



News Bulletin

Vol.34 • No.1 • 2025

Produced by and for members of the Servas community



*Servas
Turns
75*



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Thank you members who shared
your stories and photos.

Your editor, Michael Johnson
newsletter@servas.org

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President's Message

By Radha B. Radhakrishna
President, Servas International

Dear members,

The pace of activities did not slow down in the first four months of this year. While there were many national level activities, I would like to single out two very successful 2025 regional meetings. One was the first ever North and Central American regional meeting held in beautiful Costa Rica in February 2025. The other was a European meeting held in Wiesbaden, Germany around the same time. Thanks to the Costa Rican and German teams for making these events happen. You will see reports about the meetings elsewhere in this bulletin.



SICOGA 2025

Preparations are in full swing for SICOGA 2025 to be held in Dijon, France in October this year. The Servas International Executive Committee (SI Exco) had a weeklong meeting in Dijon, in early April to prepare for the meeting. We have been working with a large team of international volunteers (including many French volunteers) for nearly a year getting ready for the event.

This will be the largest SICOGA that we have ever had.





Registrations opened in the third week of February and there was such a huge demand for spaces that it closed within a month when the waitlist became too large. But it is still possible to participate online. There will be concurrent zoom sessions in real time, and I recommend you join in on some of the sessions. Information on the online sessions will be posted on the SICOGA website. This year many interactive fun sessions are being planned.

SICOGA BUSINESS

During the business part of the meeting many motions will be discussed about the future course of Servas. This year some of the major ideas that are the topic of motions are – (a) how to gain more youth members, (b) how to improve communication through our website and social media presence, (c) how to develop and organize activities that engage and delight our members.

Every member can take part in the discussions that shape these motions. I need your help with this process.

So, how can you help with the process?

Once the motions are received, SI Exco reviews them to check that they meet the standards for motions as laid down in our statutes, rules and procedures. All motions that are accepted will be published on the SICOGA website. It is anticipated that the motions will be posted on the website by mid-May. The accepted motions will be grouped for the purpose of discussion into subject working groups (SWGs). Once the motions are clustered into subject working groups, a moderator is appointed for each group. The moderators will send out a call requesting interested Servas members from around the world to join the discussion.

That is where I need your help. Every Servas member is eligible to attend the discussion. Usually, communications about the SWGs will be posted on our website and emailed to your national secretaries. Please follow up with your NS and check the website for news so that you can join in the discussion. Your input is very important to ensure that the motions are crafted properly and meaningfully.

A good motion will suggest a future course of action that is different from what we currently do. It will provide a rationale for the proposed course of action. It will also provide guidelines on how the motion should be implemented. It would specify how the results should be measured and reviewed for any follow-up action. Finally, there should be an analysis of the costs and benefits involved.

When a motion is crafted well and approved, it moves us forward as an organization. Please help by joining the discussion groups (SWGs) and giving your input.

CONSIDER RUNNING FOR A POSITION DURING THE NEXT TERM

The term of every Servas International committee is 3 years, coming to an end at the end of SICOGA 2025 when new committees will be elected. I hope that some members of the current committees and teams still have some energy left and will continue for another term. It is always helpful to have some continuity.

However, we are also always looking for new blood, new talent and new ideas. Servas needs you to volunteer! I therefore invite all of you to consider joining any of the committees and teams of Servas International. Check with the nominations committee (nominations@servas.org) to find out about the job descriptions and open positions. Please take the time to attend the meetings of the teams or committees that you are interested in to learn what the team does and whether it fits with your interests and strengths.

LAST WORD

Finally, I would like to thank all the members of SI Exco and all the Servas International committees and teams. Thank you for all the hard work you have done over the last 3 years. It has been wonderful to be a part of this group. How very satisfying to collaborate and to continue to work with such amazing people!

In peace,

Radha B. Radhakrishna
President, Servas International

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Japan: A Unique Astonishing Place

By Dafi Gilad, Servas Canada interviewer

My husband and I spent March 2025 in Japan and were honoured to be hosted at four different Japanese Servas homes during our trip.

It made a big difference that we could stay 3 nights, which we requested in each home, giving us time to know our host better.

Take your host out for a meal. It is an opportunity for good chat with them.

[Photo below]



You must have a working phone in Japan for contacting people and data for finding transportation.

Regular trains are cheap and frequent, but the bullet train / Shinkansen is not cheap: from Tokyo to Kyoto, a 10-hour trip is cut to 2.5 hours, although at 300 kph your view is often just a blur.

The easiest way to travel is to get a SUICA card at the airport or in town. Load it (cash or credit) easily in every station or the many 7-11 shops as needed.



We registered and attended some hours of a “youth conference” in Kyoto where only 3 young ladies attended and the rest of us (8) were over 50. We had a chance to wear a Kimono and participate in the famous tea ceremony. >>>



Just tap it for trains, subways, buses, and ferry boats.

Toilets everywhere have a warm seat and a bidet with a staggering number of options.



Hurray for Google maps, it was our biggest help. It shows how, where and when to get to anywhere. Count on more time than Google map estimates. Train stations are confusing with many exits, and lots of stairs

The trip is much easier with a carry-on size bag or backpack.



Cash is king in Japan, so always have enough in your pocket. At a 7-11 you can find anything one needs including very good, prepared meals. People are very honest. Once I left my suitcase outside of a very busy train station, returning many hours later to pick it up.

