



# News Bulletin

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Produced by and for members of the Servas community

## *Servas — Reaching New Heights*





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# President's Message

## Greetings!

During the general assembly held in October 2025 in Dijon, France, new SI committees were elected and tasked with new objectives for the next three years. We welcome two new members to the SI Executive Committee – Gülşen Elyak as the new SI Treasurer and Kent Macaulay, as SI General Secretary. At the same time, we thank Jonny Sångänger, Richard Cabassut and Jim Leask (departing general secretary, treasurer and co-MTS secretary, respectively) for their many years of devoted service and say a fond farewell to them. The new executive committee is presented on the last page of this bulletin.

The priorities for SI Exco for the next term are —

- **Execute SIGA 2025 decisions.**
- **Strengthening Hosting and traveling**
- **Growth.** Prioritize recruitment of new members to ensure the long-term progress of Servas.
- **Peace-building**

Stimulate peace activities on both a global and national level. SI Exco recognizes that the main responsibility for peace-building activities rests with the SI Member Groups and Committee and teams. Continue to stimulate peacebuilding and intercultural learning activities by promoting both virtual and physical in-person meetings. Promote youth events, peace schools, regional meetings and other activities that connect people for peace.



- **Continue to maintain and develop new features for ServasOnline System**
- **Continue to maintain the servas.org website with new attractive designs and content**

Make sure a modernized website on servas.org is attractive to existing members and potential new members, functional and promotes a more peaceful world.

- **Get SI's statutes, handbook and procedural documents in order.**
- **Update the SI Committees' and SI Teams' mandate documents.**
- **SICOGA.** Continuing to develop SI Conference and General Assembly (SICOGA)

We will keep you informed on the progress in these goals in future SINBs.

As always, happy traveling and hosting.

I hope you are connecting with people from all over the world — to promote peace, harmony and an equitable world.

In peace,  
Radha B. Radhakrishna,  
President, Servas International

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## Wonderful SICOGA 2025



After the wonderful **SICOGA 2025**, which brought together nearly **200 participants from around 50 countries**, we were deeply touched to receive so many **messages of appreciation and friendship**.

We are delighted to share excerpts from some of these heartfelt words with you, in the hope that they inspire you to join us at the **next SICOGA in 2028**. Together, we can continue to strengthen our Servas community and keep building bridges of

peace and understanding around the world.

A big **thank you** to everyone who made this year's SICOGA such a memorable and meaningful event.

See you again in 2028 — with even more stories, smiles, and shared dreams!

—Carla Kristensen,  
SI Vice President 2025-2028

Most of these quotes start with variations of “Thanks to all” and here are some excerpts...

1. Amazing event ... such wonderful and warm people.  
—Lilian Mendez, Bolivia
2. Thanks... people from all corners of the world working together.  
—Monique Cornelissen, the Netherlands



3. ... learn to maintain peaceful relationships ... [during] confrontation  
—Lucia Re, Italy
4. We are all re-energised in our commitments to Servas.  
—Jamie Robertson, Britain
5. I feel much more connected now with Servas international and inspired.  
—Maria Steenman, the Netherlands
6. Thanks to the French group ... everything was well organized.  
—Ornella Bertorotta from Italy
7. It was enriching to learn from like-minded people from all over the world.  
—Charles Goodger, Italy
8. Thanks ... for your wonderful job, the excursions and the closing ceremony.  
—Hans Eriksson, NPS Sweden
9. The chance to learn and grow together in the miracle spirit of Servas.  
—Manuela Kutting, Germany
10. Thanks to Servas France, EXCO... congratulations incoming EXCO team.  
—Diane and Michelle D'Souza, New Zealand
11. We are stronger for it, and look forward to the next years working together. —Jim Leask, Canada
12. Congratulations to Servas France team and the EXCO for a great event.  
—Bhudeb Chakravarti, India
13. A celebration of friendship, unity, and the true Servas spirit.  
—Nitin Wankhede, Servas India
14. Thank you ... organizing team, Servas France, Exco, Servas Youth and volunteers, AV/technology team, interpreter teams.  
—Mary Lee Béhar, USA
15. I felt happy and excited encountering so many Servas friends.  
—Amin Sudarto, Servas Indonesia
16. I feel privileged to be part of such a beautiful and meaningful network!  
—Céline Boute from France

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## Youth Camp Germany: Saying “Yes, and...”

**By Ingrid Stevens**

The fire crackled softly as we stood in a circle on the first night, conversations filling the quiet air under a sky full of stars. Most of us had just arrived that day, some, after hours of travel. There weren't any “icebreakers” or structured games—just the natural warmth



of voices meeting for the first time, in a space already full of possibility.

A few meters away, the Neckar River flowed gently by, setting the tone for the days that followed—unstructured, thoughtful and playfully free.

We spent the weekend (March 20—23, 2025) in a cozy house near Heidelberg. Each morning had its own pace, and each day brought something new: conversations over breakfast, workshops, impromptu games, storytelling and lots of laughter. We had 25 Servas members from 12 different nations.

At one point, we gathered for an improv workshop. Together, we created scenes—some ridiculous, some surprisingly heartfelt—and we practised the core improv principle of “Yes, and...” You accept what's offered, build on it and see



where it leads. It felt a lot like travelling: you never know exactly what's ahead, but when you say yes to the unexpected, the adventure begins.

Later that day, a few of us braved the *Eisbaden* (ice bath). It was literally freezing—the kind of cold that steals your breath, unless you consciously remind yourself to breathe. But what made it special wasn't just the temperature; it was the energy and encouragement we shared, the way we drew strength from one another's courage. It's the kind of experience that's hard to face alone, but when you're with others, it becomes not just possible, but exhilarating.



Another moment that still makes me smile was canoeing down the Neckar. We had five canoes and three ridiculously large pots of couscous salad. We carried them on the train to the river, balancing them carefully in the boats. At lunchtime, we tied our canoes together and shared heaping spoonfuls of salad while floating on the water, surrounded by sunshine and laughter. It was simple, and yet so good.

In Heidelberg, we strolled along a winding path offering stunning views of the city. As we wandered through the woods above the city, we got to know each other more, soaking in the charm of Heidelberg, enjoying the moment—curious, playful and present.





By the time we said goodbye, it felt as though we had known each other for much longer than just a few days. There was a lightness to it all—an openness—that made everything flow effortlessly. We left with new friends, shared memories, and the kind of joy that comes from doing something real, together.

It wasn't just a youth camp; it was an invitation to embrace “Yes, and”—to each other, to the unexpected, and to the wonderful possibilities that unfold when we approach the world with trust, exploration, and curiosity.

[Submitted by Manuela Kuttig, Deputy National Secretary, Servas Germany]

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## Hike in Zinal Switzerland, 4—10 July 2025

By Christoph Kuhn, Easy Group



We've taken words mostly from Christoph's diary...

What a wonderful week meeting old friends and some new ones.

**Photo:** In front of the Hotel Europe in Zinal on Friday

afternoon: as usual, a warm welcome from many familiar faces, including a Turkish and a Taiwanese group.

**Photo:** Our Taiwanese guests sing well, and we all join in when we know the words.





**Saturday:** After the village tour and lunch, the Easy Group hikes.

**Photo:** A village walk

In the evening, Christoph gives a presentation on 'Life and Music in Val d'Anniviers'.

