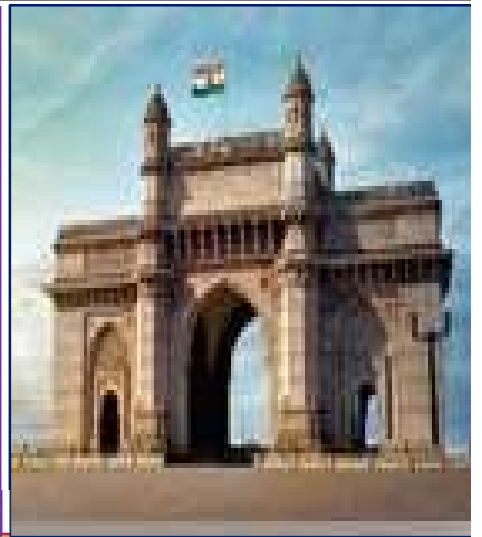




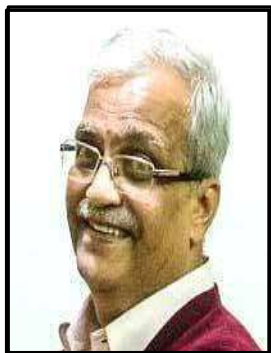
SERVAS FOUNDATION INDIA

NEWSLETTER

3rd Issue: September 2023



New Executive Committee



Dr. Prakash Vyavahare
President



Nitin Wankhede
National Secretary



Mrs. Anjana Jain
Deputy N.S.



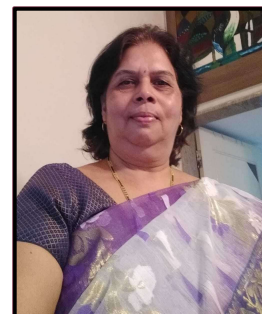
Mr. Pradeep Korde
Treasurer



Dr. Rupali B. Memane
Online Hostlist Coordinator



Dr. Mrs. Hamsavahini Singh
Peace Secretary



Mrs. Amruta Karkare
Newsletter Editor

HOW TO LOGIN?



PEACE AND
UNDERSTANDING
THROUGH TRAVEL AND
HOSTING



Servas Websites

English



Identity & goals

Community

How to join Servas

My Servas

1. Go to <https://servas.org/en/content/india>
2. Click on "My Servas" in the top ribbon
3. When prompted to enter user id and password, click on "Forgot Password"
4. A Password reset link will be emailed to the email ID entered
5. Click on the link, type password of your choice and you will be able to login. Create and save your New password.

The screenshot shows the login form on the Servas website. It includes fields for 'Username/Email' and 'Password'. Below the password field is a checkbox for 'Show password'. A blue link labeled 'Forgot Password' is circled in red. At the bottom of the form is a red 'Login' button with a lock icon.

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Our Guests say it all- 23 to 27



From the Editor's Desk



World Peace Day greetings to my Dear Servas family members. It is with immense pleasure that I present this first Issue of the News Bulletin, as Newsletter Editor.

Based on my limited experience of print media, I strongly believe that a written communication is not only a complete & effective mode of sharing, but it goes a long way in team building, fostering brotherhood, attaining common goals & it also lays paths for informed and directional progress towards aims, objectives and goals of any organization. To Share is to Communicate which in turn is to Befriend. A speaking photograph is also a very good way of sharing. And what could be better way of communicating than Newsletter?

The new Exco in periodic meetings is exploring various ways of taking our beloved organization to newer heights. It's a Teamwork without which we will not be able to proceed with possible velocity and pace. We, the members of this marvelous organization Servas, have planted seeds of peace and humanity for over 7 decades globally. It aligns well with our belief of "**VASUDHAIV KUTUMBKAM**" - a transition from Happiness of **Me & Mine TO Us & Ours**. SERVAS people stand as one family resolved to help in building world peace, good-will and understanding by providing opportunities through enhanced network of hosts and travelers of different countries, cultures, backgrounds, and nationalities by our affiliation to SERVAS. We are all bound to each other with love and respect.

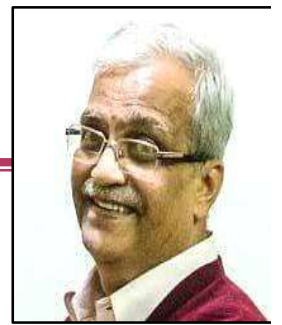
I am thankful to Mr. Prakash Vyavahare, President, Servas Foundation, India for very relevant message, putting there in, his ideas, in alignment with the spirit of this wonderful organization, Mr. Nitin Wankhede, National Secretary, Servas Foundation who has always expressed his keenness, full support and encouragement for bringing out this News Bulletin. I am also thankful to Mr. Bhudeb Charkravarti, Convenor, Servas International Development Committee, for sharing plans for developing Servas globally. Similarly, I thank Dr. Hamsavahini Singh, National Peace Secretary, Servas Foundation & SI UN Coordinator, for sharing her experiences. I also express my sincere thanks and gratitude for all the members who contributed with their articles to this Bulletin in an enthusiastic response to my appeal to contribute by way of articles/ anecdotes/ photographs with a special mention of the prompt response from Youth members is a must here.

With these words I present this Bouquet of Servas Experiences, Aspirations, and memoirs of peacebuilding exercises. Hope you enjoy the same. Feel free to give your candid feedback and suggestions to make this better.

Mrs. Amruta Karkare, Pune

amruta.Karkare@gmail.com

Message from President



Friends my greetings to you all. This is my very first communication as President, Servas Foundation (India).

Finally, the long-awaited news of the end of the "Covid-19" Pandemic has arrived. The belief in mankind's ability & spirit to fight and overcome the challenges to human life is reinforced. Undoubtedly, we are to revert now with doubled enthusiasm to a meaningful and purposeful life world-over.

It is a feather in the Cap of Servas Foundation India, that we organized, very successfully (after 42 years), the 32nd Servas International Conference and General Assembly (SICOGA) in November 2022, which was attended by around 130 members from 38 countries.