Japan is quiet even in big cities and very clean. We didn't hear cars honking and smoking is banned in most places, even in the streets. Despite the crowds I was never bumped by anyone.

We enjoyed meals where locals eat. Cabbage, noodles, and onion are in most dishes. Free cold water in every restaurant, and tipping is considered an insult, so don't do it.

All our hosts were over 70. Hopefully Servas Japan's young generation will keep hosting in this wonderful country.

Arigato Gozai Mas [Thanks to everyone]

Photo:

At Tea ceremony during Kyoto Youth Meet.

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Photos: Our Tokyo host invited several Servas members to join us for dinner the day we arrived. >>>

Photo: below: Teahouse follows the tradition of a very low door that is awkward for any unwanted guests.

Photo: bottom: Teahouse attendees included our Servas hosts.

Photo: centre and right: We learned that one can clap at a shrine [orange] but not at a temple [white].



Welcome to the Ural, Russia in 2025 !

Servas members worldwide are cordially invited to attend the Servas meeting that will take place from 30 July to 4 August 2025 in the **Krasnoufimsky** district, Sverdlovsk region, 215 km from Yekaterinburg which is the capital of the Ural (1800 km or 2 hours of flight from Moscow, Russian Federation).



The program includes exciting activities: festival reconstruction of culture and everyday life of the late 19th century (folk festivals), traditions, games, costumes, dances, songs, hiking, quests, riding in a horse-drawn cart, a master class on making a talisman, catamaran rafting, search for fossils at the bottom of the ancient Permian Sea, etc.

Participants will be accommodated in the campsite near the Ufa River in a safe forest, where all trees are treated against ticks

and bugs. The venue has a dining room and a shower.

Those who have been part of a previous meeting [see photos] will know what a wonderful experience it is to be part of such an international event where people from many nationalities, languages and cultures come together. In addition, the participants will enjoy the well-known Ural Russian generosity with food and drinks, their culture, churches, nature, and more.

For further information, including how to get there, please contact Yulia at: ju16@yandex.ru

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A Story of Gratitude: My Korean Family

By Yudeisy, Servas Cuba Coordinator

When I started organizing cultural experiences for world travelers, I never imagined that one day I'd meet people from the country of my favorite TV shows. But I did—because the magic of genuine connections knows no language, distance, or cultural borders.

As coordinator of Servas Cuba, I had the honour of welcoming members of Servas Korea in October 2024 and accompanying them on their journey through my country. They arrived from the other side of the world with eyes full of curiosity, backpacks full of history, and hearts wide open. I greeted them with the warmth of my homeland and the sincere wish that they would experience something more than just a trip. And they did.

Together we explored ...

- Havana, with its vibrant, hybrid soul;
- Viñales, with its picture-postcard landscapes and legendary cigars;

- Santa Clara, where we shared the living memory of Che Guevara;
 - Trinidad, which enveloped us in its colonial charm; and
 - Varadero, where the sea gave us moments of beauty and serenity.
- Each place was much more than a tourist destination: it was a setting for encounter, listening, and human exchange.

One of the most cherished moments was when they met my mom. We spent time together as a family, and, as always, she

welcomed them with that simple, genuine love that has taught me so much. Watching them connect with her was deeply moving. At that moment, I knew they were no longer just travelers: they were part of my home.





From the first day, I never felt like a stranger; we were already family. They offered me love, care, and attention. They cooked for me, we danced, we laughed, we shared stories... and I was immensely happy being by their side. I was moved, and still am, by how, despite our cultural, linguistic, and racial differences, we managed to build an authentic, human, and profound bond.

Beyond the tours and shared activities, what we experienced was a true transformation.



They discovered in Cuba a living history, a joyful resilience, a unique way of celebrating life amid adversity. I learned from their serenity, their respect for the collective, and their elegance in small gestures.

When we said goodbye, we cried, hugged, and made promises of reunion. And I understood that something inside me was no longer the same.

Today I miss them, I miss their hello in Korean every morning, their way of looking at the world with respect, sweetness, and their silent presence. But more than missing them, I'm grateful for them. Because, as a phrase I hold dear says: "Gratitude is the memory of the heart," and my heart doesn't forget.

Blessed are those who look at us with the eyes of their hearts.

I thank God and the universe, because meeting you has been a gift of life.

Thank you, my Korean family, this house will always be yours.

My heartfelt thanks to Servas International for allowing these encounters that became unforgettable moments.



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My Trip to Rome

By Radha B. Radhakrishna, SI President

This is my tribute to Luciana, who hosted me during my visit to Rome recently. I joined Servas 35 years ago and have had many memorable experiences, but this visit to Rome epitomized everything that is great about Servas.

Luciana was trying to learn a little bit of English, and I spoke no Italian, but it did not matter. She is an amazing artist, and the language of art and culture transcends many boundaries. She asked me if I would like her to give



me tips on where to go and what to see. By happy coincidence, I told her that it would be great if she could come along. It was the best thing that I did.

Photo: Above:

On the streets of Rome near the Trevi fountain.

Photo: Left:

One of the many Caravaggios we saw.



Her knowledge of Rome and the art in the city is boundless. I saw more Caravaggio paintings in a day than I would have ever thought possible for an unplanned trip into town. We saw fountains, plazas and gardens. Ate pizza and ice creams. We talked with strangers and told them about Servas.