Sunday: We stroll uphill through the historic part of the village to the funicular, which takes us high up to Tignousa, then a long hike, over difficult boulders, to the 143-year-old Hotel Weisshorn. Later, the 'weekend-only guests' say their goodbyes.

Monday: The Easy Group visits the old copper mine at the back of the valley. The young guide is so knowledgeable, it's almost like a theatre performance!



**Photo:** Guided tour of the copper mine

The "easy group" have dinner today and more singing (and other activities) with musician and choir director Guido.

Tuesday: We take a bus to Chandolin, one Europe's highest villages that is inhabited all year round (at almost 2,000







metres). Today it is cloudy, cold, and windy, so the expected view of the Rhone Valley is only partially visible. But before turning back, we see deep below us: the Illgraben (and the fertile Rhone Valley)!

**Photo top:** View of the Illgraben

Wednesday: Today is cloudless but colder. We climb for about an hour to view the breathtaking glacier landscape.

**Photo below:** The Easy Group in front of the glacier world

We take an extremely interesting guided 3-hour tour of the dam.

**Photo next page:** Guided tour of the dam climbs many stairs.

On the final evening, the groups presented their sketches.





**Photo:** Guido and Christoph, with two Swiss folk musicians, provide dance music: from left: Christoph K, Christoph D, Hanspeter, and Guido.

And then it's time to say goodbye again:

See you at the next Chemin de l'Amitié in the French Alps from 26 June to 2 July 2026.

Many thanks to the management team for their thorough preparation and tireless presence.

And thank you to our photographer Guido Schärli! **[Photo below]**

**Photo** bottom right: Soon the summit will be reached.

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## Learning Italian from a Local, 2025

**By Miles B. (Adelaide, Australia)**

This year I travelled for four months through Italy, France and the UK. I spent two months in Italy (January 28 — April 3) to improve my Italian, learn about the culture and connect with family in Florence and Bolzano.

I chose Italian because I love how it sounds and want to understand Italian books, TV and humour. I feel a personal connection, because as a child, I my grandma and great-grandma spoke it.

After learning about Servas and the SYLE programme through my grandpa, a Servas host, I became interested in staying with Italian Servas members. I hoped this would encourage me to speak Italian, even if poorly, and experience Italian culture from a local perspective.

This was different from my original plan to stay in youth hostels with mostly English-speaking backpackers, which would have limited my language practice and offered only a tourist view of Italy. I wanted an authentic, local experience.

In November 2024, I joined Servas, which helped me become more compassionate and worldly. I stayed with 11 Servas members in Italy, all of whom were kind, friendly and generous.



**Photo** from left:  
Miles and Revan.

**Photo** from left:  
Rosa and Miles



After long days exploring, it was wonderful to be welcomed by hosts who cooked dinner and wanted to hear about my travels in Italian.

**Photos:**

From left: Laura,  
Nicola, Alberto, Miles

Miles with classmates  
in Piedmonte.





My family loves food, and I enjoyed sharing international dishes like butter chicken, shepherd's pie, and mac 'n' cheese (macaroni and cheese) with my hosts.

Learning Italian in homes was enjoyable and easier than classroom study.

During my thirteen stops in Italy, I visited spectacular churches, from the cliff-top Cathedral of Trani to the sandstone churches in Lecce.

I am grateful to my Servas hosts—for their hospitality and adventures, including lake trips, farm visits, snow walks, and swimming trips. I especially enjoyed visiting two Italian schools, where I talked with students

about Australia and learned much beyond textbooks.

I thank all my Servas hosts from the bottom of my heart, as well as their family and friends, for their care and generosity. You all treated me like another member of the family. I never knew such hospitality existed. You are all such amazing people.

Last of all, thank you so much Raffaella for organizing so many of my stays and bringing my lofty dream to life. You are undoubtedly the most super person I know. This is so much good you are doing for Servas.

Grazie, Miles.

**Photo**, from left:  
Marta, Miles, Enrico at a bar.

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## Invites You

### **May 23 to 25, 2026 – Neuhausen am Rheinfall**

Servas Switzerland warmly invites all members to its Annual Meeting in May 2026 in *Neuhausen am Rheinfall*, in the canton of Schaffhausen. The town lies next to the famous Rhine Falls (Rheinfall), the largest waterfall in mainland Europe, and provides an inspiring backdrop for meeting Servas friends from around the world.

The weekend program will include a hike to the Rhine Falls, a visit to S+ Milestone, and a visit to the historic town of Schaffhausen. Additional hikes and nature walks are planned, along with plenty of time for good conversations, shared meals,

and strengthening bonds within the Servas community.

Neuhausen am Rheinfall is easily accessible and offers a beautiful mix of nature and culture, making it an ideal setting for our international gathering.

We look forward to welcoming Servas members from near and far for a weekend of discovery, friendship, and inspiring exchanges.

More information on [www.servas.org](http://www.servas.org) or click [here](#) (after you log in with your password)

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**Accommodation:** Hotel RHEINFALL,  
Zentralstrasse 60, 8212 Neuhausen am Rheinfall  
<https://hotelrheinfall.com>

**Included are:**

- 2 nights including breakfast at the hotel, tourist tax
- If available, free parking at the hotel (Campervan incl. breakfast on request)
- Packed lunch with a drink for Sunday (will be provided by us)
- 2 dinners at Restaurant Rebstock, Individual menu selection from list
- Admission to the interactive Miniatur Wunderland S+Milestone
- City tour in Schaffhausen by the organizer

There are 171 bay windows to discover in the enchanting, medieval town of Schaffhausen – no other city in Switzerland has more! The Munot, an unusual building.

**Contact / Organisation:**

**Contact:** Werner Brühwiler,  
[wbr@mydesk.ch](mailto:wbr@mydesk.ch)

**Organisation:** Werner Lacher,  
Kirchgasse 23, 8253  
Diessenhofen,  
[w.lacher@bluewin.ch](mailto:w.lacher@bluewin.ch)

**REGISTRATION** by April 1st, 2026 for the meeting. Sign in, then go to Servas Switzerland's online form via:

[www.servas.org](http://www.servas.org)

Problems or Questions, e-mail:  
Werner Brühwiler,  
[wbr@mydesk.ch](mailto:wbr@mydesk.ch)

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## Peace Ride in France, 2025

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**By Claude Basile for the organizing group**

**(Gisèle A, Edouard S, Isabelle G, Philippe B, Yves L.)**

A bike ride, called the Peace Ride, in reference to the Peace Ride organized in Seoul after the SICOGA in Korea, was proposed by **Servas France** to participants at the conference in Dijon, from Thursday, October 9 to Sunday, October 12.

This was an opportunity for the 23 people registered for the Peace Ride to discover the natural beauty of the Dijon region, cycling at a leisurely pace and breathing in the fresh air, accompanied by six members of Servas France.

Except for Antarctica, whose penguins did not make the trip, all continents were represented in this group:

the Americas (United States, Brazil, Mexico), Africa (Malawi), Australia, Asia (Taiwan, Israel), and Europe (Sweden, Finland, Switzerland, Belgium, Germany, Portugal, Croatia, France).

The route was a round trip from Dijon to Dijon, mostly on bike paths, along the Burgundy Canal to Pouilly en Auxois, passing through the beautiful medieval village of Châteauneuf.

On the first day, after a picnic in the park next to the bike rental shop, we cycled 30 km along the bike path, a former towpath along the canal.