Friends, Education is a very dynamic & a continuous process & Academic degrees are nothing but the means & tools to learn further and to hone soft skills like co-operation, coordination, patience, tolerance etc. Development of self and others. The "**Tait Ariya**" Upanishad states "**Never stop self-learning and spreading the acquired knowledge to others**". Nothing better than travelling to achieve this. The focus of travel, Vis-a-vis Tourism, is on interactions with people to understand their culture, history, customs, food habits, costumes, family, value system etc. - a two-way learning Indian tradition upholds "**Atithi Deo Bhava**" - a guest is to be Respected as God & considered as a source of knowledge.

Mahatma Gandhi once said, "**With every true friendship, we build more firmly the foundations on which the peace of the whole world rests**". Interaction with people while travelling is acquiring a firsthand experience and knowledge rather than the one meted out to us through various opinionated media. Staying in a friend's home is an experience sharing and learning. Having said that, I feel, we can enjoy the company of the Servas India members as much as the hosting of Servas members from other countries. The "**Open-Door**" Policy of Servas can also be experienced, within India, by hosting each other by the Servas India members, to build a strong local network. *After all the "Charity begins at home"*.

Servas India was founded more than 70 years ago at a Gandhian Ashram at Bodily, Gujrat. The great Gandhian philosopher & the founding National Secretary of Servas India (for over half a decade), Late Shri Harivallibh Parikh (Bhaijee) once said very aptly and succinctly while narrating the spirit of Servas that, "**Servas started with the aims and name of a Peace builder's movement. Environmental and Human problems can be solved with dedicated action.**"

Servas members have planted seeds of love, brotherhood, and friendship for more than 70 years all over the world, as a Servas Traveller & Host. They are the grass root peace ambassadors, actively committed to building peace, while some of the leaders of the world are /were engaged in producing more disastrous weapons of mass destruction. Hopefully the "**Butterfly effect**" helps the voices of the common men, reach the leaders at all levels. It is also the time to increase the involvement of youth in Servas activities by increasing their membership. The new Executive Committee is already planning to meet these goals. We should encourage the exchange of peace volunteers, holding of family camps etc. I appeal to the Servas India members to actively participate in achieving the goal.

Wishing all the travellers and hosts the success in building of friendship, brother-sisterhood, and Peace.

Prakash Vyavahare
Indore

NATIONAL SECRETARY'S MESSAGE



Namaskar Respected Brothers & Sisters of Servas India!

It is a matter of honor & pride for me to communicate with you as a National Secretary of this esteemed organization. I always liked the cause of our organization and hence try to connect with people around the world. Servas foundation India feels proud that we successfully organized SICOGA 2022 which was attended by members from 40 countries. It is to the credit of Team "Servas Foundation India". I am sure you all enjoyed the enriching unique experience that Servas provided us through the hosting of national & international members.

Everyone has an attraction of foreign travel , naturally; yes of course we must enjoy it; but we must try to promote different destinations in our country, to our brothers and sisters all over the globe.

India has strong Heritage. Different types of festivals and religious / social events being celebrated throughout the year. Our beautiful beaches, Hill stations, oldest and marvelous Architectural design of temples, caves & longest mountains range of Himalayas, Eastern & western Ghats. These are assets of our country.

Our Kite festival in Gujrat, Human Pyramids in Maharashtra, Ganesh Festival of Pune, Boat Race in Kerala, Beautiful Kerala Beaches, Himalayan Treks, Kashmir's SHIKARA - House Boat stay, Snow fall, Pushkar Camel Fair & Rajasthani Folk Dance, organizing, Yoga Camps, Trekking in mountains, Tent stay in Rajasthan, Kutch & various dance forms like Kathak, Classical, Folk Manipuri Dance, Rass Leela. We need strong support of you all to conduct such events in different areas.

Our family system, culture, food and nature will attract all guests because "**Ateethi Devo Bhava**" our slogan which prevails. Try to encourage participation of our guests in functions at home & festivals of our Nation. In this context I appeal here that let us travel across India first, enjoy our different languages, variety of delicious food, exchange of thoughts & ideas, support each other and try to forge a strong bond in our internal relation, keep collecting data of good locations and promoting them around the world so that our guests can enjoy "**BHARAT**". I am looking forward to meeting you all at the next AGM.

Please feel free to share your ideas and feedback on my email & WhatsApp.

Jay Hind / Jai Bharat

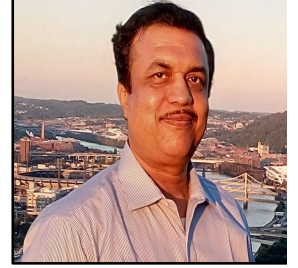
Nitin Wankhede

(National Secretary)

Nitinwankhede99@gmail.com

Cell No: 9921372999.

Building **WORLD-PEACE** through Servas



It was while attending SICOGA- 2022 at Panchgani when, although I am a relatively recent member of Servas as compared to many stalwarts , I was asked by the then N.S. Servas India, as to why I am not considering contesting the election for the post of Member, Servas International Development Committee. I was reluctant as I am quite new to the organization and so far, I have travelled, as a Servas traveller, only to Vienna and Bratislava and our friends, Paul and his wife Vicki have been our only guests. However, I was fortunate to be a part of the Servas International Technical Committee for more than 2 years, working on developing the use cases for version 2 of the Servas web portal **servas.org** & I was also the Tech Lead from India, for SICOGA 2022 and contributed, along with Dan, to the conference arrangements. As I was providing Team access to the members attending SICOGA 2022, some members already knew me, and I also had made few new friends during our stay and the group activities. But it was my maiden experience of contesting an election. However, I filled the form as requested .