It was one of the most enjoyable days I ever had.

Thank you, Luciana.

Photo:

Luciana at her studio with the latest art project she is working on.

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European Conference in Wiesbaden 1/2025

"More members, more young members, more active members"

By Manuela K., Deputy National Secretary, Servas Germany

Servas Germany invited people to the 4th European Servas Conference to strengthen the cooperation between Servas countries.



With a focus on more members — more young members — more active members, 45 Servas members from 16 nations met for three days in Wiesbaden youth hostel.

In a variety of workshops, the discussions were open, committed, and sometimes quite controversial.





It became clear again and again how differently the Servas countries organize their commitments.

All participants were enthusiastic about coming together in Wiesbaden: the workshops, the various new contacts and the exchange of experiences. There were a lot of new ideas that are now being followed up and developed for motions in the SICOGA 2025 in France.

A big thank you to our volunteers who planned and helped in and around Wiesbaden and actively contributed their interesting ideas to Europa-Konferenz in Wiesbaden 1/2025.

(Text and photos courtesy of Manuela K.)

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Unforgettable Members in Spain and Italy

By Ana María S.

My trip experience with SERVAS hosts in **2024** was full of special moments and events. All of them were unforgettable.

Spain

In Madrid, Pilar welcomed me to her condo. The next day we enjoyed time together seeing Goya's incredible frescos at the Ermita de San Antonio de la Florida. Then I invited Pilar to the Casa Mingo restaurant, famous for its roast chicken and a glass of cider. >>>



Italy

In Calabria, I met Michele and Carmela, a wonderful couple who hosted me in their city Celico. We went to Cosenza, the capital of Calabria Province, where my great-grandfather was born. They also took me to the Sila National Park, famous for the trees in the Forest of Giants. I had countless beautiful experiences with them visiting their vineyard *Spirito Ebrio*. >>>



While visiting Puglia, I met some Servas friends Leonardo and Teresa. With them, I traveled to cities such as Monopoli, where the four of us celebrated the birthday of Orazio, another very kind Servas member. >>>

As well as having amazing times going to cultural places, I always help people with needs in different churches in every city I visit.

In Napoli, I was hosted by Wanda, who accompanied me to incredible places with Olimpia, another Servas member. Later, in Bari, Puglia, during the National Servas Assembly 2024, I met many Servas members I knew from previous trips, and many of us took part in the March for Peace in Ukraine.

In commemoration of the **75th Servas Anniversary**, we planted a tree in Bari



and I had the pleasure of meeting the founder of SERVAS Italy, Luigi Uslenghi.

In Bari, Servas member Zaverio Z. hosted me, and took me to museums, and an interesting conference about the chakras.

It was wonderful to meet and revisit many Servas friends.

Editor's note: The author noted Luigi is Italy's longest-time members, but he is still 25 years younger than host Violet in Paris, born in 1917.

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Young Global South Adventure

By René S., President, Servas Switzerland

Servas Switzerland decided to invest in a pilot project. The idea was to invite a young Servas member from the Global South to get to know a country in the Global North in person, without financial problems.

We financed the flight and a small allowance for a three-week stay with Servas host families in Switzerland.

In 2025, we will decide whether to continue the pilot project, possibly with some adjustments.

Photo below: Sabdi at a museum in Zurich in front of a 19th-century wall painting.

Photo next page: Sabdi with a Servas host family on a tour in Zurich.

Sabdi Manrique, from Mexico City, wrote of her experience...



Activity period:**May 13 to June 3, 2024.****Visited cities/towns: Zurich, Bern,
Lausanne, Lysine, Clavadel and
Diessenhofen**

The project "Travel to Switzerland in 2024" took place between Servas Switzerland and Servas Mexico. The main objective was to provide someone living in the countries of the southern hemisphere of the planet, in this case Mexico, the opportunity to get to know the Swiss people, so strengthening the ties of peace and brotherhood between the countries.

I spent time together with the members in their homes while sharing their food.

The places visited allowed me to have a small sample of the diversity of the country, its history, its languages, geography and culture, and above all, meeting a range of people including those born in Switzerland, as well as others who have immigrated.



Most notable activities were:

- > visits to iconic and historical places,
- > cycling, hiking and an obstacle park,
- > dinners in restaurants and delicious dinners at home,
- > moments of relaxation, watching movies,
- > enjoying landscapes, gardening,
- > playtime with the little ones or time with the oldest members of the family ,and
- > even surprise visits to the hospital, fortunately with nothing to worry about.

At the same time, I shared a little about Mexico and its culture with members of Servas. I had the opportunity also to participate in all the activities and present a summary in front of other members of Servas. I spoke about the themes of geography, biodiversity, society, culture and food.

Strengths of the project

I experienced in a direct way the daily life of people from one year old to the age of 80. This enriched my experience and allowed me to understand and empathize with the situations that each of them goes through.

It was an opportunity to observe the world from another perspective. I was able to clearly observe various aspects that I need to work on in myself.

Finally, I thank Servas Switzerland and Servas México, and all the participants who made this possible, for the opportunity to live this experience and be part of this initial project that I am sure will open the door to a new way of relating within our association.