**Photo next page:** Saint Victor sur Ouche, in front of an imposing building full of charm where we spent the night.







We enjoyed dinner and breakfast, finally some good traditional cuisine!

On Friday the 10th, under a beautiful sun, we rode along a quiet road towards Châteauneuf. Our small group broke up during the long climb, in a sumptuous landscape. Those who rented an e-bike did not regret their choice.

But no one was missing at the Châteauneuf Inn to toast in every language, a glass of Kir (a local aperitif) in hand. After an excellent lunch, we took a guided tour of the castle. Magical! In the evening, we settled in for two nights at the MFR\* in Pouilly (family and rural home).

**\* MFR = Maisons Familiales Rurales** (Rural Family Houses).

On Saturday the 11th, in two groups, we enjoyed a pleasant bike ride to the church of Saint Thibault, a stunning Gothic marvel in this small village. We also visited the Château de Commarin and its magnificent grounds.





On Sunday, we left Pouilly to return to Dijon, under the autumn sun that made the trees along the canal blaze with color: 60 km without any major difficulties, an opportunity to admire the tourist barges passing through the locks.

We returned all the bikes to the rental company in good condition. There were no accidents to report, and everyone helped each other out when difficulties arose. For safety reasons, three equal groups were formed, with two French guides in each group. Each cyclist wore a yellow vest with the Servas logo.

The three meals we had in restaurants were unanimously appreciated and washed down with wine; our gastronomic reputation is safe!

And luckily, not a drop of rain fell during the trip. Just a little fog in the morning, which quickly gave way to autumn sunshine. Fortunate, because we didn't have a plan B. We had taken a big risk!

This four-day "adventure" allowed us to forge personal bonds during discussions along the trails, picnics, and very joyful evenings. We parted reluctantly, happy to feel like citizens of the world!

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# Baltic Republics, My Destination

**By Paloma Begué of Servas Spain**

On April 29, 2025, I began my spring Interrail trip to Northern Europe. My aim was to reach the Baltic Republics, connecting with their people there, and getting to know the region, but with stops along the way to enjoy stays with Servas hosts and friends.

**Photo:** map with route

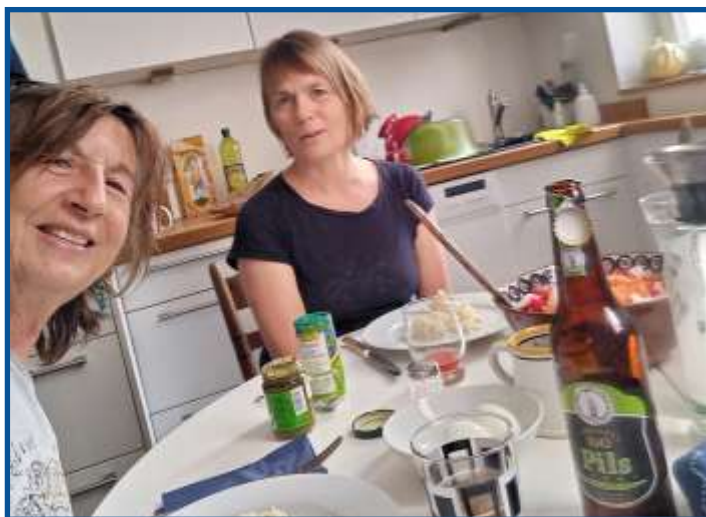
My first stop was **Lyon**, where two major rivers converge. It is known for its history of silk manufacture its *traboule* architecture, of connecting passageways between old buildings. My Servas host Florence welcomed me into her peaceful paradise at Lentilly, where we enjoyed vegetables from the market and conversations about our history and hobbies.

**Photo:** Paloma and Florence in Lentilly

I continued my journey to **Hanover**. Anke was waiting for me in her cozy apartment, where she was also hosting her friends from Berlin, who had come to celebrate *Evangelischer Kirchentag* (German Evangelical Church Day). The city was full of musical performances and gatherings of people from the rest of Germany.







**Photo:** Paloma and Anke in Hanover home

My next stop was **Warsaw**. My friend Magda and I went for a pleasant walk along the Vistula in the evening. We had dinner in the university district, and the next day we went on a bike tour

through the red pine forests close to Lochów, near the Vistula River basin.

**Photo:** Paloma and Marga bicycling in Lochow

It was time to begin my stay in the Baltic republics with a stop in **Vilnius**, Lithuania. This historic city has panoramic views from the top of the medieval castle

remains of the Gediminas Tower, the Cathedral Bell Tower, and the Hill of the Three Crosses. Skaidrius was my host, and we enjoyed conversations in English and French and the delicious dishes we prepared together.





**Photo:** Paloma and Skaidrius in Vilnius home

In Latvia, I continued west along the coast to **Jurmala**, a tourist city with vast beaches and a lot of birds. Kate and Arthur welcomed me, and we shared tasty smoked sardines with cheese and a walk through pine forests filled with blueberry plants.

**Photo:** Paloma, Kate, Arthur and in Jurmala beach

My next destination was **Tallinn**, Estonia, with its impressive medieval fortress, and **Hiiumaa** Island, where Rita awaited me. Together, we enjoyed a tour of the island's landscape and history, as well as a festival of Estonian folk music and dance.

**Photo:** Family dinner with Ingela, Lasse and the grandchildren

I travelled on north to **Jarvso**, in Sweden, where Ingela and Lasse welcomed me. Their house was surrounded by beehives and a beautiful rural landscape. I enjoyed walks, meals, theatre videos, and conversations with my friendly hosts.





**Vaxjo** was my next destination in Sweden, where my friends Eva and José greeted me. Having visited them two years earlier, it was a very emotional meeting, and I was fortunate to be able to celebrate José's 88th birthday at their home in the peaceful Swedish countryside near Aseda.

**Photo:** From left:  
Paloma, José, Eva, at home

In **Silkeborg**, Denmark, my friend Bodil welcomed me into her new home, and we caught up on the latest events in our lives. I continued the trip to **Hamburg**, where I met my friends Wiebke and Dirk, whom I hadn't seen for two years. Returning to Barcelona via Paris, I was happy for the good times with my Servas hosts and friends.

**Photo:** Rita and Paloma in  
Hiiumaa lighthouse

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# Alpe Adria 2025

in Burghausen: 26.9 to 28.9, 2025

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**Text & Photos by Brigitte R.**

**Photo:** group at stone castle.

**A long weekend with 50  
Servas friends**

Built along a ridge, Burghausen's battlements and towers stretch for 1,051 metres, making it the world's longest castle complex. At the foot of the mighty castle nestle the





squares and alleys of the colourful, historic old town, which has almost a Mediterranean feel.

After checking into the youth hostel on Friday, we had a most interesting, guided tour through the old centre of the town. After dinner, we all gathered in a meeting room to chat and sing. Our friends in Austria created a beautiful international songbook that we sang from, till late in the evening.

On Saturday, on a guided tour in German and English, we learned about the castle's history. Did you know that the German word *Schlitzohr*, usually meaning someone up to no good, comes from the Middle Ages, when they slit the earlobe of a thief as a punishment?

After lunch, some of us took a stroll around Lake Wöhrsee, some went for coffee, and others went for a rest.

That evening we danced to the music that everybody had decided on.

On Sunday, we walked up to a beautiful viewpoint on a terrace on the Austrian side of the River Salzach and a restaurant for lunch.

Too soon, we had to say goodbye. We renewed acquaintance, made new friends, invited each other, and promised to visit. We hope to meet again next year.