Finally, when the result was declared, it was a pleasant surprise to me that I was elected to the Development Committee along with my friends Jamie Robertson (UK), Evren Ozkan (Turkey), Pamela Yang (Taiwan) and Neuma Dantas (Brazil). I scheduled our first meeting on 8th January 2023, to elect the Convenor of the Development Committee and again I was elected, unanimously, as the Convenor. My first objective as Convenor DC, was to bring the members together through regular meetings and we decided to have our regular meetings on first Sunday of every month. We also inducted two Co-opted members Marguerite Hills (USA) and Exton Mtande (Malawi). Thus, the SI Development committee got representation from across the world. Friends, we do understand, our pivotal role in the development & growth of Servas, through the induction of new members & the introduction of the countries which



are presently unrepresented by any member. We also want to focus on how we can engage members in various Servas activities. For this we need to assist in activities on topics like World-Peace, Social Justice, Environment & Climate, Cultural Exchange, Creative Arts, Learning New Languages, etc., among Servas members around the world to promote the development of Servas. A Google form link

(A sunday meeting) <https://forms.gle/923KYGnFEzmJtUis6> has been created to get information from Servas members, on their areas of interests and type of participation. This link can be used by Servas India members to send areas of their interests and we will design appropriate programs for them. We have asked the developing countries whether they need any assistance to arrange Development activities in their countries. As a result, Brazil is organizing **“Servas Latin America Youth Eco-Camp 2023”** in November 2023. Similarly, Argentina & Chile are also organizing **“Latin America Regional Meet”** in November / December 2023. The Development Committee is looking for suggestions on events that can be arranged for the growth of Servas. We are celebrating 21st September, the International World Peace Day, by holding competition **“Photography for Peace” and “Servas Music Workshop on Peace.”** Servas India can also arrange, on regional level, meetings to celebrate local cultural events. We need to engage our members in various programs and the D.C is there to help you in its organization.

To epitomize, our focus shall be on building world peace through traveling, understanding other cultures and organizing events to demonstrate the rich traditions of diverse societies and we anticipate participation of more and more members in the developmental activities.

Bhudeb Chakravarti

Convenor, Servas International Development Committee

SICOGA 2022 SNAPSHOTS



Feeling at home abroad

solo female travel to Ekinci, Antakya/ Hatay Türkiye.

“Live your life by a compass, not by a clock”.

While exploring new places, people and cultures, one can agree that travelling broadens our mental horizons and understanding of life by taking us out of our comfort zones. It inspires us to see, taste, hear and feel new things. It constantly challenges us to not only adapt to explore new surroundings but also to engage with different people.

During the Covid-19 lockdown in 2020, I read about the Servas Peace School at Ekinci, Türkiye. I had the opportunity to attend a virtual meeting and knew about the Peace School Activities. When the 15th Summer Peace School at Ekinci, Hatay was announced I was all set to go!

The mission and vision of the Servas Peace School reminded me of the ideologies of National Bal Bhavan of India established in 1956 at New Delhi. Now there are 73 National Bal Bhavans across the country. The main purpose was to provide opportunities for creative pursuits like performing arts, science experiments, photography etc. to children in the age group of 5 to 16 years. I also had the opportunity to participate in the month-long activities during summer vacations. The Ekinci Summer Peace school was reminiscent of those days for me.



15th Servas Peace School Volunteers



Library at domestic departure hall, Istanbul

Travelling from Jaipur via Istanbul to Hatay was a long journey of 20 hours. I had been to Türkiye in 2006 on a cultural exchange program with my students and had been to Ankara, Kırşehir, Cappadocia and Istanbul. Istanbul airport is one of the busiest airports and renowned for its unique ventures.

At the domestic departure Zone, I found a library right in the middle of a big hall with volunteers working from 8 am to 6 pm. One can find books in different languages stored there systematically. What a wonderful way to stretch your legs and spend a few of hours in an interesting atmosphere!

The flight from Istanbul to Ekinci was delayed and I was worried. At departure lounge I met a student from Iskendrun and asked him about the safety to travel alone in a taxi at night. He was kind and nice and helped me hire a taxi. It was reassuring that he had the driver's phone number for safety reasons. I arrived at 9 pm in Ekinci and was welcomed by my host Sinem and her daughter Narin near Ates Market.

Continued.....

Feeling at home abroad.....

Next morning after breakfast I went to Peace school with Narin, Ahmed and Elif. There I met Mehmet, the founder of this Peace School and other volunteers from Italy, Mexico, Russia and Pakistan. The children and the parents from this village were involved in all activities and the success of the peace school is attributed to their active participation.

The two weeks of summer school were well planned and organized. The children from 3 years to 16 years of age were engaged every day for 3 hours in the morning and evening. The local and international volunteers met daily to discuss and plan about the workshops and the activities of next day.

I was hosted by two families- the first week with Sinem with her children Narin, Ahmed and Elif and the second week at Nurvet's place with her 4 children Melisa, Mert, Naz and Emir. My host families were in the same locality and their neighbours were very friendly. Most of the time I was invited for chai or kahve (coffee) and had lengthy discussions on many topics. I am still in touch with them and get regular calls from them. Leyla and her family are neighbours of Nurvet and I had to promise Leyla that next time I will be her guest and she will also become a Servas member.



vegetarian breakfast



Rangoli/Kolam workshop



Exploring Antakya Nurvet & Sinem

The time flew so fast and we realised that it was time to say goodbye to the loving, generous and friendly hosts. The event organized on the last evening was the highlight and almost the entire village had turned up for the cultural evening. With a heavy heart and a promise to meet soon, we bid each other goodbye.

I firmly believe in the concept of **Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam**, the world is one family. Mehmet's efforts at this peace school will provide an opportunity to young people of Ekinici to be the world citizens. The power of peace makes these children feel understood, connected and empowered and it will shape their self-esteem and sense of self for the future leading to better choices and bigger goals. World peace is achieved through internal means i.e., by liberating ourselves from artificial boundaries that separate us all.

The natural calamity that struck Türkiye in February 2023 was devastating and we were helpless in the face of nature's fury. My first reaction was to reach out to these wonderful members of my extended family in Ekinici and I was relieved that they were all safe. They may be displaced for the time being but I am certain that these Bravehearts will find their way and things will be back to normal soon. Insha'Allah I will definitely go there for volunteer work and to meet them soon.