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LATAM 2024: In Tune with Nature

by Igina P., Servas Brazil Communicator

The picturesque town of Tres Coroas in Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, recently played host to the transformative LATAM 2024 event, aptly themed "In Tune with the Environment." This gathering was a vibrant celebration of sustainable living and community spirit, bringing together 37 participants from seven countries, six of which were Latin American countries. We had roughly twenty participants joining online sessions and the online participation of several board members of Servas International.

Photo: Servas in CTG
(Gaúcho Traditions Center)

Among the attendees was a new Servas member, a young Brazilian, who said:

"It was a great opportunity for me to understand more about Servas, meet wonderful people, share traditions and talk about the environment and nature. It was a great event, and I am very happy about sharing those days." (Leila W.)

The event featured a diverse range of activities designed to promote physical, mental, and social well-being. Attendees participated in rejuvenating circle dances and yoga sessions, fostering a sense of inner peace and mindfulness. Integration dynamics workshops provided opportunities for participants to connect, share experiences, and build stronger community bonds.





A key highlight of LATAM 2024 was the series of hands-on workshops. These sessions empowered attendees with practical knowledge and skills to live more sustainably. Participants engaged in tree planting activities, contributing to the reforestation efforts in the region and leaving a lasting positive impact on the local environment, which was also enhanced with the painting of a wonderful mural in the venue.

The event also marked a significant milestone: the 75th anniversary of Servas. This momentous occasion was celebrated with a grand ceremony, reflecting on the organization's contributions to

peace and hospitality over the decades.

Photo: LATAM participants celebrating the 75th Anniversary of Servas

Adding to the festive atmosphere, a charitable auction was held, with proceeds supporting Servas future initiatives/actions. Cultural performances showcased the rich heritage of the region and other participating countries, adding a colourful and dynamic element to the event. The celebrations culminated in a scenic trip to the charming towns of Gramado and Canela, providing a perfect end to a memorable gathering.

Photo: Servas members take to the streets to celebrate.

LATAM 2024 not only celebrated environmental consciousness but also emphasized the importance of collective action and community engagement in creating a sustainable future. Equally important was the engagement between members of Servas Latin American countries, thereby empowering Servas in this region, and a general understanding from members and from the delegates of each country that LATAM must continue in following years. The event left participants inspired and motivated to continue their efforts in tune with the environment in their own countries.

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Art Beyond Borders: The journey of an artist from Catania, Italy

**By Francesco Re Li Calzi [& Hamsavahini Singh, SI
Coordinator to the UN & Peace Secretary, Servas India.]**

I first met Dr. Hamsavahini Singh (Hamsa) during the summer of 2022, while volunteering at the Peace School in Antakya, Türkiye —a project organized by Servas International. During that enriching experience, Dr. Singh suggested that I come to her university to conduct a workshop.

Photo: Francesco [right] and Hamsa

Photo: Francesco, Hamsa and volunteers during the Peace School in 2022, in Türkiye.



Banasthali University in Rajasthan, India, is a large residential women's university with around 18,000 students.

Photo: Workshop at Banasthali by Francesco.

The workshop I proposed introduced a contemporary art approach that **values experience over the final object**.

I encouraged students to explore creative expression — toward an art form rooted in presence and place. This concept arose from a reflection on our current global condition: how should art respond to a world overflowing with objects we struggle to dispose of? How can we reclaim our roles as human beings, not just consumers? How can art help us live more consciously, share experiences, and connect with the forces around us?

The students responded with enthusiasm. I invited them to create actively and independently, without strictly following technical instructions. In truth, I had much to learn from their impressive technical skills. What fascinated me most was how their distinct cultural background influenced their creative responses—particularly the ritualistic and symbolic aspects so deeply rooted in Indian tradition.

At first, the students preferred to remain within their comfort zones, focusing on drawing. But on the second day, they became more engaged and exploratory when I allowed more freedom, and when I gave them unstructured time to truly immerse themselves in the process.

Photo: Workshop at Banasthali by Francesco.



During those moments, I stepped back, and something beautiful happened: creativity took its own path. Coming from a cultural context where connection to religion and tradition has diminished, I was moved by the recurring presence of religious elements in their artwork. Everything seemed to become a symbol, a portal to another world—something magical. Through this workshop, I aimed to share insights into contemporary Western art with these bright young women. In return, I was gifted with a deeper understanding of India's rich and diverse cultural landscape. It was not just an exchange of ideas—it was a mutual discovery.



Dr. Hamsavahini Singh adds...

I have had the privilege of being associated with Servas for the past 35 years. As an educator for more than 3 decades, I am fortunate to be in touch with young minds, and I continually seek opportunities to share and promote the values that Servas stands for.

Francesco's workshop offered students a platform to explore diverse artistic perspectives, techniques, and cultural expressions. More importantly, it created a space to foster empathy, tolerance, and peace—core values that are more relevant than ever. The seed planted by Bob Luitweiler 76 years ago is now bearing rich fruit, as international friendships flourish beyond borders.

Francesco and I extend our sincere thanks to Servas International and to Banasthali University for making this collaboration possible—for nurturing meaningful connections not only for us, but also for the Gen Z.

Photo: Workshop at Banasthali by Francesco.

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Winter Warmth

By Nora M., Coordinator of Servas Canada Interviewers



Servas Ottawa members had a mid-winter gathering on February 28, 2025.

Winterlude is an annual winter festival held in Ottawa, Canada. The event is one of Ottawa's most important tourist draws. It takes place in the first three weeks of February.

