

Buddhism in Australia: Wellbeing, Belonging and Social Engagement



We acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country throughout Australia and the Torres Strait Islands. We pay our respects to all First Nations peoples and acknowledge Elders past and present.

We recognise the Triple Gem of Buddhism: the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Together, they make up the lineage, philosophy, and community of Buddhism that the Buddhism in Australia Research Team has embraced to deepen our engagement, reflection and scholarly investigation.

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Image on this page: Stone Buddha meditating in the paddock, Kodoji Zen Centre, NSW, sculpted by Brendon Stewart.

(Image credit: Filip Milovac)

Buddhism in Australia

This groundbreaking project seeks to illuminate the rich history and contemporary lived experience of Buddhism in Australia. Through interviews, heritage studies, and the first large-scale survey of Buddhists in Australia, we aim to generate greater understanding of Buddhist practices, social engagement, and flows of migration across the Indian and Pacific oceans.

Through 59 in-person interviews, and 38 location videos, filmed around Australia including Thursday Island and Christmas Island in 2024-2025, we explore relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Asian and European communities, and the flourishing of Buddhism on this continent. This project also reports on the first nationwide survey of Buddhism in Australia, conducted between September 2025 and May 2026. Responses were received from 2,317 people aged 18 and over who are Buddhist or engaged with Buddhist ideas and/or practices. The survey focused on their levels of belonging, engagement and wellbeing in Australia.

Project findings are shared in this Report, the Buddhism in Australia website, including a Digital Atlas and Educational Resource, and in academic articles and a monograph. This report focuses primarily on findings from the Buddhism in Australia Survey, alongside an overview of the project's wider research and outputs.

<https://buddhisminaustralia.org>

Watch the highlight video here:



Project Objectives

The project has five objectives, to:

- 1** document the presence of Buddhism in Australia and the religious lives and activities of Australia's Buddhist migrants from the 1800s;
- 2** identify the factors that enable or impede a sense of belonging of Buddhists in Australian society;
- 3** analyse individual and organisational Buddhist contributions to health, wellbeing and social engagement in Australia;
- 4** investigate the ongoing relationships that have been established between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and Buddhists in Australia;
- 5** increase religious literacy of Australians through the production of educational resources on Buddhism in Australia.

The project's findings are organised around three periods. The first covers the years **before 1901**, when Sri Lankan, Japanese, and Chinese communities brought Buddhism to Australia's north. The second covers **1901 to 1973**, when the White Australia Policy restricted migration and reshaped Buddhist life on this continent. The third covers **1973 to the present**, when increased mobility and multiculturalism enabled greater flows of Buddhism into and out of Australia.

Pre-1901

Previous studies on Buddhism in Australia have mainly focused on the twentieth century, Anglo-European Buddhists and Buddhist Societies of Melbourne and Sydney. This project has a substantive focus on the arrival of Buddhism in Australia, preceding the 1901 Immigration Restriction Act, and close relations between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Asian and European communities, particularly across the Far North of Australia. The first Australian Buddhist temple was established on Thursday Island, in the Torres Strait, in the 1880s by a Sri Lankan community of boatmen working in the pearling industry. They also planted a bodhi tree, descended from the very tree that Buddha is said to have reached enlightenment under.



Thursday Island pearler's helmet and pearl shells, Haemen Mendis Jewellers, Brisbane.

(Image: Filip Milovac)

Evidence of a Japanese shrine and Buddhist school in Broome have been discovered in photographs, alongside still standing large Japanese cemeteries of pearl diver graves in Broome and Thursday Island. Numerous temples and cemeteries, dating back to the turn of the twentieth century, were also erected by Chinese communities who far outnumbered Europeans in mining towns throughout the continent. From Northeast Tasmania to Cooktown and Christmas Island, these Chinese temples contained Daoist, Buddhist, Confucian and folk elements,



Japanese Cemetery, Broome.

(Image: Anna Halafoff)

including Buddhist bodhisattvas such as Guan Yin (Avalokiteshvara) as well as lotus, eternal knot, and conch shell symbols. Some of these temples are still intact and active, with artefacts and traditions respectfully maintained by local Chinese communities. Videos documenting the material record of this early period, and interviews with descendants of these Sri Lankan, Japanese and Chinese communities, archaeologists and museum curators are featured in the Digital Atlas of Buddhism in Australia.

1901 to 1973

Building on previous research conducted by Paul Croucher, this period focuses on interactions between monastics from Asia, in Burmese, Sri Lankan, Thai and Tibetan traditions, and the first Anglo-European Buddhists in Australia. It begins with the Spiritualists and Theosophical Society in the southern states, and Australian explorers and entrepreneurs who encountered Buddhism on their travels in Asia. These 'trailblazers' studied Buddhist teachings, practised meditation and established Australia's first Buddhist societies. They also invited notable visiting Buddhist monastics to teach in Australia. By the 1960s Buddhism was beginning to attract popular attention, through Beat Zen



Hut of Happy Omen, Ahimsa, Cheltenham.

(Image: Filip Milovac)

poetry and literature, and by the 1970s, interest in Buddhism increased dramatically, among the counter-cultural movement. Many young hippies travelled to Asia, and with the lifting of the 1901 Immigration Act, Buddhist teachers were able to reside and establish temples and communities in Australia, resulting in a 'Buddhist Boom'. The Digital Atlas contains entries on the Buddhist Societies, temples and notable figures of this period.

1973 to now

Since the 1970s, significant numbers of migrants and refugees from diverse Buddhist traditions have built temples, established schools, and created communities in Australia. Temples and centres facilitate dharma classes, retreats, chaplaincy programs, aged-care support, and environmental campaigns. Buddhist communities also conduct rituals and celebrate festivals, on site or in public places to commemorate Vesak (Buddha's Birthday), Obon (festival of ancestors) and the New Year. Buddhist schools and institutes, from primary to postgraduate levels, teach



Nan Tien Temple and Nan Tien Institute, Wollongong.

(Image: Filip Milovac)

mindfulness and integrate ethics and human values into their curricula in innovative ways. Policies of multiculturalism welcomed diverse Buddhist communities to take root and flourish in Australia. Buddhism has also contributed to shaping Australian culture, through Buddhism's emphasis on wellbeing and social engagement, and the mainstreaming of mindfulness and meditation. The Digital Atlas shares accounts from Australia's diverse contemporary Buddhist temples and communities.

Digital Atlas of Buddhism in Australia

The Digital Atlas brings the stories of Buddhism in Australia to life for the first time, through videos and photographs of significant places and people, gathered during this project’s fieldwork and archival research. It also contains an Educational Resource, which comprises a series of questions, suitable for teachers and students in school, community, and university settings to facilitate learning about Buddhism in Australia.

Atlas v1 | Buddhism in Australia

https://buddhisminaustralia.org/atlas

HomeProject InfoResourcesAtlasBlogAbout Us

NAVIGATE TO: NSWVICQLDWA SASATASACTNTCHRISTMAS ISLAND

All

Yup Temple and the See Yup Society

1856

South Melbourne · VIC

Shinju Matsuri – Floating Lanterns, Broome

1880

Broome · WA

Sri Lankan Community of Thursday Island

1882

Thursday Island · QLD

Sydney Jongbopsa Temple

1993

Strathfield South · NSW

Sydney Zen Centre (SZC) & Kodoji

1973

Annandale · NSW

Tara Institute (TI)

1974

GOODE ISLAND

Thursday Island

FRIDAY ISLAND

Thursdays Island: Sri Lanka

Nan Tien Institute - NTI

The first Buddhist Temple in Australia was established in Victoria Parade on Thursday Island (TI) by Sri Lankan boatmen, mainly from Galle and Matara, working in the Torres Strait Islands in the late twentieth-century. A Buddhist monk from Sri Lanka inaugurated the...

More details

DATE: 1876

ALLPRE-19011901-19731973-PRESENT

Sri Lankan Community of Thursday Island

The first Buddhist Temple in Australia was established in Victoria Parade on Thursday Island (TI) by Sri Lankan boatmen, mainly from Galle and Matara, working in the Torres Strait Islands in the late twentieth-century. A Buddhist monk from Sri Lanka inaugurated the temple, and a Sri Lankan priest is said to have visited it "from time to time".