Dr Hamsavahini Singh

National Peace Secretary, Servas Foundation &

SI UN Coordinator

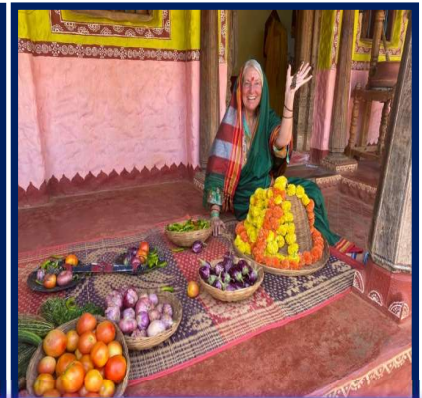


For the Love of Hosting!

If anyone had told me 5 years ago, that hosting people and staying with people was a thing, I wouldn't have believed the person. But I guess it was my love for travelling that led me to see me this new and unique way of learning about people and cultures. I had the privilege of hosting this young couple (Irmgard 69, Dietmar 79) from Germany over the weekend through Servas. They are backpackers traveling across India, planning the things on the go. They happened to be our first international guests, and I was inspired by their energy and enthusiasm. Not even once did I feel that they were old and needed any assistance. They were always ready and on time for everything and enjoyed thoroughly every moment of the new experiences. We were out on a day trip to a place that gives a glimpse of the rich tradition and culture of India. They expressed that it was their best day in India. The best part was that my parents also connected with them effortlessly and it felt like we were a part of the same family as we ate and chatted away to glory. Well, now I have grandparents in Germany, too!

Here's to one world, one family- **Vasudaiva Kutumbakam!**

Arya Katwe, Hubli, India



Glimpses of the unforgettable joyous moments of our tour to a village farm Agadi Thota, where Dietmar and Irmgard, donned in the traditional costumes, tasted farm fresh vegetables, watermelon, experienced the North Karnataka cuisine including the refreshing sugarcane juice extracted by themselves and the bullock and Tonga cart rides.



Hosting -An Incredible Experience.

Hosting friends from different countries through Servas has always been a delightful experience for us. The phrase "**Atithi devo bhava**," which means "**The Guest is Equivalent To God**," is truly reflected in the connection that we make and cherish with our guests.

Planning sightseeing trips, shopping, and cooking different cuisines for our guests is a greatly enjoyable and enriching experience for the entire family and an opportunity to learn about different cultures and make new friends.

This was certainly the case when we hosted Mahsa, a member of the Servas organization. At first, we were a bit unsure about what to expect, as we were not familiar with the culture and customs of Iran. However, on arrival of Mahsa in no time we realized that the differences were what made our time together so special.

Mahsa was incredibly friendly and outgoing, and we soon ourselves engaged in chats and laughs like old friends. As we got to know each other better, we learned a lot about Iran and its people and were surprised to discover just how many similarities there were between our cultures.



From our shared love of music and movies to our appreciation of good food, it was clear that despite our different backgrounds, we had a lot in common. Mahsa was fascinated by Indian cuisines, especially the spices we use and the way we cooked, despite there being many similarities between Persian and Indian food. Our knowledge of Persian food was limited, but talking to Mahsa gave us insight into a completely different culinary background.

But it wasn't just about the food - we also took the time to explore our city together, showing Mahsa some of our favorite sights. She was eager to learn as much as she could about our culture and way of life, and we were just as curious about hers. It was a truly eye-opening experience and one that we will never forget.

Perhaps the most important thing that came out of Mahsa's visit, however, was the bond that we formed with her. Despite coming from different parts of the world, we realized that we had much more in common than we ever could have imagined. In the real sense, our time together was somewhat of a celebration, and we left feeling grateful for the opportunity to connect with someone from a completely different background. Thus, hosting Mahsa was an experience that we will treasure for years to come as it allowed us to form a meaningful connection with another human being. We are grateful to Servas for facilitating his incredible experience and can't wait to welcome more visitors from around the world in the future.



*Servas is the thread which bind me with diverse friendship and social network. Thanks to it that I developed a broader cultural understanding and a wider world view due to the numerous, interactive think tank moments with **SERVAS** members across the globe.*

Today, I am both, a **SERVAS** Traveler and Host in the beautiful city next to Mainz, Germany known as Ingelheim am Rhein, where I am working in a Pharmaceutical company - “Boehringer Ingelheim.”

I had an opportunity to travel to many countries such as Switzerland, Germany, Argentina, USA, France, Netherlands, UK, Japan etc., earlier for my studies and then for my job assignments. During these international Travel experiences, I kindled diverse friendships and extended my social networks through **SERVAS**.

I developed a broader cultural understanding and a wider world view due to the numerous, interactive think tank moments with **SERVAS** members across the globe. We discussed & exchanged many global, social, personal and political views in an empathetic environment under the sun.

Kudos to the outstanding value structure of **SERVAS**, I can proudly say that my **SERVAS** experiences transformed me into a world citizen who is open to more than one interpretation, enjoys the subtleness of divergent outlooks and has the ability to agree to disagree so as to be able to accept differences in cultures & people.

Udita Bagchi
Mainz,
Germany



SERVAS Philadelphia ,USA



SERVAS Lübeck, Germany



SERVAS Paris, France



SERVAS New York, USA

Post-AGM Fun!

There are two ways any event could be carried out. One way is the formal, structured, well planned and accordingly executed event and then the other way is to proceed impromptu, in a spontaneous off -the- cuff casual manner. By now, i am sure everyone knows the former part refers to the organization of the AGM in Hospet which all attendees will endorse.

So, allow me to elaborate on the latter! When we picked up, at late night, Manish ji, Akhilesh ji, and Aditya from the railway station, on their arrival for the AGM, little did we know that we would make friends for life. And after the few other youngsters like Niharika, Anupriya, Ananya, and Rachana joining the club, the fun doubled, at times, incurring, I apprehend, the raised disapproval of the fellow senior participants who regretfully were kept waiting for us endlessly at the bus as we lost track of time while on a day tour to Hampi.