The highlight of the festival is skating on the frozen Rideau Canal. Due to global warming, the ice has been unpredictable. This year researchers at NASA reported the amount of sea ice on the planet had reached the lowest level ever recorded in March. The past 10 years have been the hottest on record, with 2024 being the hottest year.

This year the ice was solid for the festival but by Feb. 28, the canal ice was too soft for skating. Our alternate activity was Nordic [cross-country] skiing. Several hardy skiers met at our home. We left our door unlocked for non-skiers and we all met up for a potluck party after an hour of skiing.

It is truly a treasure to have these winter activities in the heart of the city and to finish with the warmth of friendship and sharing.

This gathering brought us out of our winter hibernation to reconnect with our local members and fire us up for a new year of adventures.

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Unforgettable Peace Ride: Strengthening Taiwan-Korea Bonds

By JoJo Jen, Taiwan

In November 2023, the Servas East Asia Meeting in Taiwan saw the enthusiastic participation of 20 Korean members, leaving us deeply touched by their camaraderie. Inspired by their support, we decided to join the Servas International Peace Riding (SIPR) event in Korea in April 2024. Despite my limited cycling experience, I eagerly joined the group.





Initiated by Servas Korea in 2022, SIPR is a four-day, three-night cycling tour blending cycling with Korea's beautiful scenery and peace values. Last year in 2023, only one member from Taiwan, Eric Y., attended and highly recommended it. In 2024, 10 members (including two couples) participated.

Before the main Peace Riding Tour, we had a two-day, one-night **Discover Korea** warm-up event, which featured a morning table tennis game, afternoon trips to Seoul in four groups, and a grand party in the evening. Korean teams performed line dances, choruses, and model walks, with professional hairdressers and makeup artists assisting, creating a lively and festive atmosphere.

Rida Y., from Taiwan, joined the host in the venue's kitchen to steam rice cakes, and prepare snacks and water for attendees. Although the dinner was simple, the snacks were plentiful. Rida remarked, "The performance at the party was nerve-wracking. I had been practicing backstage and really needed energy after the performance, so a plate of fruit satisfied my hunger. It was really thoughtful."

Julia Y. admired the Korean elders who cycle regularly, maintaining their health and vitality. She appreciated their companionship and support, which helped everyone push on despite fatigue.

“They took us to scenic spots and historical sites and let us experience wearing *hanbok* [traditional Korean clothing]. Celebrating Molly's and my birthday, and enjoying sumptuous food including a memorable picnic, were some highlights.”

The meals and accommodation were excellent. At the end of the event, Kevin L., a new Taiwan member, gave a heartfelt speech of thanks. He was moved to tears several times, creating an unforgettable moment. This SIPR event has strengthened the friendship between Servas Korea and Taiwan members, promising a lasting bond.

Back in Taiwan, members Molly & and Kevin, Julia and Alex, Fumei, Jenny and Perry have continued their cycling routines, often using Yubike* instead of taking the bus, and are feeling healthier and more active. We are all grateful to SIPR for this enriching experience and look forward to participating again next year, hoping to challenge ourselves with a non-electric vehicle journey. Let's meet again in Korea in Spring 2025, continuing to build and cele-



brate our international friendships through the joy of cycling.

**Yubike is an app with information on bike routes, bike-sharing, and bike parking.*

Thanks to Peter and Molly for providing photos.

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LATAM Sustainable: Circular Economy in Action

