



The Psychedelic Society

Willow Retreat

Your psychedelic experience

What's this document for?

This information document is not essential to be honest. Everything you need to know about the Retreat will be explained on the Retreat. However, since there's lots of information we'd like to share with you before the psychedelic ceremony, we thought some of you might like to browse through and get familiar with it so there's less to absorb when you're tired after travelling and are trying to remember people's names...

If you like, you can print and bring along this document, maybe read it on the train!

What are psychedelic 'truffles'?

Your psychedelic journey involves another organism, a fungus in the genus *Psilocybe* [sil-oh-SIGH-bee or sigh-loh-SIGH-bee].

The word 'fungus' is often used interchangeably with 'mushroom', but this isn't quite right. Mushrooms are more like the fruit of some kinds of fungi. The real 'body' of the fungus sits below the surface and is called the mycelium. A web of tiny silky fibres, the mycelium grows through soil, leaves, or wood, digesting plant matter or

working in partnership with living plants, passing them minerals and water in exchange for food.

Despite the commonly-used term 'plant medicines' for natural psychedelics, fungi are more closely related to us humans than they are to plants.

There are millions of species of fungi on the planet. Hundreds of thousands of them produce mushrooms, of which only a handful naturally contain psilocybin [sil-oh-SIGH-bin or sigh-loh-SIGH-bin] and psilocin [SIL-oh-sin or SIGH-loh-sin]. No-one is quite sure why.

To survive harsh conditions and prevent the mycelium from drying out, some species of fungus have evolved to form tight knots of mycelium underneath the ground, more correctly called sclerotia (true truffles are more like mushrooms; - a fungal fruit). Sclerotia sold as 'magic truffles' in the Dutch smart shops contain identical psychoactive compounds to magic mushrooms.

The truffles we're using, from the species *Psilocybe tampanensis*, are farmed descendants of a single mushroom picked in a sandy meadow in Tampa, Florida in 1977. The species is extraordinarily rare in the wild but has thrived in cultivation, forming a symbiotic relationship with humans where each benefits.

How much will I be taking?

Each gram of truffles contains roughly up to one mighty milligram of magic, in the form of psilocybin or psilocin. One pack (22g) contains the equivalent of approximately 20-25 mg of psilocybin. This amounts to a little more than a tenth of one percent. It doesn't sound much, but it's powerful stuff. You will be buying two packs (44g) of truffles.

The starting dose we recommend for most people is about one pack and a third, with some people choosing to take a little more later on. There is room for flexibility on this, and we will have individual one-to-one conversations with you to agree on what feels right for you. The dose is powerful and is intended to be strong enough to open the door for a profound experience, whilst minimising the chance of it feeling utterly overwhelming. It would probably not be a suitable dose for a social event or a nature hike. Through the process of facilitating over a thousand psychedelic journeys, we've found that a dose around this quantity works well in a safe, intentional setting that supports a more internally focussed experience.

If it's your first time, that doesn't necessarily mean you should take a smaller dose. There's also no need to aim to ingest all the truffles you have bought. Although the research shows that a higher dose correlates with a higher likelihood of having a meaningful or even mystical experience, dosage certainly doesn't determine everything. The Experience Retreats team have all had meaningful trips on much lower doses.

How will we use these truffles?

Before the details, here's the summary; - You prepare the truffles by pressing them to a paste inside their packets. You'll have the packets, a mug and a teaspoon with you in the ceremony room. We cut open the packets and take away part of one packet for safekeeping. You spoon the truffle paste into your mug. We add hot ginger tea to the truffle paste, you stir and wait. You drink it, leaving the truffle paste at the bottom. We add hot tea to your mug again for a second infusion. You drink it, and have the option to eat the truffle mush remaining in the mug. Then you begin a deep psychedelic journey! With prior agreement, we may offer you your leftover portion should you want it. We'll support you however you need for the rest of the day.

Preparing the truffles

You'll need:

- A mug or equivalent truffle-crushing tool
- A tabletop or similar hard, flat surface
- Truffles in their packs

Shortly before the ceremony, without opening the packets, you'll use the base of a mug to firmly press and squash the truffles against the tabletop. You can't overdo it; aim for a consistency a bit like smooth peanut butter. Try not to puncture the packets.

The truffle ceremony

When we're together ready to begin the ceremony (we use the term ceremony to mean the entire psychedelic 'trip' of around 6 hours), we'll come to you to cut open

the packets and remove the spare portion. With the teaspoon, you'll empty the crushed truffles into your mug. We'll add hot ginger tea. Give it a good stir, make yourself at home, and relax. We'll be guiding the process with spoken instructions and a visualisation.

You'll give the hot tea a few minutes to cool and extract the magical stuff from the truffles. This is your first infusion, and probably contains most of your total psilocybin dose. Enjoy your tea, leaving the truffle bits at the bottom of the mug. We will refill your mug for your second infusion. Wait another few minutes for the magical stuff to infuse into it again before drinking.