We are *“Guilty as charged”* to tell that the AGM was successful would be an understatement, because it is not just about the formal proceedings of the conference, but also about the people, their warmth, and laughter that got added to it. At the end of the AGM, we had a truckload of memories to carry back home along with a bunch of people who wished to stop by Hubli! And just like that, we got an opportunity to host Servas guests for the first time and we were fortunate to host the outgoing National Secretary and the newly elected President as well on the same day! Indulgence in street food, showing them around our homes and workplaces, and letting them be part of our daily lives was the most special feeling. Having Abhay uncle, Sunita aunty, Manish ji, Akhilesh ji, Aditya, Prakash uncle, and Smita aunty was like having parents, siblings, and grandparents around.

In the era of individualism, nuclear family, and growing conflicts, Servas is a hope which is like *A breath of fresh air!*

ARYA KATWE,

HUBLI, INDIA



One day trip to Hampi



Dinner with our first Servas guests!



Enjoying Street Food in Hampi



A quick visit to Tolankere lake in Hubli

'Sailing off without a map can be marvelous, you might fail , but will have no regrets!!'

Ever wondered why some journeys turn out to be so beautiful that they become a surreal & yet an indelible glimpse in your memory. That's what SERVAS has always presented me with - a ship that I took upon to know and experience the cross-cultures. I once had been to one of my very first SERVAS MEET'S at SANCHI. An impeccable experience of knowing and understanding the initiatives across the platforms, meeting new people, their cultures, volunteering at best towards the meet and its agendas.

From the very first day, immediately after all the members had settled in we had sessions to discuss as per the detailed agendas of the meeting. We even had group / team building activities to get us all geared up on the following day when, we formed small groups of unit and had time to debate and discuss about what all can be improvised on the current and previous working agendas. On the third day, we all went out for an excursion to visit SANCHI STUPA. The day was power packed with history, laughs and laughter all around, a mesmerizing light and sound show, and it all ended up with a karaoke session in the evening at the hotel.

A three-day event was all that was needed to know that the ship is sailing you towards a soulful shore. Capturing a lot more pages and chapters to my SERVAS DIARY soon.

THANK YOU!

Apoorva Agarwal, Agra.



Servas and Youth

We often talk about how & why “**Youth are the future of Servas**” Unfortunately out of the total 16000 odd Servas International members only 5% (about 850), are presently below the age of 30 and qualify as youth. This raises a painful apprehension that Servas may cease to exist in the next 20 years unless serious efforts are made at all levels by each member nation to attract youth to the organization and increase the member base to at least 20% of the total members.

Hence it is imperative to effectively convey to the youth the advantages that the organization offers to them. My moment of truth was when I personally experienced the tremendous personality development of my daughter, after her stints as Servas traveler. Hence, I decided to put in my best efforts towards achievement of above goal of popularizing Servas amongst youth in India. The National Secretaries of member nations of Servas International were kind enough to elect me as member S I Youth & Families Committee at SICOGA 22 and so began my journey towards the goal. Apart from me the other elected members of the S I Youth & Families Committee are from Spain, Italy, Turkey, Romania. Although the representation is from two continents only, we shall try and do the best we can with what we have.

During the last six months, our committee has had several meetings. Some of the points and actions agreed upon unanimously were as under: -

- Membership base of youth all around the world needs to be increased substantially.
- For this, benefits of Servas to youth need to be propagated aggressively.
- The Servas International website should dedicate more space to information for youth and ongoing/planned youth events as a part of this initiative.
- Social Media like Instagram should be put to effective use to spread information on benefits of Servas to youth.
- EXCOs/Boards of member nations should recognize and prioritize this matter.
- Each member nation should have a youth committee in place.
- The youth committee should be headed by a youth coordinator appointed/elected as the case maybe.
- The youth committee, under guidance of the national EXCO/Boards, should work towards organizing youth camps, cultural programs etc
- The youth committee should also work closely with youth groups of other member nations as well as the S I Youth & Families Committee to increase participation internationally.

Though, during the S I Youth & Families Committee meetings in the initial few months the idea of an international youth conference was explored, after the Earthquake in Turkey and the resultant devastation caused, it was decided to push the organization of the same to 2024. It was decided that in 2023 the concentration would be on organization of youth events at the local/national/regional level. As a result, Spain and Italy have drawn up a plan to organize a youth event in August 2023.

At Servas India, our EXCO, led by our N S Shri Nitin Wankhede, is taking the initiatives to create youth leadership. We hope that Servas Foundation, India successfully takes up youth initiatives mentioned above.

Hiren Goradia

Member, S I Youth & Families Committee

Hosting while Away from Home

Whilst on Holiday tours or on special occasions



Laxman Jhoola



Kempty Falls -Mussoorie



Michal at the Holy Ganges

Friends , most of us have experienced the pleasure of hosting guests in our home. But recently we had this novel & unique experience of hosting our guests when we were away from home / city .

It so happened that during mid-December,2022 we were contacted by Maya Tal, member Servas Israel, to enquire about our availability in February,2023; she was planning to visit India, along with her daughter Michal, during that period.

We were so happy with the prospect of hosting them. But then we had already planned our tour of Uttarakhand and central India to attend a marriage function in our extended family. Obviously, it was not possible to host them as the dates were clashing. But then suddenly a thought struck us, **“Why not ask them to join us for the tour?”** Our suggestion was immediately accepted by Maya; her reaction was, *“That’s awesome. We are certainly joining you. We want to see Uttarakhand and what better way could be to travel in another country in company of local friends who know the culture, language, food, lodging/boarding arrangements, topography, places of interest, transport / Logistics involved, shopping at right places and for reasonable prices and all the nitty-gritty of the tour. And we have heard so much about The Big Fat Indian Weddings that the opportunity to be part of one and having a firsthand experience of Indian culture, traditions, wedding customs, and rituals etc. is very much tempting. We cannot miss the fun & frolic.”* And accordingly, the duo joined us in tour of Uttarakhand, Marriage in Jabalpur and visit to Bheda Ghat, Bargi Dam, the Kanha Jungle safari etc. A most enjoyable, exceptional and memorable experience for all of us.