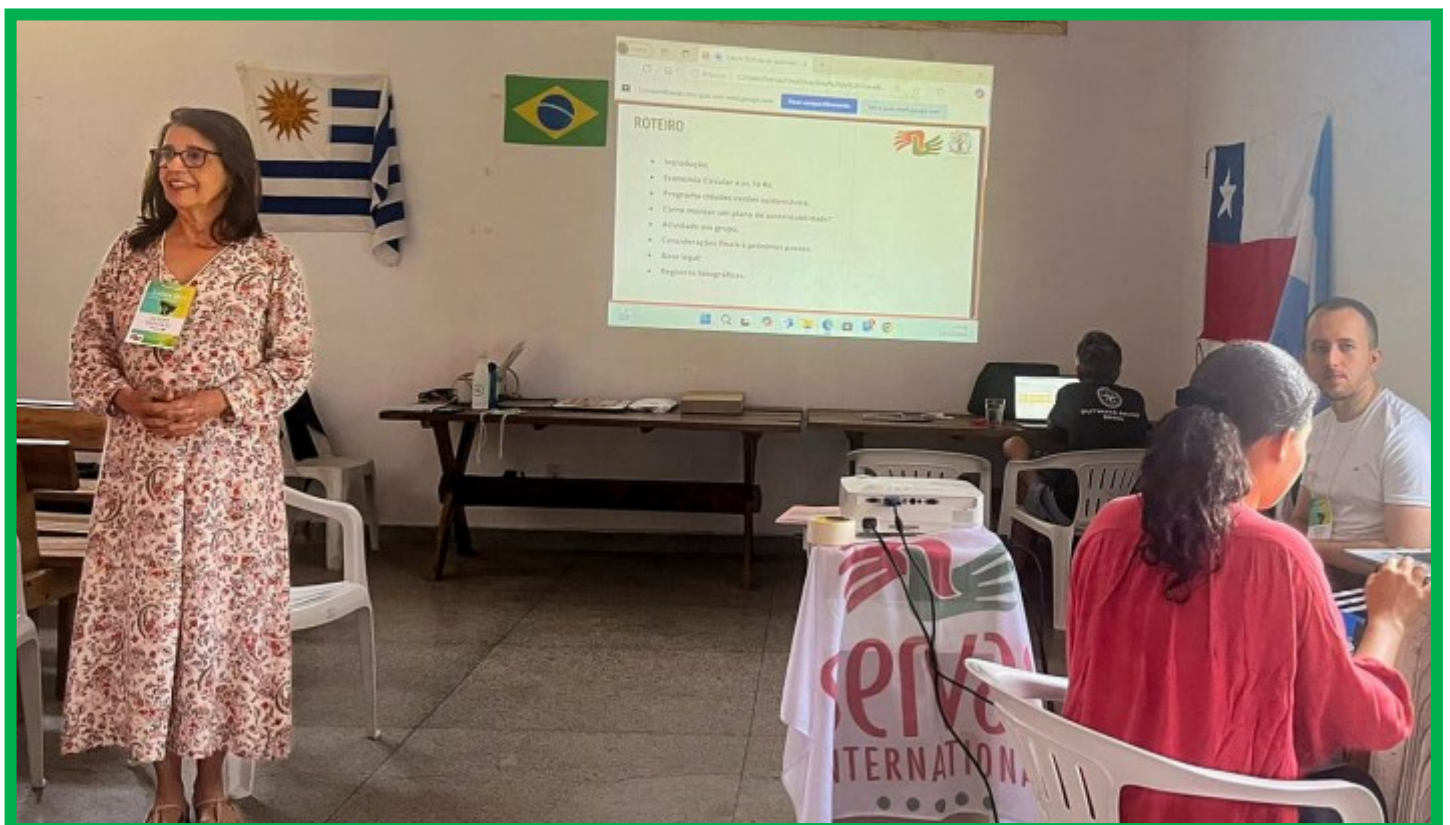
**By Alvany S. (Servas Brazil Member Admin) and
Ígina P. (Servas Brazil Communicator)**

The recent environmental catastrophes in Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, and Valencia, Spain, highlight the urgent need for action to better care for the environment and our communities. To this end, Servas is trying to go beyond environmental education and focus on sustainability education. As part of these efforts, a workshop *LATAM Sustainable: Circular Economy in Action* was held at the Latin American Servas Meeting, in November 2024.

Alvany Santiago (Servas Brazil) coordinated the workshop in collaboration with Ígina Pereira, also from Servas Brazil. Initially, the activity was planned to be carried out with Marcelo Sivack (Servas Uruguay), but due to Marcelo's health issues, the partnership was not possible.

Photo:

Workshop leaders Alvany Santiago (standing) and Ígina Pereira (seated, back to camera) with Matheus Nienow (Brazil National Secretary), who interpreted.



With the aim of promoting ecological awareness and contributing to the transition towards a circular economy, Alvany highlighted the importance of education for sustainability. She emphasized the Sustainable Green Cities programs promoted by Brazil's Ministry of the Environment and the importance of aligning actions with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). An inspiring example mentioned was the municipality of Três Coroas, where the workshop was held, as one of the cities participating in the Sustainable Green Cities program favoring sustainability.

During the workshop, Alvany shared practical suggestions for developing sustainability plans applicable to families, communities, cities and countries, as well as organizing sustainable events.

Photo:

Beatrice Gropp, Servas Brazil, watering the trees we planted.

The circular economy was presented as an essential tool for ensuring quality of life, supported by eight aspects of sustainability: economic, social, environmental, ecological, cultural, territorial, national, and international public policies. She also detailed the practical application of the 10Rs of sustainable living:

- **Rethink**
- **Refuse**
- **Reduce**
- **Recover**
- **Reuse**
- **Remanufacture**
- **Recondition**
- **Repair**
- **Repurpose**
- **Recycle**





To reinforce the importance of individual responsibility and collective action in achieving sustainability, in pairs, the participants also took part in a practical exercise in applying the 10R concepts.

As a closing activity, following a rafting experience, ten trees were planted in Parque das Laranjeiras.

This action symbolized a commitment to environmental preservation and the practical implementation of the values discussed during the workshop.

Photo:

LATAM: Servas members joyfully celebrate the planting of ten new trees.

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The PanAmerican Conference in Costa Rica

By Mary Lee Behar, Servas USA

Overview:

In February of 2025, I attended the PanAmerican conference in Costa Rica and served as a volunteer interpreter, alongside Miriam Kerekes Beltrán (Servas Mexico). Most conference participants were from US Servas and Servas Costa Rica, but there were also participants from Servas Canada, Mexico, Colombia, Panama, Germany, France, Austria, New Zealand, and Guatemala. One of my favorite parts of the event was making friends and watching participants grow closer over the course of our four days together.

Many countries presented their respective countries, and had a little something to share. Among the many gifts, Canada offered salmon jerky, Mexico shared some tequila, and Colombia bracelets. A family from Servas Panama shared what Servas has meant for their family. Servas Costa Rica



brought coffee, and each country extended an invitation to come visit.