The majority of the Sri Lankans on Thursday Island were devout Buddhists, and a small number were Muslims. Among them were notable pearl merchants and jewelers, including Venaragendra Buddharaja De Costa Samarasila, whose second store remains standing on Douglas Street, and P. H. (Punchi Hewa) Mendis. Mendis also operated a large store on Douglas Street, until he left for Darwin in 1940, where he opened a department store, and then another in Brisbane, where he and his family lived during World War II.

In 1941, after the war, Mendis returned to TI and ran several businesses, including a jewellery shop and a cafe. In Douglas Street for another twenty years. His younger son Nissanka (Niss) and his wife Amara helped him to run his stores there. His eldest son, Siripala (Sir) Mendis and his wife Swarna Mendis, continued to operate the Brisbane store, after Sir Mendis returned to TI, and another in Townsville, later in Wynnum in Southern Queensland. Sir Mendis had close relationships with European, Chinese, Malay, and Indian business owners and was highly respected. He died on Thursday Island in 1985 and the cemetery there. His funeral was well attended by the TI community.

Sir and Swarna later established the first Theravada Buddhist Vihara in Queensland, Higginbotham Hill in 1982. Their two sons, Dulantha and Nissanka Mendis, still live in Brisbane. Nissanka Mendis owns a jewellery store there. The Mendis family was also involved in establishing the Theravada Chammagiri Forest Hermitage, in 2007, just outside of Brisbane in the Thai Forest tradition. They have made a significant contribution to Buddhism in Australia, over three generations.

Author: Anna Hahafut, Sush Yang Tan

1 Stanley J. Sparkes and Anna Shruksal, "The Sri Lankan Settlers of Thursday Island: Boundaries, The Asian Diaspora in Torres Strait, ed. Anna Shruksal, Coy Press, 2017, 101-102; Bernard Swan, "Sinhalese emigration to Queensland in the nineteenth century," Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society 67, no. 1 (1981): 50-63.

2 Sparkes and Shruksal, "The Sri Lankan Settlers," 101-102.

3 A book about the Sri Lankans in Queensland in Australia (The Government Press, 1988).

4 Sparkes and Shruksal, "The Sri Lankan Settlers," 101-102.

5 Venaragendra, "Links between Sri Lanka and Australia, Part 1: Sri Lanka's Theravada Buddhist Temples," Queensland Atlas of Religion, accessed June 2, 2026, https://qaratlas.com.au/qaratlas-theravada-buddhist-temples/.

Keyword search

Click for stories on each place, community or person in text, videos and photos

Scroll time bar to view Buddhist centres and communities across time

Scan QR code to view the atlas

Figure 1: Features of the Digital Atlas of Buddhism in Australia

About the survey

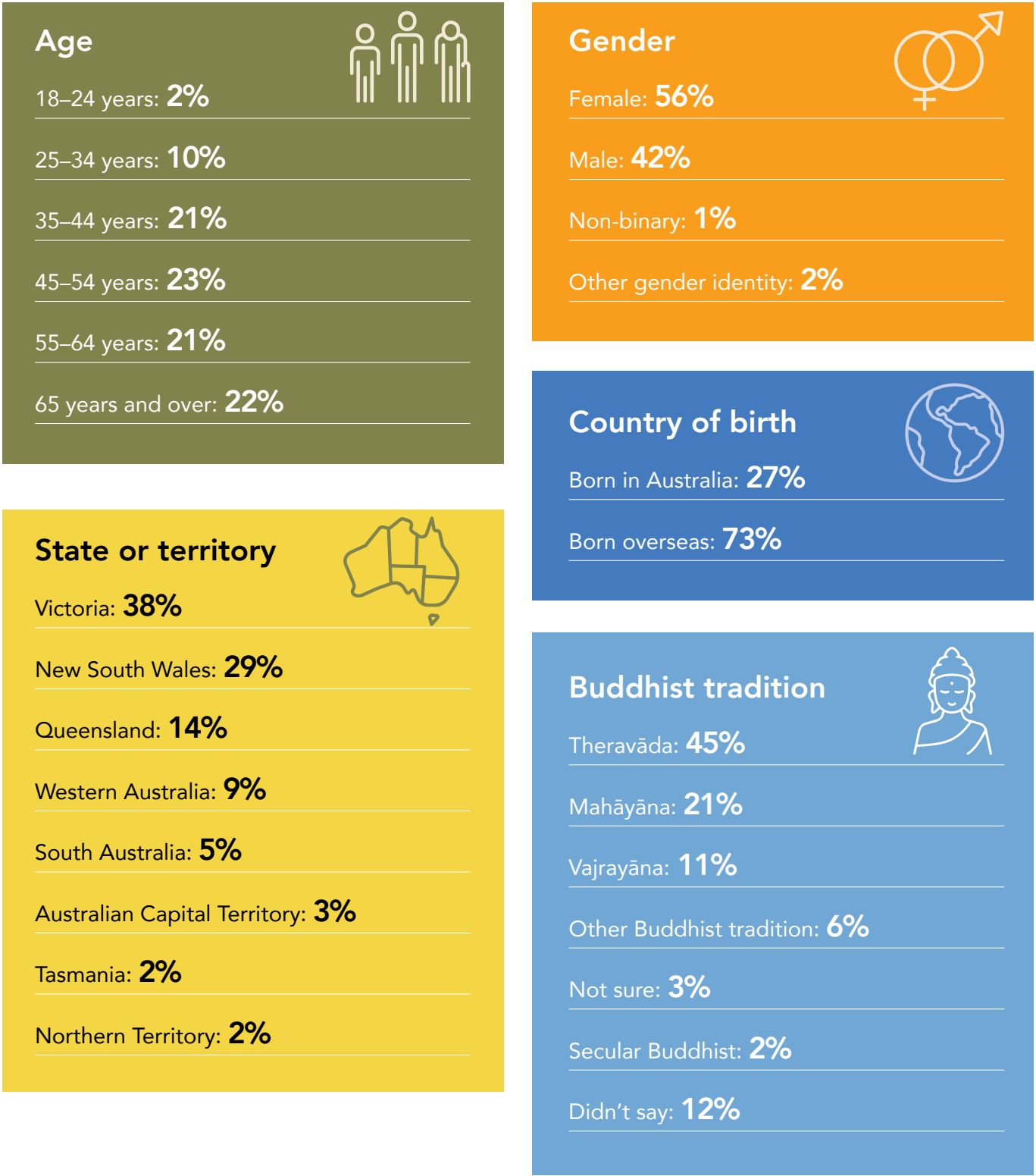


Figure 2. Buddhism in Australia (BIA) Survey sample profile (N = 2,317)