In retrospect it is felt that, although it was an individual level impromptu plan it was an activity that aligned so well with various objectives enlisted in MOA of Servas Foundation India viz. *Promoting world peace through better understanding between the people of various countries and cultures by providing Servas members opportunities to meet people from different countries and cultures, Diffusing Indian cultural knowledge among Servas members, Encouraging travelers to participate in the life and daily routines of the families and communities in which they are guests, Encouraging better understanding through person-to-person contacts etc. Hence this sharing.*

Maya writes about her experience of the tour in the article that follows.

Amruta Karkare

A DREAM COME TRUE

Way back in 2018 my daughter and I were very lucky to be part of the Ganesh Festival in Pune, India, which was a unique traveling experience for us as every day brought more surprises and more interesting things for us to learn. And by the end of 10 days travel through the Northern and western part of India we came to how much more is there to be explored in India, in terms of the people, the multiplicity of sightseeing places, plurality of cultures, foods, festivals etc. The Gem of our India tour was staying with hosts Shirish and Amruta Karkare and experiencing their great hospitality. It was a good lesson to us in hosting & clearly the beginning of a wonderful friendship. Since then, for the last 7 years, through the gloomy days of Covid pandemic, we have been in continuous touch with each other. **And then it was time to meet again.....**

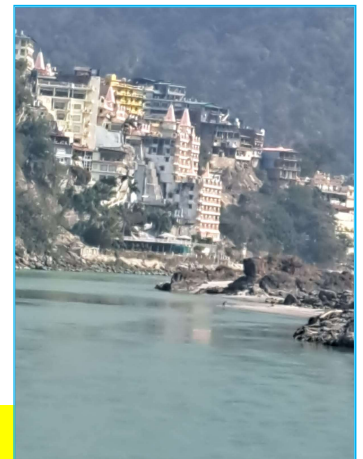
Me and Michal were planning to visit India and the Karkare couple informed me that they are undertaking a tour of India's northern state of Uttarakhand - the picturesque land of Himalayan foothills, the Holy River Ganges, and the cities renowned for centers for studying yoga and meditation, Temples and ashrams. They asked if we would wish to join them in the tour, planned by their U.S. based daughter, to the last detail - from Hotel bookings, to taxi arrangements, to shortlisting sightseeing places. It was again a lifetime opportunity for us. How could we refuse it? We immediately conveyed our willingness to join them. And so started our memorable experience. The Whatsapp group for the tour was formed and aptly named "**Call of the valleys**" Besides the tour of the mesmerizing mountains, we were to attend a grand Indian Wedding ceremony and a visit to the famous forest, in Central India. Travelling in exotic places with good friends is always a great fun. The extra benefit is their knowledge of native language, local customs, food, sightseeing places, Hotels, Shopping at right places and prices and their amazing family friends wherever you go. with people who live in the country is a unique. We were so excited about the tour.

We all arrived at Delhi Airport around same time and embarked upon our journey by a taxi ready for us. Michal and daughter of Karkare's found so many common things to talk about and became real good friends in no time and we the adults continued our friendship like we never parted. We will ever remember the incredible experience of the next ten days of our travel together. Literally a seamless experience of travelling through the most exciting places and making the most of it.

All the places we stayed were with most picturesque view as they were selected after a lot of search.



The scenic view from our Hotel



We went to the spots that may not be known to foreign tourists like us; they were very mesmerizing and beautiful, in & around Haridwar, Rishikesh, Massoorie, Deharadun - like, Ram/Laxman zoola, Happy Valley, A Monastery, Sunset point, George Everest House/Peak/Trek /camp, Lal Tibba, Patanjali Ashram, Ganga Aarti, Ruskin Bond's house, Kempti fall, The BEATLES's Ashramjust to name a few.



THE BEATLES ASHRAM

Being part of the Grand Indian wedding Ceremony , at Jabalpur, was an extraordinary experience for us. The venue, lawns, the lodging / boarding arrangement ,especially the colourful wedding costumes, floral decoration, the yummiest exotic cuisines, the procession of the Bride groom, the music, the dance and great fun & frolic during the 2 days of the wedding ceremony that we could attend was an extraordinary lifetime experience for us.



Dressed In colorful Indian Costumes

After the wedding we visited the Bhedaghat Marble rocks , the roaring Dhuandhar falls and Bargi dam , which was another great experience. And lastly the 2-days stay in thick evergreen forest at Kanha National Park – the famous Tiger resort, where we enjoyed the thrill of a night, and a day safari was an amazing experience. Here we could have the real feel of the Flora, fauna and wildlife of a typical dry, deciduous tropical forest.



Amazing waterfall Dhuandhar



Night Jungle safari

The tour through Servas acquaintances was like a dream come true for us. Michal and me are very much thankful to the host family, first for being our friends, for hosting us, taking us to wonderful places, having us in the family wedding, and for the extraordinary experience we had with them.

Maya Tal, Israel

Servas - A Unique Way of Bonding

Traveling is not just about visiting new places and seeing new things. It is also about meeting new people, experiencing different cultures, and creating lasting memories.

Servas promotes cultural exchange and peace through travel.

I along with my spouse Deepa undertook our first Servas trip to the Ural Mountains in Russia which shall remain our most memorable trip as we made friends from across the world and experienced the warmth of hospitality that transcends language and cultural barriers.

Most of the participants stayed in dorms and rooms, but we were fortunate to be given a beautiful wooden log cottage. The accommodation was very cozy and comfortable and had very picturesque surroundings adding to the charm.

The best part about Servas trips is the opportunity to stay with local families in the countryside. We were touched by the warmth and generosity of our hosts, who went out of their way to make us feel at home. We also had the privilege of attending meetings and presentations by representatives of different countries, who proudly showcased their cultures and traditions.

One of the highlights of the trip was Deepa's daily "Yoga lessons" amidst the serene surroundings of the Ural Mountains. We also trekked the mountains with the whole group, which comprised of both seasoned hikers as also the beginners.



Being vegetarians, we were a bit apprehensive about the food arrangements; but our hosts took great care of us and ensured that we had delicious and wholesome vegetarian meals throughout the trip.

Servas - A Unique Way of Bonding.....continued....