In the first two days, we heard talks on Costa Rica's biodiversity (Nancy Castro), updates on Servas International and ways to grow the organization (Radha Radhakrishna & Francisco Salomón Luna), the dances of Costa Rica (Servas Costa Rica & Irma Alvarez), the history of Servas Costa Rica (Doña Carmen Mora Mora), the dissolution of the army and history of Costa Rica (Roxana Abarca & Ligia Araya), the coffee industry in Costa Rica (Jaime Duque), changes to the Servas International website (Jim Leask & John Whidden),



Servas in the UN (Kent Macaulay), Servas Colombia (Monica Garcia & Ana Maria Fajardo), Servas Mexico (Miriam Kerekes Beltrán), and Servas Panama (Flor Cano de Picota, Arquimedes Picota & Eufrazio Centella Rodríguez).

United States Servas also had presentations from:

1) USA National Peace Secretary, Karen Morian, about peacebuilding activities

including an effort to reforest areas of Altadena in honour of Paige LaCombe, former National Peace Secretary, former US Servas Board Member, current Chair of Servas Women, whose home burned in the Los Angeles wildfires on January 7, 2025;

2) Bill Magargal, US Servas Board Member, about internal operations and the presentation of the Peace Pole, a gift for Servas Costa Rica from US Servas;



3) Paige LaCombe (and Victoria Cripovich from Servas Argentina) about Servas Women.

On Day 3, we had a wonderful outing to see some of the natural wonders of Costa Rica, including a live volcanic crater, a waterfall on the side of the road, and a lagoon surrounded by a lush forest. Our stop at the lagoon was multi-faceted in that we were able to admire the lagoon while being hosted for lunch by the non-profit "Asociación de Desarrollo Especifica" a non-profit built this Airbnb overlooking a spectacular lagoon.

A huge thank you goes out to Servas Costa Rica (Larissa

Mora Mora, Carmen Mora Mora, Marc Krebs, Manuel "Malo" Ramirez Quiros, Irma Alvarez, Ligia Araya, Elizabeth Araya, Roger Chavarria, Magaly Camacho Cordero, Tatiana Colindres, Roxana Abarca, Nazira Vega, Lorena Navarro, Nancy Castro & Jaime Duque) and Francisco Salomón Luna, of Exco, for hosting us and ensuring our comfort, food and activities for 4 days.

The weather was pleasant, the food was satisfying and delicious and the talks, tours and cultural presentations were well-planned.



Take-aways:

It was a great experience learning about local food, traditions, government and ways of life. One such tradition was the "El Torito" dance, which is a playful partner dance where the man acts like a bull and the woman acts like a bullfighter with her large colorful skirt. (In Costa Rica, they don't do actual bull fighting because they find it cruel.) Costa Rica is a model for peace and social justice.

The meals were well-balanced and flavorful. There is also no shortage of exotic fruit nearby.

Something that surprised me was that Costa Rica has had no army since 1949. Instead, Costa Rica has powerful "friends" and neighbors

(including the United States, the European Union, and other regional organizations) who will come to their aid in the event of a threat or invasion. By having no army, Costa Rica was able to invest more money into public education (which includes a free college education), universal health care, social development, cultural programs and conservation. And with the dissolution of the army, weapons were melted and turned into sculptures. In Costa Rica, they have literally replaced the sword with the pen.

Another remarkable thing about Costa Rica is the country's commitment to conservation. In fact, after the banana and meat industries

destroyed half of the forests in Costa Rica between 1940 and 1987, activists successfully pushed legislation to protect the existing biodiversity and increase protected natural spaces. Now Costa Rica has 52% forest cover (compared to the all-time low of 21% in 1987). How did they do it? They made alliances with politicians, planted trees, protected areas around active craters, created the national parks program, created a system of protected areas, biological corridors and interurban biological corridors, and provided incentives for land-owners who didn't develop their land. Costa Rica recognizes that protecting biodiversity and our forests can be more profitable than clear-cutting forests.

I left the conference wishing that somehow the United States could be more like Costa Rica, regarding conservation and prioritizing social

development over guns and warfare. I also left the conference sad to leave such like-minded people, who had become like a second family... so I left with two new Servas friends on another adventure. ¡Pura Vida!

After the conference, I discovered the Quetzal National Park and Uvita (with my new friends from Servas Canada). I got to see a magnificent blue butterfly, a sloth and howler monkeys in the wild, avocado trees, coffee plants and a simpler way of life.

Conclusion:

If you've never been to a Servas conference, I highly recommend it. Travel with Servas not only opens your mind but also opens your heart.

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Two Destinations: Paris & Taiwan

By Ana Manghi

I'm Ana from Servas Argentina, and with my husband Hernan Ferreiros we decided to make a trip together with two destinations: one chosen by me and the other by him.

We travelled with our folding bikes and immersed ourselves in the most authentic things that each destination could offer us.

Paris was the first destination, a city that we know well but is always renewing itself and surprising us. I couldn't believe how easy it is to get around Paris by bike now, there are bike paths everywhere.

Our days staying at Servas houses were a pleasure, we really enjoyed the meals and our conversations.

It was very gratifying to be able to share moments together with Hernan, a Servas friend whom I have known for 28 years. Hernan speaks French very well and was super happy to talk to the hosts.

Photo: Hernan and I with our folding bikes in Paris.

Photo: Dinner with Francoise and Jean Pierre at their home in Paris.



At the last SICOGA [Servas International conference], the **Taiwanese** group caught my attention because of their friendliness and warmth, and I said to myself: *I want to get to know their country and visit them!*

I organized a trip in which I traveled alone through the south of the island: then I met up with Hernan and spent several days in the Taipei area.

