First Time Visitors to ISKCON Temples/Centers

Relevance Committee

Step 1: Needs, Interests and Concerns of First Time Visitors

People are curious
--Often have family or friends who were/are involved with ISKCON
--Contacted thru wisdom of the sages/online/web search

I like to see people that look like me

Feel safe, welcomed, but not invaded

Want warm greeting

Need to feel comfortable
--when is it over? (regarding formal function)
--not uptight about male/female roles

Families together

Not have women in back

See words for the songs
--translations handy

Make sure kids are safe and engaged
--meet other kids
--kid friendly

To not be overwhelmed, to have their personal space
--not preached too
--like the questions answered that they pose

Take things in at my pace
--don't assume I'm here to join

Looking for: People are spread out, families not close by

--want community, and family, and home away from home
To be informed what is going on/what is happening

Want to know what to do or not do
--music
--the schedule
--programs
--scriptures

Not too noisy

Not too long of a class

Not be overwhelmed with do's and don'ts

Wheelchair accessible

People are seeking positive engagement
--confused, looking for direction
--to be involved in something that gives direction, positive impact
--need meaning
--need something to sink their teeth into

Facilities:

Be sure the temple is attractive and clean (from an outside/street view too!)
--nicely landscaped
--hire professionals as needed (don't skimp, its preaching)
Ensure families can worship together, during kirtan and class for instance.
Do not encourage women to stand in the back of the temple, etc.
--It's against ISKCON Policy
Provide words for the songs
--with translations
Printed information on rules/contacts/information
--Caru's brochure above
Chairs or other places to sit besides floor only
--Clean mats, or pillows
Keep building maintained well
Keep temperature comfortable—heating and cooling

Wheel chair accessible
Clean bathrooms
--toilet paper
--soap
--have toilet seats!
Clear signage

Step 2: Guidelines and Action Points

Don't expect reciprocation. Do not take things personal. Be detached.

ALSO these lists are helpful, but it requires a mood of serving and loving people. They will pick up the vibe if we are not feeling ourselves to be servants, and acting from the heart.

Have special days for newcomers
--regular basis, monthly, weekly
--tailored for new comers

Special programs/days for special audiences
--yogis, etc
--geared to them via music, seating, prasada, etc.

General Culture:

Prioritize new comers.
--especially the SF should be organized for new people, not regulars
--give older devotees other options for advanced sanga
(it inspires older devotees to see new people coming, also)
--Sunday is for new people

Train all devotees to know how to interact with new visitors
--not just specialists

Be friendly (and humorous as appropriate)

Make sure kids are safe and engaged—meet other kids
--kid friendly

Have soft kirtan playing in temple/entrance

Someone who supports visitors, and is interested in them
--don't assume "I'm here to join"

Be informative about what is going on/what is happening
--music
--the schedule
--programs
--scriptures

4 kinds of people come to Krishna
Distress
Curious
Seekers of knowledge
In need of money/ opulence
People are in distress. They need help.
--They are not where they wanted to be in life
--Or, materially successful but not satisfied

BE compassionate and caring, not overly preachy or condescending

Tours: Offer people a quick tour (5-10 minutes, let them prolong at their discretion)
--Have a 4-5 stations/stop tour of the temple, with highlights. Not too much.
--Srila Prabhupada (need of a guide/guru. Example of apprentices.)
--Changing body display, or photo (introduce reincarnation, etc)
--Deities (god is a person)
--Architecture (if appropriate)
--music displays. Harmonium (opportunity for mantra explanation)
--Book display (importance of knowledge, antiquity of the tradition)
--Etc. per local situation/temple

Greeting:

Provide a warm greeting
--have trained devotees as greeters
--and in general whenever people visit
--wear nametags

Have defined roles. All people feel comfortable, with roles

Have someone assigned to meet newbees and make friends
--take care of their needs
--be "feedback conscious"
--Concerned what are their Needs, interests and concerns
—what is of interest to them
--get names
--follow up
--sit with them during prasada (Sunday Feast)

Introduce them to others similar to them that they can connect to

Communications:

Have an introductory brochure printed
--schedule
--history
--directions (bathroom)

Avoid jargon
--within announcements
--and when speaking

Properly introduce dos and do nots
Don't be offended by their ignorance (not know about rituals)

Give introductions before starting class/kirtan/etc

Explain Deities and functions in a reasonable way
--post office box
--explain color of Krishna, like monsoon cloud
--that God is youthful, if all-powerful, why would he want to be old?
--same God as in Old Testament, but He is in a better mood
--Deity is an ATM for deposits

Have comment cards/feedback survey to get their feedback and advice
--positive and negative
--(learn what to improve)

Include in comment cards
--their contact information
--be added to newsletter?
--be visited a home
--invited to future events?

--can ask questions also how

Have a newsletter with emails
--can send email receipts for donations

--If asking for donations, do so gently (basket at SF)

Sunday Feast:

SF should be designed for new comers
Use Thematic talks of interest to people
-avoid jargon

Prioritize one on one interactions with guests
Schedule best kirtan leaders
Schedule talks, publicize topics
Start and stop on time

Plan schedule for visitors: UTAH sample:
Short melodious kirtan while arriving
Arati with SP/JSC/HK mantra (not Gaur arati)
Announcements—Articulate, clear English speakers
--not to preach another lecture
--short and focused—what events, opportunities
--can use slides here also
--Never ask who is coming for the first time!!!
    --it embarrasses them—they want to "peek in"—not be in limelight

Feast

Assign devotees per tables to interact with guests
Round tables with 6-8 chairs are best

Classes need to be designed for new people (SF especially)
--30 minute talk max
--Use PPTs
--topics carefully chosen
--thematic
    —not just verse based
    ---what is interesting to people
--minimize terminology
--no jargon
--broad based, not too narrow
--not too long
--have a variety of speakers if capable (newer devotees too, and train them)
--diversity, women, youth, etc.

Have special class for beginners at same time
Classes for drummers, kartals

Serve out should maximize face to face interaction
--sit down service if possible

Contacts:

After first visit, plan your follow up
--get contact information
--invite visitors back

Keep peoples phone #, emails, what's app, and photos
—make a comment in the note section to keep track of them
--keep some personal information about them.
--remember them, they will become friends

Food/Prasada

Be healthy as a priority
--less fried, less oil
--not overcooked

--spiced reasonably
--not too hot
--identifiable
--presentable
--eco friendly
--menu available (with English explanations)
--have vegan options, and well labeled
--kid friendly

Hot or cold

Make sure servers are presentable
--health codes observed

Eco-friendly utensils
--recycling

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Safety:

Make sure kids are safe and engaged
Parking lot well lit
Sidewalks clear of obstructions, ice, etc.
Clear of dangers to walkers, children
Assigned security person(s)
Security cameras as required (use signs, Smile you are on camera)

Engagement:

Be sure after a visit or two, they are protected and connected, and not abused by demands for service

Utah has a very good example of brochure text

New Congregation:

First donors: Send a BTG immediately and give them a subscription
Calendar at end of year