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# SERVAS and COP30

**By Lydia Meryll, Servas Britain, 07 Nov. 2025**

We arrived back in the UK from Kenya on the eve of COP30 in Brazil (10 – 21 November, 2025). We watched, on the interactive aeroplane's map, the very thin blue layer of oxygen that keeps us all going.

In Nairobi we met Caroline Kisato, our SERVAS day host. She is carrying out some action research into the various ways in which young people in Kenya become radicalised and join violent groups and factions. She said she was sure that the scarcity of food and water across the Region creates fear and division. She hopes that COP 30 can bring agreement by all the world leaders at this United Nations Conference.



Climate Change can be mitigated, but Antonio Guterres, head of the UN, has said that the target of 1.5° C of global warming has already been missed and the world has to get ready to deal with vastly higher temperatures and the likelihood of much more severe weather, droughts and floods. We saw “evidence” of this as trees died in Lake Nakuru and flamingos had nowhere to nest. **[photo]**





We found the lobby of our hotel on Lake Baringo full of water, as huge rains swept silt down from the Rift Valley mountains to block the natural outlets of this last fresh water source. Their thatched Conference Centre [photo] had been taken over by a hippo. The 800-bed hotel had only three guests. Tourism was once the area's main source of income.

So, in a country of 57.25 million people, most very poor, we had to confront the contradictions of travelling as tourists. Thousands of taxis and huge cars clog up Nairobi roads. The Maasi markets and hawkers struggle to find steady work.

Their President vowed to take them away from the status of a third world country by building more roads and investing in Nuclear Power, but in his speech at Raile Odinga's funeral, he didn't mention investing in solar, the free

source of energy for a country that straddles the equator.

So how can COP30 begin to help the citizens of a country like Kenya? The *Sunday Nation* newspaper challenged the fairness of one of the "Great Ideas" that large international corporate companies buy Carbon Credits to allow them to continue to emit global warming gases.

A Kenyan court stopped the development of a massive coal mine in a fishing-based community. The Kenyan government had granted a license based on a questionable environmental impact assessment. The court seemed to have decided that it would have polluted air, water and damaged the soil as well as the local economy.

Across the world, indigenous people fight to maintain their way of life, free from the damage done by companies cutting down trees, burning fossil fuels and extracting natural resources. That is why COP30 is being held in the Amazon, where the rain forest and water systems have been exploited to grow soya and dig for gold. Those people who suffer from hurricanes – especially in the Caribbean, know that these are not just freak events, but whole weather system changes



brought about by high levels of global warming gases in the atmosphere. These have been created so WE in the “Developed Countries” can continue to “grow” our economies and scoot around the small planet in our large cars and aeroplanes, chucking out Carbon and other polluting gases.

COP30 is just beginning. Champions like the President of Barbados, Mia Mottley, are there challenging the rich countries to invest in reparations and real climate adaptation measures in countries like hers and Kenya, where the impact of climate change is advancing so rapidly and unequally. Hers is the call for global Climate Justice.

The United Nations admits that Developing countries are receiving less than 10% of the money they need to adapt to a world, increasingly vulnerable to extreme weather. Our own Prince of Wales is in Brazil calling passionately for innovative projects to be properly funded and showcasing Earth Shot examples.

On November 15, in the middle of COP30, NGOs and Trade Unions will call on our governments to make a genuine financial and technological contribution to lower our emissions and to help



those people in the “Developing World” to deal with the increasing heat and flooding.

Schools are being asked to draw up a Climate Action Plan. At COP30 all states are also asked to present *their* Climate Action Plan and work together to make the planet safer for all of us.

As SERVAS members, parents, grandparents and neighbours, many of us have delighted in making friends around the world. The WAY we travel to meet each other makes a difference. We pride ourselves on being an ethical Peace and Justice organisation. COP 30 is not just an event to note, it defines what is “Developed” and what one country’s need for oil, coal and gas can do to other peoples and other living things. SERVAS members can ask ourselves,

*Are we living within our means or are we exploiting others so we can live well? How can we help to resolve this?*

For me, this is the very last time I shall fly anywhere!

**Editor's Note:**

COP 30 stands for the 30th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Earth photos: courtesy NASA.

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## Kindness in St. Ives, England

**Text and Photo: Savitha W.**

When you travel, find people with true hearts and a generous spirit, and the world becomes your home. That is what I found with Sophie, who is a professor. She and her dog Teddie (a dachshund) stole my heart.



Sophie was so kind to pick me up from the bus station.

St. Ives is a beautiful little town with so many charity shops and antique shops that I lost myself in that beauty. I had an attractive room to myself. Sophie made sure breakfast was always available. I was very happy to cook a meal for us a few times, with some Indian spices, plus some good wine.

Sophie introduced me to her parents who are very well traveled, and they shared stories from India and their travels. Her mother cooked a lovely meal when we visited Sophie's parents' place. I met

her brother who is differently-abled. I am grateful for this splendid experience – meeting people who have such a loving generous spirit. Thank you Sophie!

And Sophie confirms:

"I just wanted to let you know that Savitha had a lovely stay at my place in St. Ives. Very much in the spirit of Servas, she was the perfect guest, and we had a great cultural exchange. She was my first ever Servas guest!"

Wishing you lots of love and hugs. You always have a home in India. –Savi

...

## Golan Druze Tour, Israel 2 August, 2025

A handful of Servas Israel members participated in a guided tour of a Druze community that lives in the Golan Heights. The guide was our own Servas member Aqab, a tour guide from the Bukata Druze village that we visited.

Large groups of Druze live in Israel, Lebanon, and Syria.

Some members commented on the tour:

*Yael wrote:* Thank you, Aqab, for an important and fascinating tour between lookouts, Mount of Vinegar (Har Cramim) and the Hill of Screams (Givat Hatzeakot). Thank you for the clear explanations about the history and geopolitics of the Druze in general and the Golan Heights in particular. Thank you for sharing personal stories from the heart, in the spirit of Servas.

*Dalit wrote:* What an exciting morning: we met Aqab in Bukata, and we heard a detailed overview of our Druze community, then and now. Thank you to Aqab for making us aware of the complexity of the subject, organizing it for us, and providing us with first-hand information, including the moving story of your childhood, divided between Syria and Israel.

*Claudia wrote:*

Thank you dear Aqab for the tour, the sharing, for the in-depth review — historical and current. You are all in the hearts of all of us. A big hug.

*Aqab wrote:* Dear friends from Servas who came

for a tour. The money you paid will be transferred to support the Druze in Syria. Thank you very much, dear friends.

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## Reunion in South Korea 2025

**By Yudeisy, Servas Cuba**

There are gifts that are neither wrapped nor bought.  
There are gifts that arrive when you need them most, without having asked for them, without having imagined them.  
This was my reunion in South Korea, with my “Korean family”, in a country that embraced me.

Arriving in Seoul in May, I felt myself change. The *Discovery Korea and Peace & Ride* event in Suwon welcomed us warmly and promoted peace and cultural exchange.

Each city offered something special:



- **Seoul:** There I discovered perfect harmony between tradition and technology, between ancient temples and futuristic cafes.
- **Busan:** By the sea, I experienced a beautiful wedding, with moments that made me feel part of a big family.
- **Pohang:** Walking by the sea was like breathing peace.
- **Gyeongju:** An open-air museum, where I learned the value of silence, respect for the ancestral, and the language of small gestures.
- **Changwon:** Walking around in *hanbok* (traditional Korean dress) was an honour I still can't believe.
- **Gyeongsangnam-do:** Delicious food dishes at Uiryeong-gun Palace.