Take a little more time over your second infusion, you may feel the effects beginning, welcome them in! You do not have to finish it all, but do so if you feel comfortable. Most of the 'magic' will now have been soaked out of the crushed truffles at the bottom of your mug, there's no pressure to eat these truffly bits, but if you're feeling good, you're welcome to.

After you've finished your tea, everyone's journeys begin at a different pace. Don't worry if you feel it very fast or notice others are reacting long before you notice anything. The effects will start to bubble up in people around the room, and what you notice will be unique to you.

You'll probably start to feel the first effects about 15-30 mins after consuming your first infusion. Get comfortable and stay seated while you are drinking the tea as, during the onset of the truffles, it is possible to feel wobbly on your feet. For anything you need, such as the loo, it's best to ask us first before you get up.

Most participants will be immersed in the experience after about 1 hour, although it can take longer for some. Every psychedelic journey evolves differently. For this reason, many of you will be offered a top up dose at around 60 minutes into the ceremony, but you needn't think about this too much in advance. Your own 'peak' moment or moments might come at any time, not just whilst the effects are 'strongest'.

For some people, the initial onset can be compared to taking off on a plane, and you might feel sensations of all kinds in the body, (warmth, chills, tingles, heaviness, lightness...) this is normal, just be curious and welcome it in! During the metaphorical plane's ascent, before you get above the clouds and level out, some people temporarily go through a stage of so-called 'psychedelic turbulence'. The next few paragraphs are focused on navigating potentially challenging things like this; - not because difficult parts are inevitable or predominant, but because tips are less

needed for navigating bliss and ease!

'Turbulence' can take the form of an uneasy feeling, and is part of the normal range of effects. Let us know if you feel queasy (it occasionally happens, but is uncommon). Any nausea usually arises, we think, from the embodiment of this turbulence, rather than from a physiological reaction to the substance. The ginger in the tea is traditionally thought to have some anti-nausea properties, and few participants have any problems.

Helpful exercises, especially if you feel any turbulence, can include moving and relaxing parts of your body or mind if you notice any tension, breathing deep soothing breaths, and letting yourself go into the music. It can be helpful to remember that once you enter the trip, whatever you're feeling will always soon evolve into something else: *'This too shall pass'*. The facilitators will be there to offer you support through any highs and lows.

What about the emotional and subjective experience of the ceremony?

Connecting deeply with your emotions, memories and place in existence can be joyful, painful, and often both. While it is not unusual to have an entirely blissful easy psychedelic experience, many people can experience challenging patches. When it comes to the psychedelic experience, 'challenging' does not mean bad. Sometimes the most valuable, affirming or healing moments arise when we allow ourselves to connect with our grief and hidden sorrow. Sometimes, it is by moving into and through a challenging part of the experience that you may find resolutions or insights.

Discomfort during the experience can arise from resistance to what is unfolding, from a cautious part of your mind that is reluctant to let you flow with the mysterious momentum of the journey. Be gentle with yourself, and as you feel more secure you'll be increasingly able to explore the quality of 'openness' versus 'closedness'. A more closed mindset that says, *"I'm going to swim against the current so I don't slip downstream"* can often also translate into physical tension; tightening, defending, holding on— whereas an attitude of openness can be supported by relaxing the body, moving with the current of the music and endeavouring to 'lean in' to what is emerging.

Trust and surrender to what is arising if you can, bit by bit if necessary. You are in a safe place, and the facilitation team are here for you. You can let your guard down.

Nothing you encounter will harm you, and anything you do encounter is merely an aspect of your own consciousness. Ask yourself with kindness;-

“Is there something here I’m resisting?”

“Can I find a way to relax a little more?”

“Can I investigate this with open curiosity?”

“What is here for me to learn?”

While there can be an element of surrendering to the flow, paradoxically, surrender isn’t a choice to be passive and lose control. Strangely, it often seems that the more you can allow, the less tightly you grip the reins (wow, I’m mixing so many metaphors!), the greater your sense of agency in your journey. The less you seek to control every turn of the experience, the less you are likely to feel ‘out of control’.

If you’re feeling uncomfortable in some way, it can often be a bodily need trying to make itself known through your unconscious. Try checking in with your body: are you hot or cold? Do you need to visit the toilet? To eat or drink something? Sometimes, what feels like an existential crisis can be solved by putting on a jumper...

Just as in life, your internal attitude and physical posture can affect the experience you are having at every single moment. You can make use of this as needed, for example by consciously deciding to relax your body and breathing, or by letting your limbs move with the music, or by sitting upright, opening your eyes and becoming more present to your surroundings.

Remembering your intention and hopes for the experience can help you during the experience. You can ask yourself;-

Why am I here?

What reasons do I have to explore this that are more important to me than any fear, discomfort or unease?