Respondents' Country of Birth

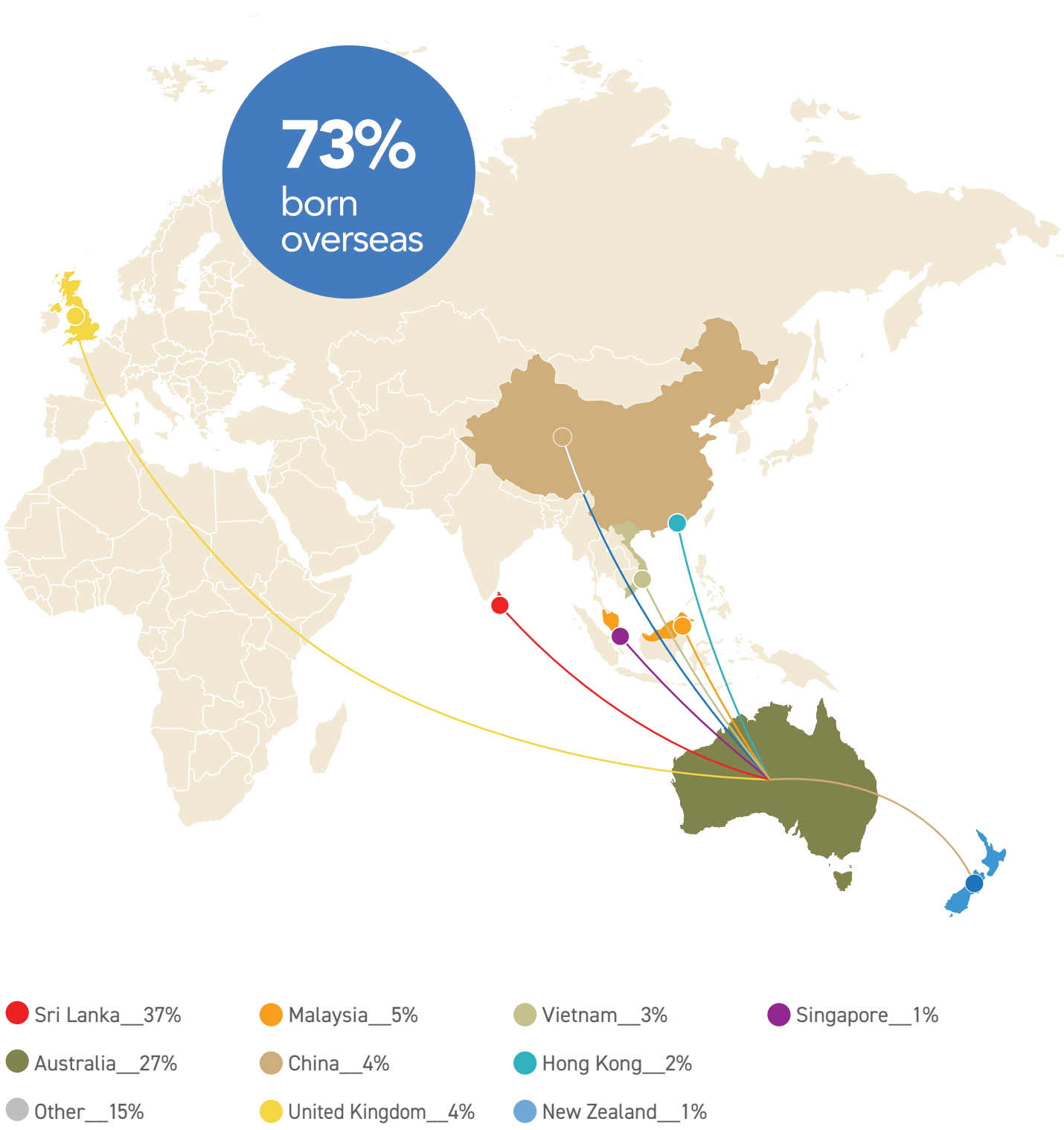


Figure 3. Buddhism in Australia Survey: Country of Birth of Respondents (% of respondents)
Source: Buddhism in Australia Survey 2025-26.

Survey Design

- The Buddhism in Australia (BIA) Survey is the first large-scale national survey of its kind.
- The survey was designed to understand better the experiences, beliefs, values and practices of people engaging with Buddhism in Australia, as well as the factors that shape their wellbeing, belonging, community participation and social engagement. It also explored the growing role of online and digital forms of Buddhist practice.
- It was open to Australian residents aged 18 years and over, with an interest in Buddhism and did not require respondents to identify as Buddhist. Respondents were asked whether they identified as Buddhist and whether they engaged with Buddhist ideas or practices.
- Respondents who neither identified as Buddhist nor engaged with Buddhist ideas or practices were excluded from the final analytical sample.
- The survey was administered online using the Qualtrics survey platform and hosted by Deakin University. Data were analysed using the SPSS program.
- Data were collected between September 2025 and May 2026.
- Recruitment occurred through Buddhist temples, centres, organisations, community networks, and social media across Australia.
- The survey was available in English, Cambodian, Chinese, Korean, Sinhalese, Thai and Vietnamese, allowing participation across a range of Australia's Buddhist communities.
- A total of **3,507** people commenced the survey and **2,317** completed it, representing a completion rate of approximately **66%**. The analytic sample used in this report comprises **2,317** respondents.
- Respondents were drawn from every Australian state and territory and represented a wide range of Buddhist traditions and perspectives.
- Among completed responses, **90%** identified as Buddhist. Comparison with 2021 Census data (people aged 18+) indicates that this Buddhist-identifying subsample closely reflected the 2021 Australian Buddhist population in terms of gender, but was somewhat older and more likely to be Australian-born. Compared to the census, the survey sample also included a higher proportion of respondents born in South and Central Asia, particularly Sri Lanka, and a lower proportion born in North-East and South-East Asia.
- These differences should be considered when making population estimates. Nevertheless, the survey's **large and diverse sample** provides excellent coverage of Australia's major Buddhist traditions and communities, making it well suited to examining differences between respondent groups in beliefs, practices, wellbeing, belonging and social engagement.

 The survey was available in **7 languages** to make it culturally accessible

 The completion rate was approximately **66%**

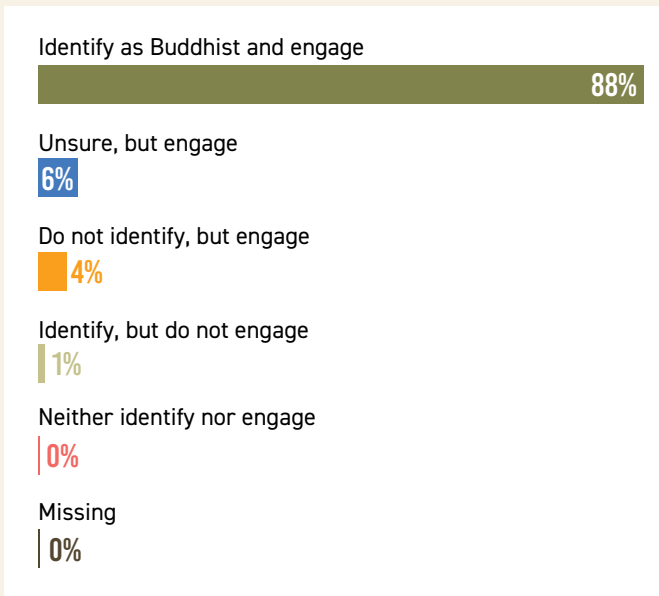
 Data were collected between **September 2025 and May 2026**

 The analytic sample used in this report comprises **2,317 respondents**

Buddhist Identity and Tradition

While most respondents are dedicated Buddhists, some people identify as Buddhist, as if it were an inherited family tradition, yet do not engage with Buddhist ideas or practices. Others engage with Buddhist ideas or practices, such as meditation, but do not identify as Buddhist. Respondents were asked which description best matched their situation. **Figure 4** displays the responses.

Figure 4. BIA respondents: Identification as Buddhist and engagement with Buddhist ideas or practices (% of respondents).



Source: Buddhism in Australia Survey 2025-26.

Almost nine in ten respondents (**88%**) both identify as Buddhist and engage with Buddhist ideas or practices. Around **6%** are unsure whether they identify as Buddhist but engage with Buddhist ideas or practices, while **4%** engage with Buddhist ideas or practices without identifying as Buddhist. Only around **1%** identify as Buddhist without engaging with Buddhist ideas or practices.

These findings suggest that, among people who engage with Buddhism in Australia, religious identification and engagement with Buddhist ideas or practices commonly occur together.

Most respondents (**88%**) report not participating in any other religious or spiritual tradition alongside Buddhism. Among the **12%** who do, the most common affiliations are Catholicism (**36%**), being spiritual but not religious (**26%**), Hinduism (**20%**), other Christian traditions (**14%**) and a range of other faiths or spiritual paths.