- **Suncheon:** Suncheon, nature in its purest form, in every garden, beauty adorns the city, a place where the soul and body find rest.
- **Incheon and Cheongna:** Places of learning, where affection became eternal and they were also my farewell settings.
- **Gunpo:** The everyday became extraordinary. Between home-cooked meals and simple conversations, I understood that beauty lies in simplicity.

I tried new flavours, laughed, danced and found myself again. Challenges were met with patience and kindness. Servas Korea became my home away from home, teaching me that belonging is about shared love, not borders.

I return with my heart full of memories and gratitude. In the end, it's the people who transform you.

Thank you, Korea and Servas, for making me feel at home. I will return, because you always go back to where you were happy.

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## Last-minute Long Stay

**By Vancouver host Jonathan [photo>]**

Like most Servas exchanges, ours began with a phone call.

On July 25, 2025, a Servas member contacted my wife, Jennifer, with an urgent request: could we host Mrs. Lee from Korea, who was traveling with her son and daughter? I agreed, though Jen was leaving for Europe soon—it would be just me and our son Isaac [22 years old] at home.

**Photo:** Mrs. Lee and Yena



Mrs. Lee and her daughter Yena (5 years old) arrived on July 28. Yena was very shy, and they both went to bed early that night. When I came home the next day, Mrs. Lee arrived with a large package of steaks and other food, which we enjoyed that night.

On July 31, Mrs. Lee and Yena left on a bus tour of the Rockies. They returned on August 3 in the evening.



On August 4, I made pizza for everyone, and Mrs. Lee was very interested to see how. The next day, Mrs. Lee made bibimbap and gimbap (Korean rice bowl and Korean sushi) for us. Isaac had been making bibimbap for a few months and enjoyed seeing how she made it. Mrs. Lee was quite surprised to see that we had Korean gyochojang sauce (a key ingredient of bibimbap) – the same brand they used in Korea! Each day Mrs. Lee and Yena went to see part of Vancouver. At Grouse Mountain,

they enjoyed seeing two rescued grizzly bears.

On August 8, Mrs. Lee picked up her son (10 years old), whose camp was finished. August 10, they left for Korea. I drove them to the airport. They kept me up to date on their journey home, and we corresponded after her return to Korea.

**Photo** from left: Jonathan's son, Isaac, Mrs. Lee, her daughter and son.

Mrs. Lee added [translated from Korean]:



*Living with local Canadians in Vancouver was so exciting for my children and me.*

*We had a great time learning how they do their laundry, how recycling trucks collect, how two-storey houses are structured, and how to eat delicious local food.*

*Our host was very friendly and went out of his way to provide for us.*

*This experience made me fall in love with Servas. I look forward to meeting many new Servas members in Korea. Thank you.*

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## Super SYLE Stay [October 2025]

Text and Photo by Violeta



Thanks to Servas, I was able to spend a week with a French family.

I took the train from Frankfurt to Metz, France, and was picked up at the Metz train station by a very nice host family.

I was able to accompany their youngest daughter, Hanaé, to her school and I was in her daily life for a week. This allowed me to get to know every-day French life better and improve my language skills.

The school day in France is a bit longer than in Germany (8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.), which meant there was no time left for extracurricular activities.

We also went on family outings, such as visiting a grandmother, going to the forest, and into the city.

The grandmother lived in a large 16th century house. It was very impressive to see what life was like there. For example, there was a huge room filled with wood for the fireplace to heat the house.

My host family also took me into the forest to collect mushrooms, which we cleaned and ate.

Lovely and interesting conversations with Hanaé's family members and classmates, the new surroundings, the language, and the people I met during this time, made my stay in France wonderful.

Meeting new people, experiencing a new culture, and a completely different daily life from the one I know at home, was a fantastic experience that I can highly recommend.

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# How to Learn a Language: A month in Panama with Servas

**By Sercan Duygan, Servas Türkiye member for 22 years**

This journey was an incredibly enriching experience in terms of language learning and emotional and cultural connection.

**Servas Language Exchange [SLE]**, previously available only to “Youth” members 18 to 30 [called SYLE], is now open to all ages. Learners choose a language, connect with hosts, and develop a plan for their stay.

Participants engage in conversation, volunteer work, plus local folkloric, social, and religious activities. On weekends, they can stay with other Servas host families in a different city.

Before the trip I took Spanish classes, then was fully immersed in my hosts’ daily life...

helping in the garden, taking care of children, assisting in the kitchen, and giving talks at educational institutions.

The Servas traditional “two-day

hosting rule” is insufficient for deep linguistic and cultural experiences. Spending a month in this programme made a huge difference—both emotionally and in learning.

I touched their lives, and they touched mine... We formed a very sincere bond. This connection greatly accelerated my learning process.

I encourage members to embark on such a transformative journey with Servas.

## **Photo:**

Folk Dance Group *Penonomé Aires y Ritmos* (PAR)

In the background, Servas members from Penonomé: Flor, Ada, Arquímedes, Sercan, Diógenes and Gonzalo.





**Photos in order:**

Discussion session with 7th-grade students at Santo Domingo Educational Center in Penonomé.



At the Health Promotion Centre in Penonomé, social workers who took part in the volunteer work: Lisbeth Espinosa, Arsenia Lombardo, Sercan, and Nadia Torrero.



Farewell dinner with the Picota Cano host family: Carlos Valentín, Flor, Sercan, Paulo Alberto, Arquímedes, little Apollo and his mother Itzmira, Spanish teacher, in Panama.



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# Indian Travelling in Europe

**By Vipul Shaha, Servas India**

My parents Sunita and Abhay have been a Servas family since 1992, when my father first discovered Servas during his first visit to Europe. The values of Servas align very well with our family, and we have hosted guests from all over the world in our little village in India. Growing up, this international exposure was a great thing for me and my younger brother Anuj.

During my recent travels to Europe, I had the good fortune of meeting and staying with some wonderful Servas people. I initially went to Europe to attend the global Hearth Summit in Slovenia. Around a thousand change-makers from around the



world had gathered in Ljubljana to promote holistic wellbeing in every field, at every level – including peace activists, artists, healers, educators, and organizational leaders. In some way, it felt like a Servas global gathering – with similar values of diversity, inclusion, cultural exchange and peace.

My first Servas day host was Mr. Boris, who came to meet me during my conference on his bicycle!

**Photo:** Mr. Boris biked to me.



He was very busy attending to his 92-year-old mother, who was in the hospital at the time. Despite that, he kindly spared a couple of hours in the afternoon to treat me to a lovely local restaurant along the river. One of the only two Servas members in the entire country of Slovenia, Mr. Boris shared a bit of his life journey and the changes that Eastern Europe has gone through during his lifetime. I presented him with a Gandhi peace hat. From me, he was keen to hear about J. Krishnamurti and his teachings on 'Truth Is a Pathless Land'.

After my conference in Slovenia, I took a long scenic train journey to Vienna, Austria. A lovely family welcomed me – Irena and Steven with their two kids, Luca and Rosie. They are an American family living in Vienna for the past few years. We went on long bicycle rides, swam in the Danube, learned some strength training from Steven, and shared yoga with them. Being with the kids was quite fun; we played card games and harvested some fresh cherries from their generous neighbour's backyard.