Can I find more willingness to be with what is happening, if that choice can bring me closer to what I’m longing for?

As you read this document, notice what feelings are coming up. Anticipation? Anxiety? Either or both are welcome, other participants will be sharing these feelings with you.

What music will be playing?

We use a specially curated playlist developed by neuroscientist and ethnomusicologist, Mendel Kaelen. The ebb and flow of the playlist is designed to support the trajectory of a psilocybin experience, and to resonate with your emotions. Expect some occasional silences; they are intentional parts of the playlist. It is possible to feel some resistance to the music and the powerful feelings it can evoke. If you can allow these feelings, these moments can be rich opportunities to let go and release emotion. Try noticing what it is about the music that you feel resistance to, breathe into it and stay with any sensations which arise.

What will the setting be like?

There are many different and valid ways to approach a group psychedelic experience, from ayahuasca ceremonies to parties, the priority for us at this retreat is supporting you to have a deep inner journey. For our ceremony, you'll have a personal eye-mask, duvet, pillow and your own mattress.

It will be held indoors, in a beautiful light-filled room. For safety, and to put the focus on undisturbed inner journeys, participants typically remain within this space for the duration of the ceremony. Occasionally we may accompany participants to go outside briefly during the ceremony. After the ceremony there will be a chance to go outside.

The ceremony will not be a conversational or socially interactive experience, at least not in the usual sense! Although you will probably feel a powerful sense of group unity at times, we ask that you don't talk to other journeyers within the group room. Staying non-verbal and exploring your own inner world can make for a deeper experience for you, and simultaneously supports everyone to have their own personal journeys. Being loud or talkative can be an unconscious way to detach oneself from our experience, and engaging someone else in conversation can pull them away from theirs. If you need something, or if you need to express something, reach out to one of the facilitators.

Our intention is not for the ceremony room to be silent. Like a forest, it will be hushed but alive. We don't want you to stifle your experience by trying to maintain an unnatural silence. Noises of tears and laughter may emerge at times, along with

movements of people, doors, air. This will become a natural part of your experience of the space. Empathy is often enhanced during a psychedelic experience, and when you hear emotion expressed by someone, you may feel an urge to reach out to share in their joy or pain. In these moments, trust that the person has all they need as they go through the experience they came here to have. It can be a good exercise to try lightly noticing the way that others are expressing themselves, without needing to interact with them, to mentally send some warmth to that person before turning back to your own experience.

The facilitators are with you in service of your experience and will be on hand for any practical or emotional support. Our role is to support your journey, not to direct it. We will be checking in on everybody, but you can reach out to us at absolutely any point by raising your hand. Don't be afraid of taking up our time, receiving our care, or appearing vulnerable. It can be taboo in our culture to express our needs, and ask for and receive attention, but *this is why we're here*.

Touch from the facilitators can often be more useful than words: a hand on the shoulder, a squeeze of your foot, or sometimes even a hug. Physical contact can be incredibly grounding and supportive if you are going through a challenging patch, and we have frequently seen it unlock tension in participants, and let them release their emotions. However, we all have different boundaries and levels of comfort with touch. We'll check in with you regarding your boundaries during your one-to-one chats before the ceremony. We will also ask for your consent rather than just assuming you want a hug. Please feel totally free to signal to us if you'd rather not be touched, in advance, or at the time. We absolutely will not take it personally.

Alex will prepare sandwiches and snacks for you to consume in the latter part of the ceremony. Food may seem like an alien notion while on psychedelics, but we recommend you give it a go. The experience can require a significant amount of mental energy, and it's a good idea to maintain your blood sugar levels as well as staying hydrated. Senses can become heightened, and this can transform eating a simple piece of fruit into a potentially transcendent culinary experience.

There will be materials available for writing or drawing towards the end of the ceremony. For most people, this will not be relevant during the heights of the journey, but it can be a great way to start the integration process towards the tail end.

When the psychedelic trip is coming to a natural end, we'll close the ceremony together. Afterwards, we'll take it very easy, drink lots and do little. We serve a quiet

dinner in the evening and keep the ceremony space open for gentle resting and personal reflection.

There may be an urge to eagerly discuss and compare your journey with others, but the opportunity will come later, the day after. It's best to let the experience settle first and be felt 'in the heart', before sleeping on it, then only the next day trying to put it into words in the mind.

How will I feel afterwards?

After-effects vary. You may feel tired afterwards, in body and mind, throughout the evening and into the next day. Others experience an 'afterglow' or a sense of peace, or a buzz of excitement, you might have a mix. Mild headaches are not unusual, and paracetamol or similar may be useful. Think of it like muscle-ache after an intense exercise session at the gym, except in this instance, your brain has been working hard exploring new connections and pathways.

I've got questions!

Great, on the Retreat we'll answer all the questions that this document brings up. All your questions should be satisfied before the time comes on Friday for you get comfy on your mattress and sip the truffle tea.