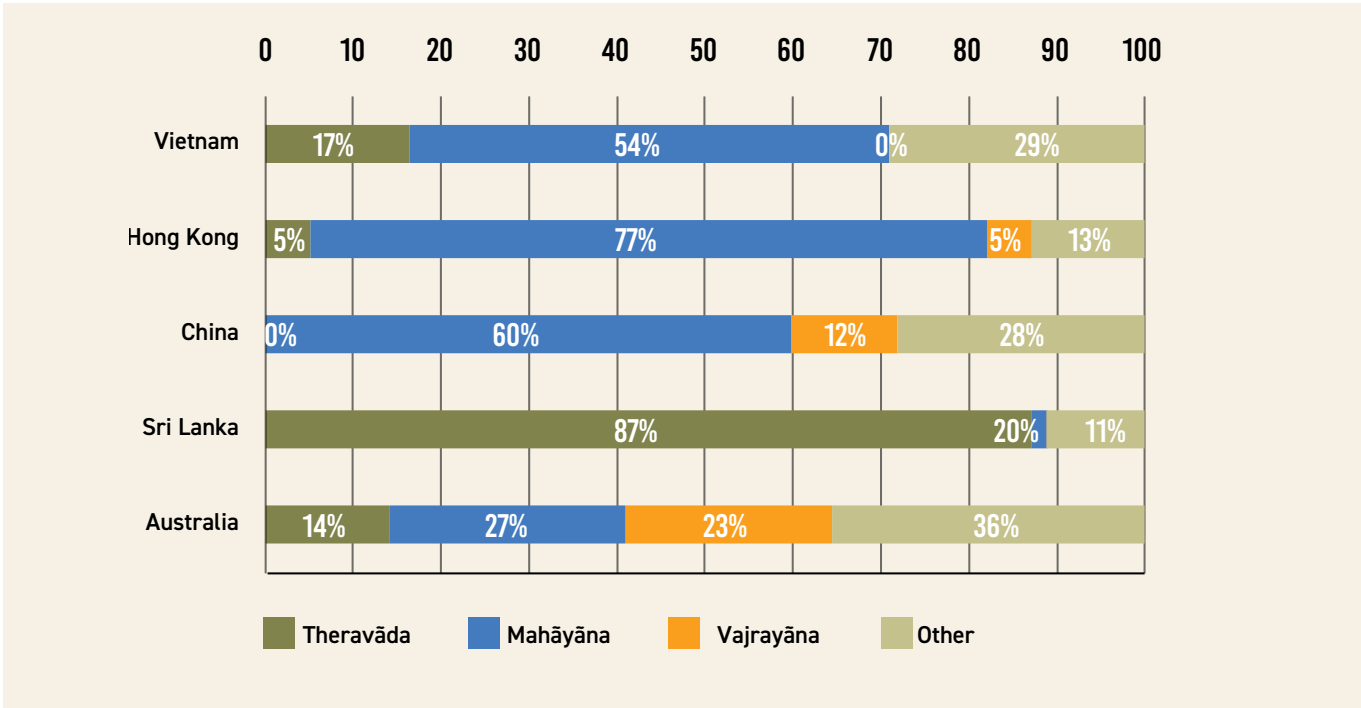
We also asked respondents which tradition, if any, they followed. Theravāda is the largest tradition represented in the survey (**45%**), followed by Mahāyāna (**21%**) and Vajrayāna (**11%**). Smaller proportions identify with another Buddhist tradition (**6%**), are unsure of their tradition (**3%**), or identify as Secular Buddhists (**2%**). A further **12%** did not answer the question.

These proportions should not be interpreted as reliable population estimates. However, **Figure 5** demonstrates a strong association between respondents' countries of birth and Buddhist traditions, consistent with the historical development of Australia's Buddhist communities.



Burning incense, Hou Wang Temple, Atherton.
Image: Filip Milovac

Figure 5. BIA respondents: Buddhist tradition by country of birth (% of respondents).



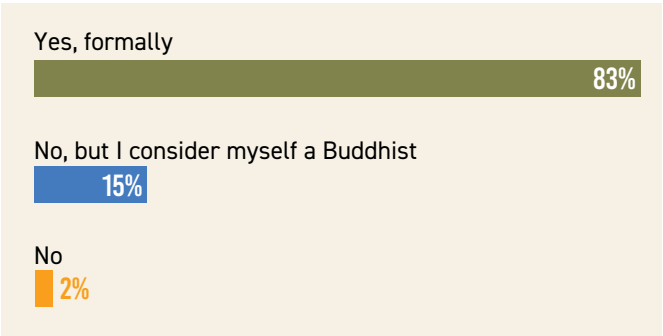
Source: Buddhism in Australia Survey 2025-26.

This figure shows that tradition is strongly associated with country of birth, reflecting the migration histories through which Buddhism has developed in Australia. Sri Lankan-born respondents overwhelmingly identify as Theravāda, while respondents born in China, Hong Kong and Vietnam are predominantly Mahāyāna. By contrast, Australian-born respondents show substantially greater diversity across Buddhist traditions.

Further analysis also suggests that Buddhist traditions are reproduced through different pathways. Theravāda respondents are more likely to have been raised in Buddhist families and to have identified as Buddhist throughout their lives. In contrast, Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna respondents include relatively larger proportions who adopted Buddhism later in life.

Respondents were also asked whether they had taken Refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, the traditional ceremony through which a person commits to the Buddhist path. This is shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6. BIA respondents: Formal taking of Refuge (% of valid respondents).



Source: Buddhism in Australia Survey 2025-26.

Formal commitment to Buddhism is widespread among our survey respondents. More than four in five (83%) report having formally taken Refuge, while a further 15% consider themselves Buddhist despite not having formally done so. Only 2% report that they have neither taken Refuge nor consider themselves Buddhist.

These findings suggest that among survey respondents, Buddhist identity is typically accompanied by formal religious commitment, although a minority identify as Buddhist without having undertaken the traditional Refuge ceremony.

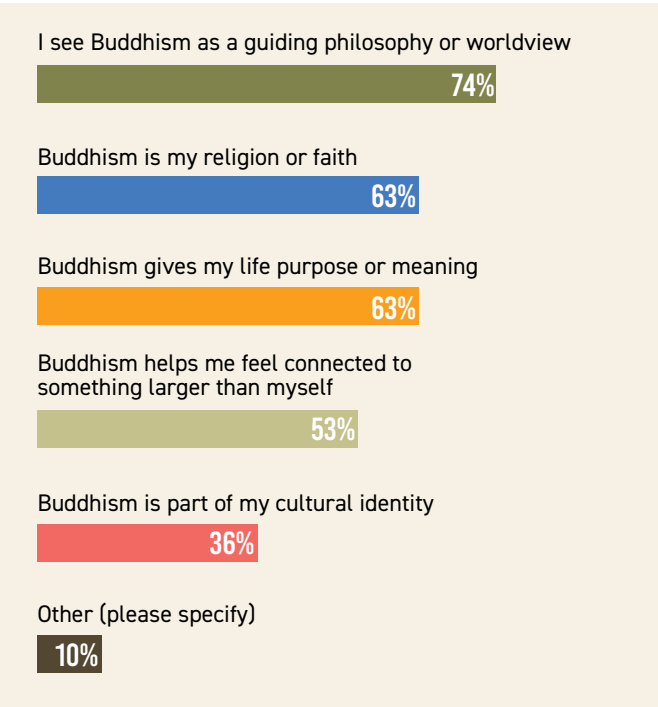
Living Buddhism

Relating to Buddhism

To better understand how Buddhism is lived in contemporary Australia, respondents were asked about their relationship to Buddhism, their practices and their beliefs. Together, these findings provide insight into the diverse ways Buddhism is understood and enacted in everyday life.

Respondents were asked to select all the ways they experience or relate to Buddhism in their lives. This is shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7. BIA respondents: How respondents experience or relate to Buddhism (% of respondents).



Source: Buddhism in Australia Survey 2025-26. Note: Multiple responses were permitted; percentages do not sum to 100%.