After a couple of days with this wonderful family, I shifted to David and Zsuzsanna's place on the outskirts of Vienna. It was lovely to listen to their story of their first meeting through Servas.



I particularly enjoyed my deep conversations with David, who has been a peace educator and very actively involved with Servas for over four decades! He showed me around Vienna on a bicycle ride, and we also visited their 'community supported agriculture' farmland, where they grow fresh organic vegetables. It was also interesting to learn a little bit about the Baha'i religion from David and exchange insights from Buddhist, Jain, and Hindu traditions.

I also briefly met another lovely Servas day host named Sabine in Vienna, who kindly cooked a Middle Eastern lunch for me.

And finally, in Prague, Czech Republic, I caught up with a French Servas member named

Patricia. We walked around the beautiful city, and the Jewish quarter.

Carrying on my travels in Europe to Spain, Sweden and the Netherlands with personal friends, I continued to share about Servas wherever I went. I was amazed at how widespread the Servas network is and how easy it is to get around Europe. I learned and felt inspired by the European urban design, public policies, and the civic ethic that makes life so much safer and joyful, and enables wellbeing!

How wonderful it is to feel, not like a stranger but like family, in homes where one can share an instant connection, all thanks to Servas!

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## Sadhana Forest, India: Servas Beginnings

**By Vipul Shaha, Servas India**

I, along with my Servas parents — Abhay & Sunita, recently had a chance to meet Aviram and Yorit in the international township of Auroville, India. Aviram and Yorit are originally from Israel and have made India their home. They first came to India back in 1998 (from Israel) and traveled on a bike throughout India thanks to Servas!

They are the founders of Sadhana Forest, Auroville, India (2003) — an off-the-grid, eco-conscious, vegan, natural learning community that has inspired many communities and projects around the world.

Sadhana Forest is a volunteer-based, international not-for-profit organization primarily focused on reforestation and water conservation

through sustainable living practices, located in Auroville, India. They aim to teach local communities and volunteers about environmental renewal by actively regenerating the endangered Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest (TDEF) through planting trees and



managing water resources; the project also operates in Haiti, Kenya, and Namibia.

In my conversation with Aviram, he was very grateful to Servas for creating opportunities for travel and hosting. He sees great overlap and alignment with the values of Servas and Sadhana Forest namely:

1. They operate on 'Gift Culture' — meaning that they're non-commercial organizations — promoting trust over transaction-based relationships. Sadhana Forest has grown with the generosity and kindness of many.
2. They are working towards a more peaceful, compassionate world and recognize human unity while respecting diversity and promoting cultural understanding.

Both are a global community of volunteers and travelers committed to creating a more beautiful world.

3. Sadhana Forest would be very welcoming of Servas guests from around the world to come for long-term volunteering/internship stays (minimum 2 weeks) and who are more interested in environmental sustainability, veganism, natural learning, intentional community living, etc.

To know more — <https://sadhanaforest.org/>

To arrange for your visit and volunteering, email: [india@sadhanaforest.org](mailto:india@sadhanaforest.org)

**Photo:** From the Sadhana Forest website.

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**The Lost Elephants of Timbuktu**



# Solo Woman Traveller in Thailand: Peace, Friendship, and the Servas Spirit

**By Hamsavahini Singh, SI Coordinator to the UN & Peace Secretary, Servas India**

In April 2025, I had the wonderful opportunity to attend the RCAP (Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific) meeting, held at Siam University in Bangkok, Thailand.

**Photo** below: RCAP attendees

The two-day event beautifully combined professional engagement with cultural discovery and offered an inspiring opportunity for me to represent Servas International (SI). During my visit to the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in March 2025, I had met Mr. Liberato Bautista, President of CoNGO\*, who encouraged me to attend this RCAP meeting. (\*CoNGO is the



Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations.)

**Photo** top: Hamsa and Liberato Bautista.

As the SI Representative, I actively participated in all sessions, contributing to discussions on strengthening



regional collaboration, promoting youth participation, and advancing Servas' peace and sustainability goals. The meeting brought together representatives from across the Asia-Pacific region, creating a vibrant platform to exchange ideas, review ongoing projects, and plan future initiatives. The energy and enthusiasm of the participants reflected Servas' shared commitment to peace, friendship, and intercultural understanding.

In Bangkok, I was warmly hosted by Servas member Pisit and his wife, who made my stay both comfortable and memorable. **Photo below.**

Pisit shared fascinating stories about his travels with Servas International founder Bob Luitweiler and reflected on how Servas has grown over the years as a global community of

hosts and travellers dedicated to promoting peace. Our engaging conversations on Buddhism and Hinduism deepened my cultural understanding, and his helpful travel tips made navigating the city as a solo woman traveller smooth and enjoyable.

I was also delighted to reconnect with Rathada Arpornsilp, SI Peace Secretary of Thailand, whom I had met in India three years ago, along with Yuri Pratama Widiyana, Servas member from Indonesia. I invited both of them to attend the two-day conference and join me as SI representatives to demonstrate the strength and outreach of our organization. Together, we actively participated in the RCAP sessions and had meaningful interactions with about a dozen CoNGO members, discussing shared goals in peacebuilding and cross-cultural education.

With the kind assistance of Ratchada Arpornsilp, I found a comfortable hotel in the city center and had the chance to explore some of Bangkok's iconic sites, including the Maeklong Train Market, Wat Pho, Wat Arun, Sala Chalmkrung Royal Theatre and the Grand Palace.





Later, we were joined by Servas members Verena and Friedrich from Germany for a visit to the train and floating markets. It was a delightful day filled with cultural exchange, laughter, and conversations about life in India, Germany, Thailand, and Indonesia. These interactions—especially with younger members—were full of warmth, curiosity, and learning, perfectly capturing the Servas spirit.

**Photo:** Hamsa [far left] Servas India, with members from Thailand, Indonesia and Germany.

The RCAP meeting at Siam University was both productive and enriching. It strengthened regional connections, deepened my understanding of Servas activities across Asia and the Pacific, and renewed my enthusiasm to promote Servas values among youth and communities.





The experience truly blended business with pleasure and reaffirmed my belief in the power of human connections to foster peace and friendship across borders.

**Photo** right [from left]: Hamsavahini (SI Coordinator to the UN), Cyril Ritchie (First VP, CoNGO ), Dr. Pornchai Mongkhonvanit (President of Siam University).

**Photo** below [from left]: Hamsavahini, Yuri Pratama Widiyana (Servas member Indonesia), Servas members Friedrich and Verena from Germany, Rathada Arpornsilp, SI Peace Secretary of Thailand.



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## Re-member-ing Sunita

By Zan Romeder (Servas host in Roberts Creek, BC, Canada)



My mother Sunita Romeder arrived in Quebec, Canada, in 1969. Sunita, her husband Jean-Marie and their four-year-old son Ivan had been Servas travellers and hosts in Paris, France. On a later trip to India by land, they met wonderful hosts along the way.

Having Servas travellers visiting us regularly was a part of my childhood that I cherish deeply... Hearing new languages, music, tasting new foods and seeing my parents so happy to greet people from around the world.

Sunita and my dad Jean-Marie Romeder were key founders in bringing Servas to Quebec. Many of their lifelong friends came from Servas.

Sunita travelled her whole life, by foot into the mountains, then later, having less mobility after three hip replacements, she explored with her small RV. She was unstoppable in her quest to explore the world and discover one more lake.

