observance of prayer, ensuring that dietary laws can be kept, and that levels of supervision are high – particularly with regard to taking Asian girls on overnight stays. Single gender visits may persuade greater numbers of Asian girls to participate. Modesty or morality should not be compromised and due thought should be given to evening activities on residential visits.



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Sacred Space Web resources

www.nasacre.org.uk

National Association of Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (NASACRE) has links to many religious education websites and also to regional websites that link to local SACRE members. These often provide their own directory of places of worship. Information about places of worship can also be obtained through local authority websites, some of which include 'virtual tours'.



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www.religiouseducationcouncil.org/

The Religious Education Council of England and Wales – provides access to the Religious Education Directory and links to faith communities.

www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/

This BBC website provides information about many religions with links to more specialist sites and resources.

www.shap.org

Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education – produces a pictorial calendar of festivals and a journal, and offers an advisory service.

www.christianeducation.org.uk

Christian Education – publishes religious education resources on all faith traditions, which are listed on the linked site, www.retoday.org.uk

www.ctbi.org.uk

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland – an interdenominational organisation with 31 member churches. Successor to the former Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland, and before that the British Council of Churches.

www.bahai.org.uk

National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United Kingdom – provides information and advice on regional communities and visits.

www.thebuddhistsociety.org

The Buddhist Society seeks to publicise the principles of Buddhism; produces a newsletter and journal. Includes a resources section for schools.

www.clear-vision.org

The Clear Vision Trust promotes understanding of Buddhism through audio-visual media. It publishes teaching resources suitable for all key stages and can advise on visits.



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www.nchtuk.org

The National Council of Hindu Temples – an organisation acting as a resource and one of the main consultative bodies on matters relating to the British Hindu community and the Hindu culture and religion. The website provides information, advice and resources.

www.iskcon.org.uk/ies/

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness Educational Services – the website aims to provide a full range of educational resources and services for the understanding of Hinduism.

www.bod.org.uk

The Board of Deputies of British Jews – elected from the great majority of Jewish communal organisations in Britain, including synagogues, social and welfare organisations, local community bodies and many others. The website provides an information and resource service.

www.muslim-ed-trust.org.uk/

The Muslim Educational Trust – advises on educational issues and needs of Muslim young people. The website includes many useful publications and factsheets on Islam.

www.iqratrust.org/index.php?page=newreso2.htm

www.iqratrust.org/index.php?page=exhibition.htm

The IQRA Trust – provides a wide range of publications, an interactive Islamic Experience Exhibition, INSET, and an enquiry service that can answer promptly and online all enquiries from local authorities, schools, teachers and young people on almost all aspects of Islam.

www.thesikhway.com

Sikh Education Council of the United Kingdom – the education section of the website has a range of resources useful for all keystages.

www.het.org.uk

The Holocaust Education Trust works in schools, universities and in the community to raise awareness and understanding of the Holocaust, providing teacher training, an outreach programme for schools,



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teaching aids and resource material. Website has details of the annual Lessons from Auschwitz project, which enables teachers and sixth-formers to visit Auschwitz for a day.

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