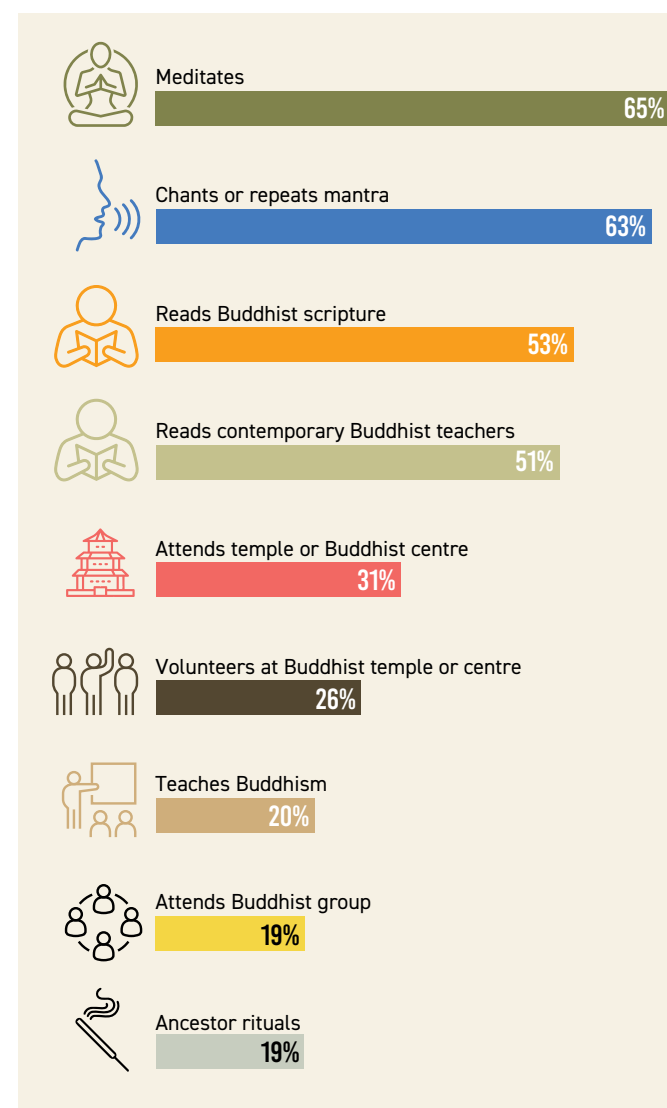
Respondents are most likely to describe Buddhism as a guiding philosophy or worldview, with three-quarters selecting this option. Around two-thirds say Buddhism is their religion or faith and that it gives their lives purpose and meaning, suggesting that, for many respondents, Buddhism serves as both a religious and an existential framework. By contrast, just over one-third relate to Buddhism as part of their cultural identity.

Further analysis shows that Theravāda respondents are more likely to emphasise the cultural dimensions of Buddhism. In contrast, Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna respondents are more likely to emphasise its role as a source of purpose and meaning. Secular Buddhists primarily relate to Buddhism as a worldview rather than as a religion.

Buddhist Practice

Buddhism encompasses a wide range of practices. Respondents were asked how often they engaged in a range of Buddhist practices, including meditation, chanting, temple attendance, study, volunteering and ritual. To simplify comparison across practices, Figure 8 presents the proportion of respondents who engage in each Buddhist practice weekly or more often.

Figure 8. BIA respondents: Buddhist practices undertaken weekly or more often (% of respondents). Note: Multiple responses were permitted; percentages do not sum to 100%.



Source: Buddhism in Australia Survey 2025-26.

The most common forms of Buddhist practice include meditation, chanting and reading or studying Buddhist texts and teachings. Around two-thirds of respondents meditate or chant at least weekly, while around half regularly read Buddhist scriptures or the writings of contemporary Buddhist teachers. By contrast, organisational and community-based forms of participation are less common: around one-third attend a temple weekly, and fewer than one-quarter volunteer, teach Buddhism, participate in Buddhist groups, or engage in ancestor rituals.

Further analysis shows that Vajrayāna respondents report the highest levels of regular engagement across most practices, particularly meditation, chanting, scripture reading and engagement with Buddhist teachers. Mahāyāna respondents also report relatively high levels of practice. Compared with these groups, Theravāda respondents are somewhat less likely to engage in regular meditation and study but more likely to participate in ancestor rituals.

Gender differences in patterns of Buddhist practice are generally modest. Further analysis shows that women are somewhat more likely than men to chant regularly, while other practices show little variation by gender.

Older respondents generally report higher levels of regular engagement across most Buddhist practices. Further analysis shows that the strongest age differences are evident in meditation, scripture reading, engagement with contemporary Buddhist teachers, volunteering and participation in Buddhist groups. In contrast, ancestor rituals and teaching Buddhism show relatively little variation by age. The findings are consistent with the view that regular Buddhist practice becomes more deeply embedded over the life course.



Meditation

Most respondents who meditate draw on multiple sources of instruction and practise a range of meditation techniques.

84%

have received meditation instruction from a monk or nun. Still, many also learn through videos or podcasts (61%), lay Buddhist teachers (56%), contemporary books (56%) and canonical Buddhist texts (42%), suggesting that meditation is increasingly learned through a combination of traditional, digital and self-directed pathways.

55%

of respondents have completed a formal Buddhist retreat, meditation course or intensive stay at a Buddhist monastery.

68%

practise loving-kindness (mettā) meditation and 67% practise mindfulness meditation, making these the most common techniques. Around 59% practise breath awareness, and 44% practise vipassanā (insight) meditation.

Among those who have attended a retreat or intensive practice, 61% have done so more than five times, and 52% report that their longest retreat lasted more than one week.

Note: Multiple responses were permitted for sources of instruction and meditation techniques. Retreat frequency and duration are based only on respondents who reported completing a formal retreat, meditation course, or monastery stay.

Image on this page: Gillian Coote (second from the right) meditating with the Buddhism in Australia research team in the Hut of Happy Omen, Ahimsa, Cheltenham, NSW.

(Image credit: Filip Milovac)

We also asked about Buddhist ceremonies. Participation in Buddhist ceremonies is widespread and varied. Respondents report attending an average of **2.3** different types of ceremonies. Buddhist funerals or memorial services (**63%**) are the most common, followed by blessing ceremonies for homes or businesses (**50%**). Around three in ten respondents have participated in Buddhist weddings (**30%**) or baby or children’s blessing ceremonies (**29%**), while around one in five (**22%**) have attended a Buddhist adulthood ceremony. These findings suggest that Buddhist ritual life extends beyond temples and regular practice, marking important family, household and life-course transitions.

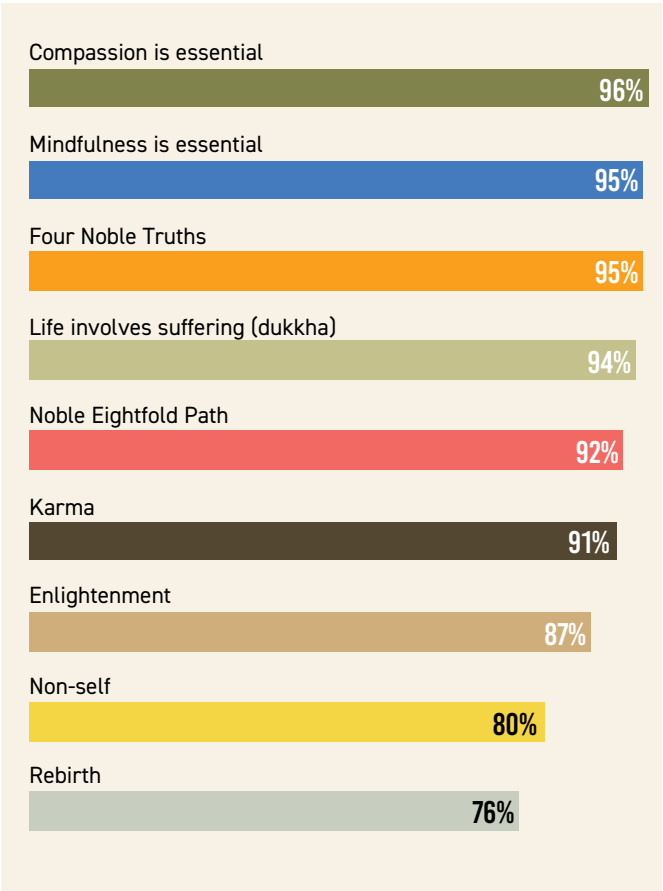
Participation in Buddhist ceremonies also varies by tradition. Further analysis shows that Theravāda respondents report the highest levels of participation across most ceremonies, particularly funerals, home and business blessings, weddings and children’s blessing ceremonies, suggesting that ritual life plays a particularly prominent role in Theravāda community life.