Mom is now free to roam the universe as she pleases.  
Blessings, Zan

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# Guernica Peace Museum

Visit on International Peace Day

**By Niall Watts, Servas Britain and Ireland**



My wife, Eileen, and I visited the Guernica Peace Museum on International Peace Day – September 21, 2024. The museum commemorates the bombing of the town in the Spanish Civil War, but it also focuses on reconciliation after conflict in Spain and around the world.

Guernica (Gernika in Basque) is a small town in the Basque region of northern Spain. Despite its modest size, it is culturally significant to the Basque people as the site of their ancient, local assembly. In the Middle Ages, delegates from villages in the region met there to discuss the issues of the day beneath an old oak tree. Over time, this tree came to symbolize the freedom of the Basque people.

For this reason, in the Spanish Civil War, General Franco and his Nationalist (Fascist) forces chose Guernica as a target. Franco aimed to undermine his opponents among the Basque nationalists and the

elected government of Republican Spain brutally and violently. To do so, he called on his Fascist allies in Nazi Germany and Italy to bomb the town.

Aircraft from Germany's Condor Legion levelled Guernica to the ground in a 'blitzkrieg' (lightning attack) in four hours on the afternoon of April 26, 1937. This was a market day, and the town was crowded with people from the surrounding area. The number of deaths is still disputed, but official Basque figures report that 1,654 local people lost their lives in the attack. The aircraft did not bomb the railway station or a munitions factory, suggesting that the attack aimed to kill civilians and destroy property. Painted shortly after the event, Pablo Picasso's iconic picture commemorates the attack.

## Photo:

Entrance to the Guernica Peace Museum







**Photos:** Stained glass of the *Old Oak Tree of Guernica*

***Guernica*** by Pablo Picasso (1937) exhibited in the Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid

The museum at Guernica features photographs of the devastation of the town. But for me, the testimonies of the survivors had the greatest impact. A woman tells us how she, as a young girl, saw her mother being killed while running for cover. A man tells of his internal conflict when enrolling for compulsory military service in the army responsible for the death of his parents.

William Smallwood compiled the first testimonies. He was an American teacher who learnt Basque from immigrants in Idaho, USA. Their stories inspired him to visit Guernica in the early 1970s where, under the pretence of revising a science textbook, he worked with the Basque underground to interview survivors of the bombing. Transcripts of 124 such interviews, mostly



conducted by Smallwood in Basque at substantial risk to participants, were smuggled out of Franco's Spain. The Basque Government's Institute of Memory, Coexistence and Human Rights compiled further testimonies in 2018.

*"The bombing told by those who lived through it."*

The exhibition moves from harrowing accounts of death and destruction to attempts at peace-building and reconciliation. Only after the return of democracy in 1975 could the victims tell their stories openly, and attempts at reconciliation begin between the two sides in the Civil War. Though the war ended in 1939, its legacy still has an impact on modern Spain and on the Basque identity.

The exhibition broadens its scope to examine the effects of terrorism by Basque revolutionaries and how they gradually renounced violence for completely non-violent politics. The museum has exhibits on the Northern Ireland Peace Process and on the transition from apartheid to majority rule in South Africa. Its work drew the Australian/American artist William Kelly to

Guernica where he set up a Peace & Art school.

On reflection, I found the testimonies of the bombing to be more engaging than the accounts of reconciliation. Perhaps horror is more compelling than the slow and painstaking process of peace-building. It is certainly easier to describe! Writing this article has piqued my interest in Guernica and the museum's work for peace. I would like to learn more. More broadly, what lessons can we learn from Guernica? Can we apply those lessons to other conflicts? If so, how? What role, if any, can Servas play?

**Photo:** Activist peace protest at the Guernica Peace Museum.

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## Servas Pakistan National Get-Together: Celebrating Peace & Servas International's 76th Anniversary

Lahore, September 6, 2025 — Servas Pakistan held a special national gathering in Lahore to mark International Peace Month and celebrate the 76th Anniversary of Servas International. About 32 people attended, including the national board, regional coordinators, active local members, and a number of guests and potential new members. [photo below]

### Overview & Program

The event opened with welcome remarks and introductions from the Servas Pakistan Executive Board.

Members, regional coordinators, and guests shared stories of their experiences and peace-building initiatives. The

keynote speaker, Mr. Francisco Salomon Luna, Peace Secretary of Servas International, [photo >>>] presented an

informative talk on how Servas operates globally — its structure, volunteer roles, ongoing initiatives — and how local groups like Servas Pakistan can



engage more and strengthen their presence in the international Servas community.

Following the formal program, we made a brief presentation of a shield of appreciation to Mr. Luna, in recognition of his contributions. The gathering concluded with coffee and refreshments, providing a more informal space for discussion and networking.

### **Key Takeaways & Impact**

Attendees said that the event was enlightening and motivating. Many reported gaining new insight into how to volunteer more effectively, enhance local activities, and connect with the global network. The involvement and contributions of female members in the local group were particularly appreciated, reflecting the inclusive and collaborative spirit of Servas Pakistan.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, the get-together was a success — not just in learning and reflection, but in inspiring future activities. The involvement of Mr. Luna, combined with the celebration of Servas International's 76 years, has motivated Servas



Pakistan to revive its former strength and visibility. Such events promise increased cultural exchanges, more international participation, and a deeper engagement in promoting peace across communities.

Servas Pakistan looks forward to hosting more such events that foster peace, enable international exchange, and place Pakistan as a strong and vibrant part of the Servas International community.

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## Pizza Party in Germany

**Text and Photo: Roland K.**

In glorious sunshine, around 20 young or new Servas Hessen members set out on a short 5 km hike along the old trade route "Hohe Strasse."

We were able to enjoy the magnificent panoramic view of the Frankfurt skyline as well as the mountains. To refuel, we had plenty of pizza (10 trays!) and many other treats we brought, such as salads, raspberry jam, and more.

At dusk, Jan unpacked his guitar and Benjamin his saxophone, and supported by Marc, Christoph, and Karl on the ca-jon [drum], we sang around the warming campfire until late into the night.

As we said our good-byes, it was clear to everyone that we would have to continue the series of Servas new/young member meetings soon.

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## Servas Meeting in Kandy, Sri Lanka

**By Vipul Shaha, Servas India**

I recently had the opportunity to travel to Sri Lanka for International Intensive Training in Nonviolent Communication (NVC) developed by Marshall Rosenberg.

I was kindly hosted by Ken and Visakha, Servas members since the early 1970s, having earlier lived in Japan. They are both originally from the USA and have been living in Sri Lanka for over twenty years. They run 'Buddhist Relief Mission' and do some amazing relief work for refugees – including the Rohingyas who are currently in Sri Lanka. (<https://www.brelief.org/>)

Ken and Visakha also introduced me to Sylvia and her family. Sylvia was originally a Servas member in Austria, but is now living in Sri Lanka.

We enjoyed a beautiful dinner with some of their local Sri Lankan friends joining us. The hospitality was so warm and welcoming that I



decided to cancel my plans to go to the Sri Lankan beaches and instead chose to spend a couple of extra days with Ken and Visakha.

It turned out to be the most meaningful and inspiring time for me – learning more about their lifelong work and Buddhist philosophy. I hope to return to Sri Lanka and volunteer with some of the community work Ken and Visakha are involved with. All thanks to Servas for making these connections possible.