Photo: Dining with Guy in a night market in Kaohsiung.

Photo below: Visiting Longshan temple in Taipei with our hosts.



The Taiwanese are so friendly and so open that you can't help but create personal bonds immediately. Many of them had never met an Argentinean woman. The fact that I had travelled around the world to visit them surprised and moved them.

My trip with Servas made the experience even more extraordinary, because there are so many places, traditions, customs, gestures and foods that are very different from mine and cannot be easily accessed without a local guide.

Travelling in Taiwan is very easy, everything is very well connected by trains that work perfectly. Although, as everywhere, not everyone speaks English fluently.

Here everyone will do everything possible to understand and assist you. I was enchanted by this country with a thriving economy, its delicious food and, above all, with its charming people.

On this trip, the two very different destinations had something in common -- meeting great people. Even though we were always very far from Buenos Aires, there was always a feeling that nothing was too foreign.



Photo above: Hernan, Ana, biking in Taipei with Afong [right].

Photo below: Ana eating *street food* in Taipei with Hernan.

Photo next page: Ana gets a hug in a Taipei street market.

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Letters to the Editor

Michael, There are several substantial articles on SI initiatives in this edition [last issue of 2024] of the SI News Bulletin, making it one of the best yet. Thanks for that.

–Kent, Servas Canada Board member

December 25, 2024

Hi Michael

I liked your article **Closer than You Think** in the current newsletter. Since you asked how we're doing:

Not too bad, except for running to the bomb shelter in the middle of the night. But we manage.

Happy holidays,

–Claudia, Servas Israel's National Secretary

Hello Mike,

Could please publish this report about the European Conference in the next bulletin?

Is it ok that I send a Word document and separate photos?

Thank you so much,

–Manuela, Servas Germany Deputy Secretary

Reply: That is exactly what works best for me. Thanks, SINB Editor

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Editor's Note:

The resolution of some photos submitted for this issue were too low to be used. We cannot extract good quality photos when they are embedded in Word or PDF documents. Photos must be submitted in separate files, such as JPEGs to preserve their quality. Photos should be sent as "attached files to retain their quality.

Thank you, Michael Johnson

Servas Home Gone



A prominent Servas member and peace activist, Paige L., lost her home in the fires in southern California recently.

She wrote: Our beautiful home in Altadena that we loved and all our personal belongings have completely burned to the ground. We spent 11 wonderful years in our home. Bruce and I were married in the backyard with all our family present. Our home was a sacred place for family, friends, and visitors from Servas and other international friends, who were welcome. It's been a place of peace and harmony and open doors for all.

Our five children have beautiful memories with us there, and they have lost everything from their childhood. We only had a few minutes and chose to save the cat and our elderly neighbor and her dog. It was awful, but we survived.

Many people have lost their homes, including my sister, her husband, and three kids, and many Altadena friends. Our hearts are broken.

Some good news, we all are alive and well.

Paige started a GoFundMe that gives more details:

https://www.gofundme.com/f/paige-and-her-family-devastating-loss-of-altadena-home?attribution_id=sl:0a0d90f9-2779-46f5-aa8a-ab1595e4f027&utm_campaign=man_ss_icons&utm_medium=customer&utm_source=copy_link

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Key People

Italy

By Lucia Re,
Servas Italy National
Secretary

It is my great pleasure to announce the appointment of the new Italian Executive Committee voted in at the October 2024 National Assembly in Bari.

Lucia Re:
President or National Secretary
Lucia Poma: Deputy
Francesca Putzolu: Secretary
Valerio Manuguerra: Treasurer
Sebastiano Foresti:
Communication Coordinator
Anna Bonavia: Peace Secretary
Gregorio Lombardo:
Coordinator of Coordinators.

It is with pleasure and satisfaction that I want to point out that Anna Bonavia, Lucia Poma and Sebastiano Foresti are young members under 30.

Taiwan

By JoJo Jen,
Past National Secretary

The new National Secretary of Taiwan is Ms Hsiu-Ling Liao, Ph.D in History.



The new board of directors (2025-28): from left in the photo are: Thomas Kuo, Julia Pai, Hsiu-Ling Liao, Pamela Yang, Mei Wang, Rida Yu, Susanna Wu, Sunny Lin, Tina Lin, Vicky Liu, Kevin Lin. And Lyla Chang (not shown).

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SERVAS INTERNATIONAL NEWS BULLETIN

The SINB is a newsletter produced by and for the Servas community.

Editor and Graphic Designer: Michael Johnson

Proofreader: Picot Cassidy

Translators: Isabelle Girard & her team, plus Cynthia Granados Posada

Please send your news for the SI News Bulletin to: newsletter@servas.org
We encourage Servas key people around the world to forward this bulletin to all members. Feel free to quote us but please mention the source.

SI EXCO 2022 — 2025

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Co-Peace Secretary, Mei Wang peacesecretary@servas.org

Servas International is an international, non-profit, non-governmental federation of national Servas groups, supporting an international network of hosts and travellers. Our network aims to help build world peace, goodwill and understanding by offering opportunities for personal contacts between people of different cultures, backgrounds and nationalities.

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Radha Radhakrishna



Carla Kristensen



Jonny Sångänger



Richard Cabassut



Francisco Salomón Luna



Mei Wang



Paul Nielsen



Jim Leask