Buddhist Beliefs

Because understanding the Dharma is integral to Buddhist practice in most traditions, respondents were also asked about a range of key Buddhist teachings. **Figure 9** presents the proportion of respondents who agreed ‘Yes, definitely’ with each statement.

Respondents report high levels of agreement with most Buddhist teachings. More than nine in ten definitely agree with statements about compassion, mindfulness, the Four Noble Truths, dukkha, the Noble Eightfold Path and karma. Levels of agreement are somewhat lower for enlightenment, non-self and rebirth, with rebirth attracting the lowest level of definite agreement.

Figure 9. BIA respondents: Agreement with selected Buddhist beliefs (% agreeing ‘Yes, definitely’)



Source: Buddhism in Australia Survey 2025-26.

What is most striking is the extent of agreement across traditions. Further analysis shows that Mahāyāna, Theravāda and Vajrayāna respondents all report near-universal endorsement of compassion, mindfulness, the Four Noble Truths, dukkha, the Noble Eightfold Path and karma. Differences are greatest for rebirth and non-self, with Vajrayāna respondents most likely to express definite belief, followed by Theravāda and Mahāyāna respondents. Secular Buddhists are much less likely to endorse rebirth, although most continue to affirm core Buddhist ethical and practical teachings.

The findings suggest that contemporary Buddhism in Australia is characterised by a broad shared understanding of many key Buddhist teachings, despite differences in tradition, cultural background and pathways into Buddhism.

Gender differences in Buddhist beliefs are generally modest. Further analysis shows that women are more likely than men to express definite belief in karma (**94%** compared with **87%**) and rebirth (**81%** compared with **71%**). Belief in other teachings is similar across genders.

Further analysis shows that age differences in Buddhist beliefs are modest. The main exception is belief in rebirth, which is more common among younger respondents, while endorsement of compassion, mindfulness and other core teachings remains high across all age groups.



Buddhaloka Centre, Malvern East.
(Image: Filip Milovac)

Home Buddhist altars

Seven in ten respondents report having a Buddhist altar in their home. Among those with an altar:

96% include a Buddhist statue, making it the central feature of most home altars.

70% include candles, 66% incense and 63% water or food offering.

57% keep Buddhist texts on their altar, while 40% display images of Buddhist teachers.

10% include images or representations of ancestors.

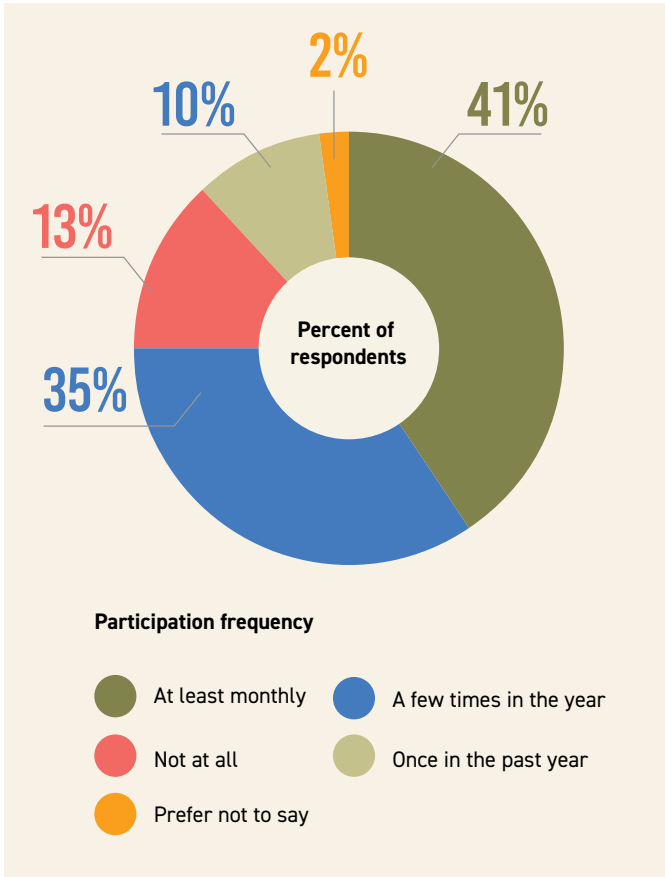
And differences in traditions? Buddhist statues are almost universal across traditions, but Vajrayāna respondents are more likely than other traditions to include texts, teachers and offerings on their home altars.

Note: Percentages are based only on respondents who reported having a home Buddhist altar. Multiple responses were permitted.

Buddhist Community

Buddhist community life extends beyond individual belief and practice. Respondents were asked about their participation in Buddhist organisations and activities, where this involvement occurs and what motivates them to volunteer and contribute. This is shown in Figure 10.

Figure 10. BIA respondents: Participation in Buddhist community activities in the past 12 months (% of respondents).



Source: Buddhism in Australia Survey 2025-26.

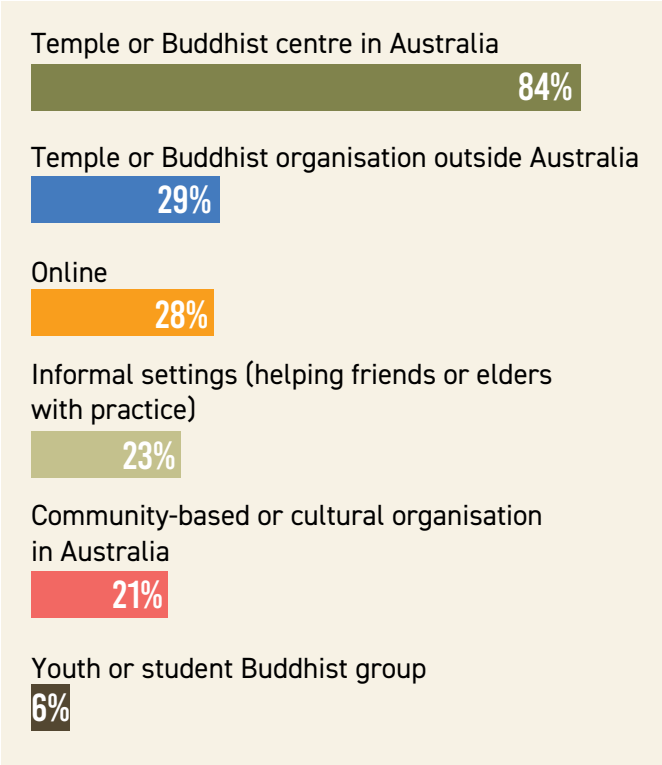
Community involvement is widespread, but not as frequent as personal practices. Four in ten respondents participate in Buddhist community activities at least monthly, a further one-third participate a few times during the year, and only 13% report no participation in the previous 12 months.

Community participation takes place across a range of settings, although temples remain the primary site of engagement. Figure 11 shows where respondents participated in or helped with Buddhist activities during the previous 12 months. Because respondents could select multiple locations, the figure highlights the breadth of community participation.



Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva statue, Buddhist Society of the Northern Territory, Darwin.
(Image: Filip Milovac)

Figure 11. BIA respondents: Where respondents participated in or helped with Buddhist activities in the past 12 months (% of respondents)



Source: Buddhism in Australia Survey 2025-26. Note: Multiple responses were permitted; percentages do not sum to 100%.

Most participation occurs through Buddhist temples and centres in Australia. More than four in five respondents report participating in activities at a temple or Buddhist centre in Australia over the previous 12 months. Around three in ten also participate through Buddhist organisations or temples outside Australia, or online, while around one in five participate through community-based organisations or informal settings. Participation through youth or student Buddhist groups is comparatively uncommon.