The camaraderie and bonding we experienced on the Servas trip were truly unforgettable. We exchanged gifts, sang, and danced, and created memories that will stay with us forever.



The final dinner and goodbyes were bittersweet, as we had to say goodbye to our newfound friends. Servas taught us to understand the commonalities among the people, feelings of gratefulness, meaningful connection with another human being. Traveling with Servas members gave us an experience of warmth and generosity of hospitality that transcends language and cultural barriers. Showed us a true, authentic way to camaraderie and bonding with people.

In conclusion, Servas trips offer a unique and meaningful way to travel, make new friends, and create lifelong memories. It is not just about visiting new places, but also about experiencing the warmth of hospitality and the richness of different cultures. We highly recommend Servas trips to anyone who wants to explore the world in a truly authentic way.



Gautam Lunavat
Pune, India

Through the eyes of Guests



**Our Guests Say It
All....**

My Experience of Indian Culture through Servas

It was 2019 when I met Amruta and Shirish for the first time when they were in Italy for a youth and family camp at Fano & were travelling through Italy. Being part of Servas family and living in Lucca countryside – a twin village of Pisa, I received them on Pisa train station & hosted them for 2 days that transformed in to a sweet bond of a lifelong friendship through cultural exchange. My friend Angela and I will never forget the bicycle ride around the thousand-year-old palisade around the Lucca, city, the Picnic on it with Pizza from the oldest Bistro cafe , Visit to the Beach etc. After 2 days they moved ahead to Florence with strong bridge of friendship forged between us and a standing invitation to their home in Pune. Since then, it was my desire from the bottom of heart to visit India as I nursed very sweet memories of the couple.

Post COVID me, Angela my friend and our sons planned a visit to India. Shirish & Amruta were always there to help us in planning, transport arrangements & finalization of Itinerary. Finally in December 2022, our dream come true & we arrived in Mumbai on 25th December and we immediately headed to Pune to Amruta's house where they were waiting for us. It was an awesome welcome for us which shows the roots of true Indian culture. It was as if we were at our home in another country. In an unknown terrain friends like Amruta and Shirish were there to introduce us to their city. This made our trip very easy and comfortable. A hearty welcome with big joyful hug, a hot delicious dinner, sharing experiences and laughter - what more can be expected by a tourist to feel at home in a foreign land, after a long, tiresome 10 hours journey . Next day we were taken around the

Pune city to get a feel of the culture, lifestyle, local foods, culture and do as much as possible local sight-seeing, and window shopping. Thanks to our hosts, after few hours only we all were so well-tuned with the surroundings that we were feeling very much at home. Roaming around the city all through the day , we reached home late in the evening, had homemade delicious dinner and did relaxing meditation before hitting the bed.

Unfortunately, next day, I was sick. But our hosts put all the efforts, gave medicines to make me comfortable. Their caring attention enabled me to start my further journey next day. I want to thank them with all my heart. A surprise awaited us, when we were all were gifted traditional Indian designer costumes. These unexpected, beautiful gifts, chitchatting, yummy break fast and a visit to the city– what a wonderful way to spend the day.

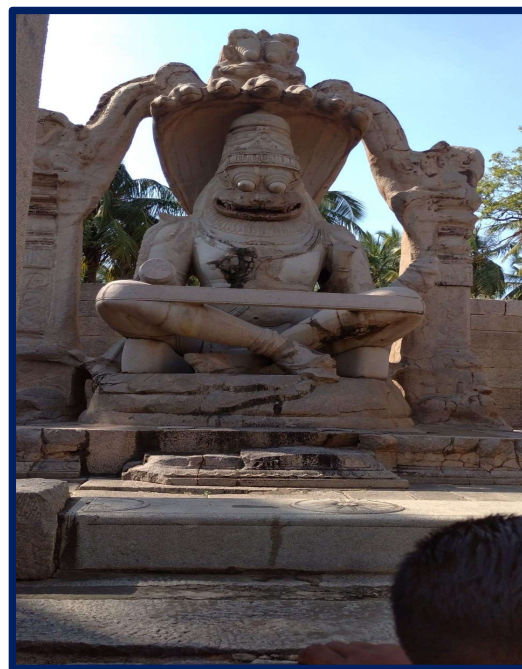
Next day was the last day in Pune and time to bid adieu to our lovely hosts. We realized that the real challenge, we may face will be the next day when our tour to Kerala will start on our own. But thanks to our hosts it was all planned well, and all arrangements were in place. Shirish drove us to the bus stop for our overnight journey to Humpy , by a sleeper coach.



My Experience of Indian *Culture through Servas*.....Continued ...

Next day, early morning, we reached another ancient, historical city of India, Humpy in the south Indian state of Karnataka with multiple ruins of temple complexes. It is situated on the banks of Tungabhadra river. Its a UNESCO Heritage site situated in the hills and valleys of Karnataka.

We visited some monuments and temples from the Vijayanagar Empire, one of the Great southern Hindu Kingdoms which shows architectural wonders of India. After visiting Humpy, we headed to Kochi where the calm of the lagoon and the arts Biennale awaited us. There we met another Servas friend who day hosted us. with whom we had an Indian lunch in an unforgettable place.



Our next stop was Trivandrum where we enjoyed some pleasant moments on the serene sea beaches in the evening. Time flew by and the next day arose with fresh breeze and warm sunlight. It was time to say good-bye to India; The country where we enjoyed the warmth of lovely people, experienced hospitality

and noted that the respect for nature and affection for animals are most important.



We headed to the airport with heavy baggage of love and affection which we got from our Indian hosts. I promised Amruta and Shirish that we will surely visit India again. We are also waiting for you all in Italy again.

We will always have the unforgettable memories in our minds and the song of India in our ears. Thank you so much for making our trip to India special from the moment we met you Shirish / Amruta !

Being part of the big Servas family brings a welcome feeling in every part of the world because servas is the name of not only hospitality, a bed or a house, but it is also sharing of peace, harmony, brotherhood. A big Thank you Servas!