Participation settings are broadly similar across Buddhist traditions. Temples and Buddhist centres in Australia are the principal sites of participation for all traditions. The main difference is that Vajrayāna respondents are more likely to participate online and in informal settings. In contrast, Theravāda respondents are somewhat more likely to participate through Buddhist organisations or temples outside Australia.

While temples and Buddhist centres remain the primary sites of participation, many respondents also engage in Buddhist activities through online, informal and transnational settings, suggesting that community life often extends beyond the local temple.



The monastic and lay community of Mountain Spring Monastery, Bilpin.
(Image: Filip Milovac)



Mahadana organised by Metta Centre in Burwood Park, Burwood.
(Image: Freeman Trebilcock)

Online Buddhist communities

62% Nearly two-thirds of respondents report that they usually practise Buddhism either online or through a combination of online and in-person participation. These respondents were asked a series of questions about their online engagement.

45% participate in online Buddhist forums or communities daily or weekly.

90% find online platforms helpful for feeling connected to the Buddhist community, including 61% who find them very helpful.

61% say their online and in-person engagement work very well together.

56% regard online and in-person engagement as equally important, while 38% consider in-person engagement more important. Only 4% regard online engagement as more important.

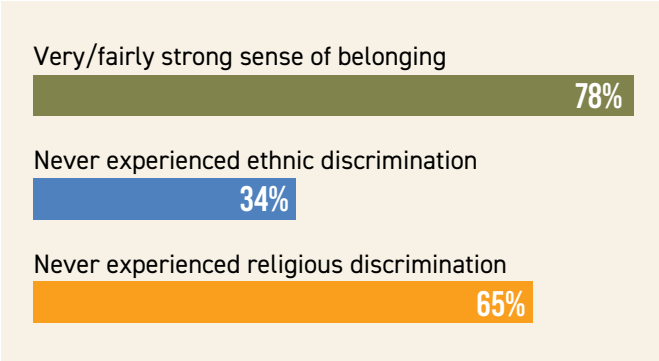
Most respondents use multiple online platforms. Social media (70%) and video conferencing (63%) are the most common, followed by Buddhist forums (28%) and chatbots or apps (9%).

Belonging and Discrimination

Beyond beliefs, practices and community participation, the survey also explored respondents’ experiences of belonging and discrimination in Australia. These questions examined how Buddhists understand their place in Australian society and whether they encounter discrimination because of their ethnicity or religion. Together, they provide insight into the social inclusion of Buddhist communities in Australia and the challenges they continue to face.

Figure 12 brings together respondents’ sense of belonging in Australia and their experiences of ethnic and religious discrimination.

Figure 12. BIA respondents: Sense of belonging and experiences of discrimination in Australia (% of valid respondents).



Source: Buddhism in Australia Survey 2025–26. Note: Percentages are based on valid responses. Belonging combines respondents reporting a very strong or fairly strong sense of belonging in Australia. Responses to ethnic and religious discrimination are shown separately.

Most respondents report a strong sense of belonging in Australia (78%). Experiences of ethnic discrimination are, unfortunately, also common, with only one-third (34%) reporting they have never experienced discrimination because of their ethnicity. By contrast, two-thirds (65%) report they have never experienced discrimination because of their religion. Together, these findings suggest that respondents are more likely to encounter discrimination based on ethnicity than on their Buddhist identity.

How do Buddhists in Australia feel about other groups and communities? The survey employed a ‘feeling thermometer’ to measure people’s warmth toward different minority groups, with 0 degrees representing the coldest and most negative rating and 100 degrees the warmest and most positive. **Figure 13** places the survey findings in a national context by comparing BIA respondents’ attitudes with those of Australian adults in the 2021 Gandel Holocaust Knowledge and Awareness in Australia Survey (a nationally representative survey of Australian adults).

Figure 13. Mean feeling thermometer scores towards selected social and religious groups: BIA respondents and Australian adults.

Group	Australian adults 2021	BIA respondents 2025–26
Buddhists	68.6	88.2
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people	70.1	74.4
Hindus	62.6	72.1
Christians	66.9	71.2
LGBTQIA+ people		66.6
Jewish people	62.6	65.5
Asylum seekers	60.7	65.4
Muslims	52.4	59.1

Sources: Buddhism in Australia Survey 2025–26; Gandel Holocaust Knowledge and Awareness in Australia Survey 2021. Note: Scores are mean ratings on a scale from 0 to 100. LGBTQIA+ people were included only in the BIA survey.

Figure 13 compares the attitudes of BIA respondents with those of Australian adults in the 2021 Gandel Holocaust Knowledge and Awareness in Australia Survey. Across every comparable group, BIA respondents express warmer feelings than the Australian population. The largest differences are towards Buddhists (+20 points), Hindus (+9.5 points) and Muslims (+6.8 points). Respondents also express somewhat warmer feelings towards Christians, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, asylum seekers and Jewish people. Overall, the findings suggest that Buddhists in Australia hold more positive attitudes towards a wide range of social and religious groups, particularly other minority communities, than the broader Australian population. However, thermometer readings for LGBTQIA+, Jewish, and Muslim people, as well as asylum seekers, reveal that prejudices against these groups also exist among Buddhists in Australia.

The survey also explored respondents' views on several broader social and political issues relating to religion in Australian society. Respondents express very strong support for religious freedom, with 90% agreeing that all religious groups should be free to practise their religion. A majority also agree that religion should not play a role in Parliament or official ceremonies (62%). There is also strong support for education about Buddhism in Australian government schools, with 96% favouring either education about diverse religions, voluntary religious instruction or both.

While a small majority of Buddhists in Australia support same-sex marriage (56%), almost one-third (31%) neither agree nor disagree that it should be legal and 13% disagree. Support varies across respondent groups. Differences by Buddhist tradition are particularly pronounced, with Theravāda respondents expressing substantially lower support and higher opposition than respondents identifying with other Buddhist traditions.

Overall, these findings suggest that Buddhists in Australia are generally supportive of religious diversity and inclusion. However, important differences remain both between Buddhist traditions and in attitudes towards some minority groups.

Living Well

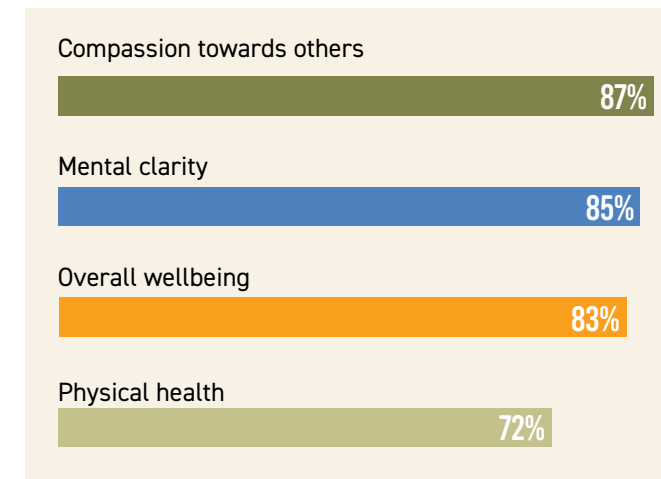
How does Buddhism contribute to living well? In the survey, respondents first reflected on how Buddhist practice affected different aspects of their lives. We then assessed subjective wellbeing using the WHO-5 Wellbeing Index, followed by an examination of the role of Buddhism in everyday lifestyle choices, such as diet.

Figure 14 summarises the proportion who agreed or strongly agreed that Buddhist practice had enhanced four key areas of wellbeing.



Dharma Wheel carving, Wat Buddha Dhamma, Wisemans Ferry.
(Image: Filip Milovac)

Figure 14. BIA respondents: Perceived benefits of Buddhist practice (% agreeing or strongly agreeing).



Source: Buddhism in Australia Survey 2025–26. Note: Percentages combine respondents who somewhat agreed or strongly agreed that Buddhist practice improves each outcome.

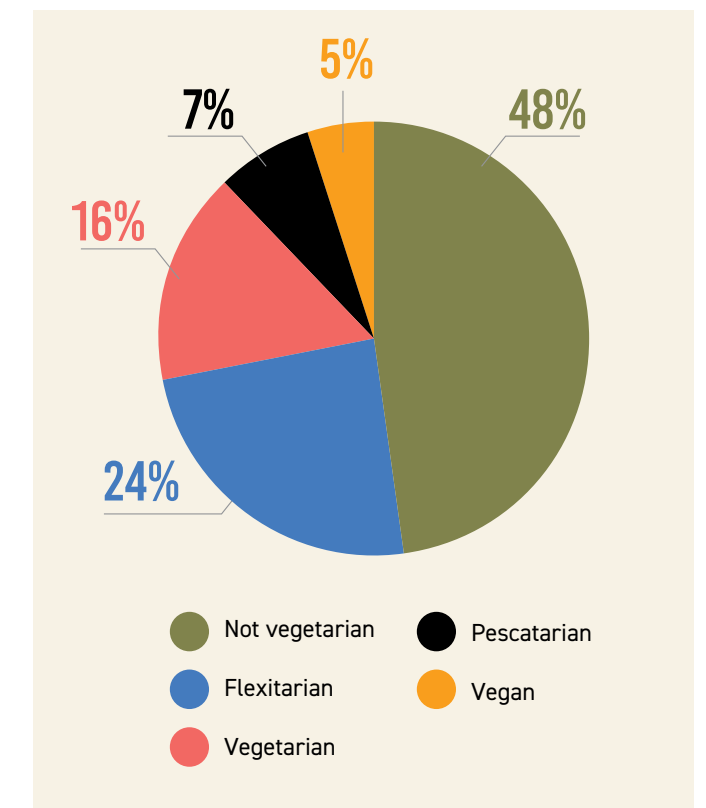
Figure 14 shows that respondents overwhelmingly believe Buddhist practice has positive effects on their lives. Perceived benefits are strongest for compassion towards others (87%), followed by mental clarity (85%) and overall wellbeing (83%). Almost three-quarters (72%) also agree that Buddhist practice improves physical health.

Further analysis shows that there are only modest differences between genders. Women are slightly more likely than men to strongly agree that Buddhist practice improves their wellbeing, mental clarity, physical health and compassion, but overall agreement is very high.

Respondents also completed the WHO-5 Wellbeing Index, an internationally recognised measure of personal wellbeing over the previous two weeks. Overall, respondents report high levels of wellbeing, with an average score of 70.9 out of 100. Consistent with this, 87% of respondents report wellbeing levels above the threshold commonly used to indicate good mental wellbeing, while 13% fall below it. Overall, the findings suggest that most Buddhists in Australia in this survey are experiencing positive psychological wellbeing.

The survey also explored an everyday practice commonly associated with Buddhism: diet. While Buddhist traditions vary in their dietary teachings and practices, many encourage compassion towards animals and the reduction of harm, making food choices an important expression of Buddhist values. This is shown in **Figure 15**.

Figure 15. BIA respondents: Current diet (% of valid respondents).



Source: Buddhism in Australia Survey 2025–26.

Figure 15 shows that respondents follow a wide range of dietary practices. Almost half (48%) report that they are not vegetarian, while 24% describe themselves as flexitarian, eating mostly vegetarian meals but occasionally consuming meat; a further 16% identify as vegetarian, 7% as pescatarian and 5% as vegan. Overall, over half of respondents (52%) follow a diet that limits or excludes meat, suggesting that Buddhist ethical commitments influence dietary choices for many.

Among respondents who identify as vegan or vegetarian, compassion for all living beings is by far the most common reason for their diet (94%). Around half also cite environmental concerns (49%) and following Buddhist teachings or precepts (48%), while one-third (34%) mention personal health reasons. (Multiple reasons could be selected.)

In their own words ...

The survey concluded by inviting respondents to share anything further about their experiences with Buddhism. A total of 879 respondents provided a written response, and five major themes emerge from these responses.

“ Buddhism as a source of personal transformation

Many respondents describe Buddhism as profoundly changing their lives. Several refer to Buddhist practice as having ‘saved my life’, while others say it prevents them from living ‘far worse lives’ than they might otherwise. Respondents frequently link Buddhism to recovery from depression, anxiety, and trauma, and to becoming more patient, compassionate, and less self-centred. Many also share how Buddhism helps them navigate illnesses, notably cancer, and that it offers deeper understandings of dying and processing grief.

“ Buddhism as a way of life

Respondents commonly describe Buddhism as something to practise rather than believe. Instead of ‘blind faith’, they emphasise applying Buddhist teachings deeply to their consciousness and using the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path as guiding principles for everyday life. Many describe Buddhism as a ‘philosophy’ or a practical ethical framework that cultivates mindfulness, emotional resilience and compassion toward all beings. Some also see Buddhism as a valuable antidote to consumerism and a contributor to ‘world peace’.

“ The importance of community and Sangha

Many highlight the role of Buddhist teachers, temples and communities in supporting their practice. Respondents describe the Sangha as making the ‘heart sing’, while those living away from major centres sometimes reflect on practising in ‘isolation’ or experiencing ‘disconnection and loneliness’. Community involvement, particularly volunteering, is also described as fostering purpose, connection and resilience, and the Rainbodhi community is praised for its inclusion of LGBTI+ people.

“ Buddhism as compatible with modern science

Many respondents believe that Buddhism can be practised as a secular philosophy compatible with modern science, offering benefits to Australian society. This is evidenced by statements such as ‘Buddhism is a science’, ‘Buddhism and modern science (quantum physics) go together’ and the claim that Buddhism ‘aligns’ and is ‘in harmony with modern science’. Secular mindfulness practices in schools aimed at enhancing student wellbeing are cited as an example of this.

“ Optimism about Buddhism in Australia

Respondents express confidence that Buddhism is becoming an established part of Australia’s religious landscape. Several note that Buddhism has become a ‘mainstream part of Australian culture’ and is ‘pervading our culture with messages of peace and kindness’. Many also welcome the growing diversity of Buddhist traditions and teachers in Australia.

“ Critical reflections on contemporary Buddhism

Alongside these positive reflections, a smaller number of respondents raise more critical issues. These include concerns about Buddhist nationalism in Buddhist-majority societies, power imbalances and abuse of power within some Buddhist organisations, and the need for more gender equity for Buddhist women, particularly among monastics. Issues of sexual abuse in Buddhist communities are also raised. While some Buddhist organisations are said to be ‘slowly’ addressing them, the need for survivors to be better supported when bravely speaking out is emphasised. The need to protect people from financial exploitation, in the form of giving too much of their time and money to Buddhist centres, is also voiced. Respondents also state that Buddhism needs to better adapt to ‘21st century Australia’, by transcending some outdated cultural norms and utilising more scientific and philosophical approaches. Finally, some feel that Buddhism is not something they can easily discuss or share with friends and family who are not Buddhist, and that a better understanding of Buddhism is needed in Australian society.



Together, these responses highlight the diversity of experiences and perspectives within Australia’s Buddhist communities. They demonstrate Buddhism’s positive contribution to meaning-making, wellbeing and belonging, but also point to issues that need to be considered and addressed by Buddhist leaders and communities in Australia, and Australian society at large.

Note: The thematic analysis of responses to the final open-ended question was undertaken manually and also using two AI tools, ChatGPT and Google Notebook LM, and reviewed by the research team.



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◀ Buddhism in Australia research team members in Cooktown Botanical Gardens, the site of former Chinese market gardens
(Image: Filip Milovac)

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Additional notes:

Data availability

The data underpinning this report are not publicly available. The dataset is currently used for ongoing analyses and publications and remains subject to ethics and confidentiality requirements. Researchers wishing to discuss the findings or future access to de-identified data are invited to contact the research team.

Artificial intelligence

Generative artificial intelligence tools were used to: translate the survey questions from English into six languages before being manually proofread by native speakers; assist with writing SPSS syntax; checking statistical output; and improving the clarity of the report. The choice of analyses, interpretation of findings, reporting decisions (charts, tables, etc.) and final editorial decisions were made by the authors.



▲ Lotus pond at Nan Tien Temple, Wollongong.
(Image: Filip Milovac)



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