Cinzia Maria Bertolucci, Italy

Italy to Pune via Mumbai

This was our first visit to India to attend S.I.Co.G.A. in Panchani. I was to attend the same with Sebastiano Foresti and Ester Poma (22 and 24 years old respectively) representing the Youth Group of Servas Italy. Sebastiano and Ester were excited to be volunteering for the first time, at Servas International meeting. They had prepared some activities to be shared with the Servas delegates and international friends, such as a video on “How to overcome the pandemic”, a country presentation with “Italian body language game”, a workshop on Servas Camps and Youth activities, as S.Y.L.E. and Servas youth exchange. Besides this, Sebastiano and Ester were ready to be volunteers for Minutes taking, Newsletter editing and to work with the other youngsters to build an international network. We were all thrilled to meet our old and new friends, to support new projects in Servas and to discover India.

In Mumbai the warm welcome by Hiren Goradia and his family, his wife and mother, will be remembered by us with deep feelings. They offered us a rich meal and a sweet conversation and relaxing time at their home. He took care of us and organized for us the transfer to Pune where we were welcomed and hosted for two nights by Shirish and Amruta Karkare.

I had already met Shirish and Amruta Karkare in an International Servas Camp at Fano that I coordinated in Italy in the past and I was very happy to receive their invitation to be hosted at their home in Pune. Shirish and Amruta opened their house and their hearts to us. We felt very much honoured to enter their home and to receive from Amruta the traditional Indian welcome by “Tilak” - red dot on our forehead as sign of holy blessings and happiness.



They told us a lot about the lifestyle in their country and about their family, traditions and religious celebrations of Lord Ganesha which has presence in all families. They dedicate a separate room- “Pooja Ghar” for the Gods, for worship with flowers and with precious incense and food offers.

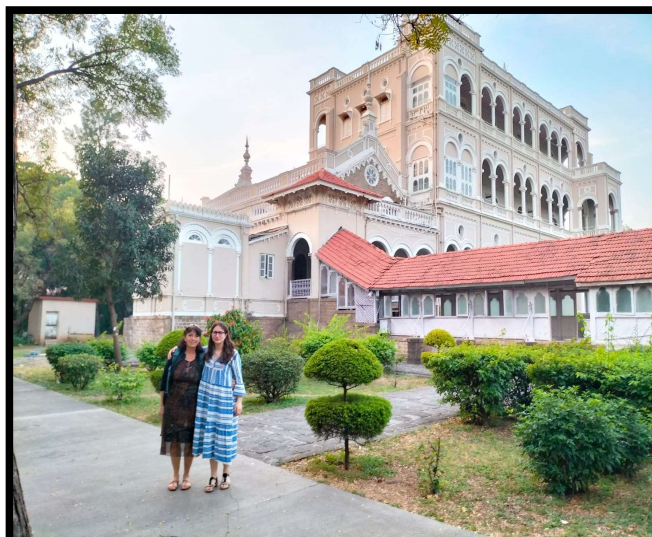
Shirish took us for a walk in the surrounding area, we discovered the town from the top of a hill and could watch wild peacocks in the wood. We also visited one family with smiling children living on a farm, cultivating a green area with chickens and a cow. The land is fertile and offers gorgeous vegetables and flowers. Amruta and Shirish took great care of us for three days, organizing several visits for us in spite of the big traffic jams and the difficulties to drive around the town by car.

Italy to Pune via Mumbai -continued--

They took us to visit ISKON - a temple dedicated to Lord Krishna, the god of protection, compassion, tenderness, and love and one most popular and widely revered among Indians. We could walk in the holy garden around the temple, meeting many smiling people.

We also visited Aga Khan palace, a majestic building in a huge green park. The palace is important for us because it is linked to the Indian freedom movement as it was used for house arrest for Mahatma Gandhi, his wife Kasturba Gandhi and his secretary Mahadev Desai. It is also the memorial place where Kasturba Gandhi and Mahadev Desai died. Amruta and Shirish took us through the Museum' rooms, where we could see Mahatma Gandhi's daily life objects and feel the relevance of Gandhi's philosophy on several planes – spiritual, religious, moral, political, economic, social, individual, and collective.

Gandhi's example is still important all over the world not as utopian idealism, but as a practical non-violent way of resistance and lifestyle.



At home we discussed about about lot many things –about our life in Italy, our families, culture and customs etc. They told us about their family and showed us also videos of their two daughters living in the USA. Amruta cooked for us several types of traditional foods and we appreciated her culinary skills that too to meet our Italian taste. It was so great to discover India through the daily life!

After this warm welcome we went to Panchani, energized and ready to start our Sicoga meeting.

Thank you, dear Friends !

Raffaella Rota

Servas Italy Deputy S.I.youth and
family committee

MANY THANKS SERVAS INDIA

My family and I have been hosting for over 20 years, but we are not much of travelers. & I virtually travel with every person I welcome into my home, and they tell me what their country is like. But this time I had 10 days after SICOGA22 to travel around the country and visit some hosts, and to have a Servas experience from a traveler's point of view. My husband joined after the assembly, and we were able to celebrate our 30th anniversary in such an incredible country as India and with such wonderful people as our hosts.



We only visited four cities - Pune, Aurangabad, Nashik and Mumbai. –a very small part of this huge country. For me it was the trip of my life so far as it gave us a taste of how colorful and diverse India is. We loved everything -the landscapes, the food, the monuments... but above all, its wonderful people. We saw the unknown Pune from the hands of Shirish who revealed to us the most technological part of the city , a wonderful market where we could shop to our satisfaction, tastiest food and we were pleasantly surprised.

In Aurangabad, our guide Akshay told us the history of India and its religions. In Nashik we had two unforgettable experiences thanks to our wonderful host Nitin, who took us to a wedding and a religious ceremony that made us feel like we were friends forever.



I hope one day they will tell me that they are coming to Spain and will visit us,. I dream to reciprocate all the wonderful moments they have given me and do everything to make their trip unforgettable, as was mine. In the meantime, I will help all the travelers who come to my house to have the best hospitality experience I can offer them, because this is simply SERVAS.

Susana,

Spain