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# SI Environment Team is Growing

**By Karen Morian, Servas Environment Team**

This year Servas International rebooted its environmental and climate work. Beginning with a webinar in January and continuing with sustainable travel and living suggestions (featured in [Open Doors](#), US Servas Newsletters, from June and July). Most recently, we also made well-received presentations at SICOGA, as we build for the future.

As an officially recognized team within SI, we are building our structure. This will include a leadership team and two Servas representatives from each of six continents. Please help us identify your members who are already working on climate change and/or environmental protection, and who may be a good representative of your region for the SI Environment Team.

Please send us an email with their experience and contact information.

If you identify members who do not want to be a representative, but would like to help with the ongoing work of our Team, please ask them to reach out with some information on their interests and background:

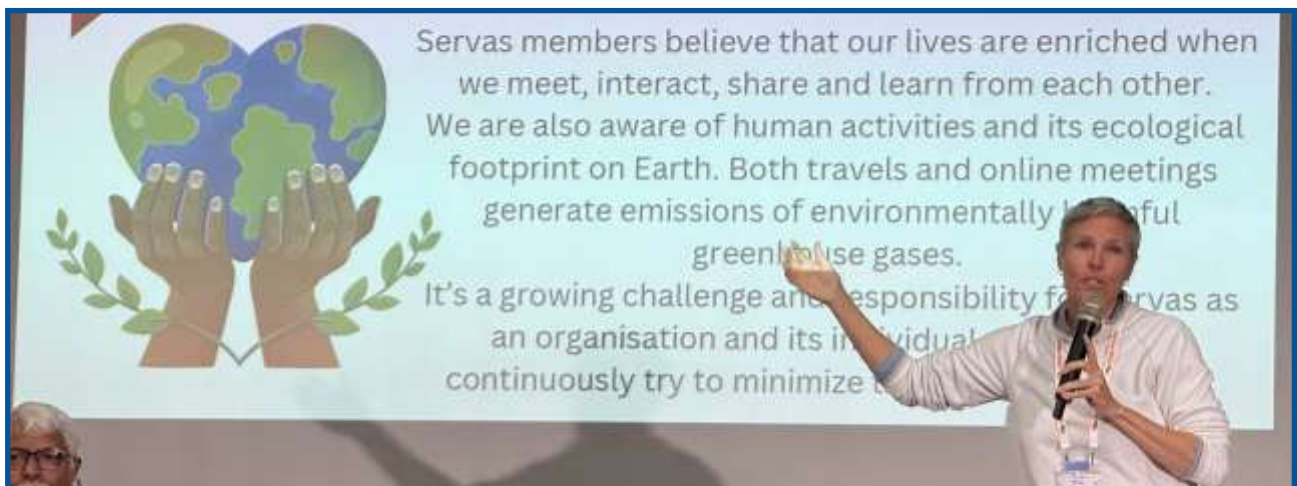
[servasenvironment@servas.org](mailto:servasenvironment@servas.org).

We need help including: Eco Camps and Schools, climate content creation for Peace and Youth Camps, joint projects with external partners, and collaborations with local projects.

Finally, to best represent our membership, we are soliciting the input of ALL members. Please ask your members to share their thoughts and ideas with us **in this survey**:

<http://tinyurl.com/ServasEnvironmentSurvey2025>

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# Servas Embarrassing Moments

By Michael Johnson, SINB editor

**Photo:**

From the **Archives of Paris**.

After 45 years with Servas, I've had several awkward, embarrassing moments.

In 1981 I went on my first trip to Europe and was trying to contact a host whom I had written to by "snail mail". Arriving in Paris on the day we had agreed, I found a public phone and called. At that time, a Paris phone number had eight digits.

The host didn't answer the phone, so I went to the address in the printed host list – it turned out to be one large city

block, with a sign outside, reading "Archives of Paris".

Back to a phone booth (which we all did in 1981 before cell phones) and I called again. Still no answer, so I had lunch at the restaurant across the road and tried to call again from the phone booth.

Looking more carefully at the **printed** host list I realized that instead of an **8-digit phone number** I'd been dialing the **hosts' birth years**, the hosts and their children were born in '52, '54 '74 and '76. Finally I dialed the correct number.

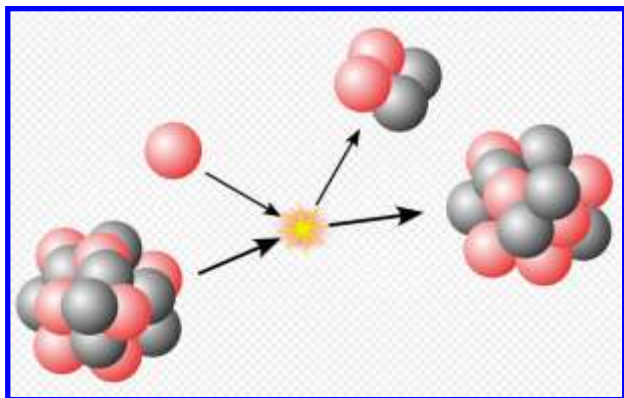


MAYNARD OWEN WILLIAMS, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC



The host answered and said, "I thought you were coming for lunch. Hurry up. It's ready. By the way, I am the archivist for Paris."

What embarrassment, arriving late with no appetite, because I was dialing birth dates.



A few years later, in 1988. I was at a conference and I spoke briefly with a Servas member from an Eastern European country. He was struggling with English, but I'm sure he knew four or five other languages. At the end of the talk, I said to him rather flippantly, "Well, next time we meet, maybe we can talk about nuclear physics." I was going to say "brain surgery", but this was the first thing that popped into my mind.

A year later, I got a call from this man.

"Hello, I'm in Toronto, and I wonder if I could stay with you."

I asked where he was, and he said he was attending a convention in downtown Toronto on **nuclear physics** !

Never judge a person by their command of one language. Better still: Never judge.

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

The next year, 1989, I was at a Servas home in USA. I had called a week before and asked what day and time I should arrive.

We agreed on Tuesday at 6pm. I arrived promptly at 6pm, knocked on the door and no one answered. I waited till 6:30 and knocked again. Still no one. About 6:50 my host walked in and said, "Oh, hi. You must be Michael. Come on in."

I must admit I was a little upset that the host was late and she didn't apologize. So I asked her why she asked me to come at 6pm on Tuesday, then not arrive until almost 7pm.

She replied, "I plan to be home on Tuesday at six without any problem, but today is Monday." She wasn't late, I was a day early.

What little humility I have, I've learned thanks to Servas.

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# Montreal Summer

**By Michael Johnson, SINB editor**

“I arranged a home exchange in Montreal, want to join me?”

My friend Richard didn't have to ask me twice. Although we had a nice house to **sleep** in, I contacted and met six Servas members in five days.

The coordinator for Montreal, Suzie, and her husband Vikram, invited us for dinner. She proudly showed me >>> the Servas sign she had recently created.



Eric and Karry Ann took us on a tour of Jarry Park, where Canadian Vicky Mboko had just won the national tennis match in Canada for 2025, competing against world-class players.

We met my long-time friend Rolf for dinner; Rolf was on the original Servas Canada Board of Directors.

Richard and I also visited a Servas host Mie who showed us her ceramic art. >>> Then she served us tea in a charming outdoor patio, beside the railroad tracks.

**What a joy to have friends  
worldwide when I travel.**

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## A Joyful Reunion

**By Suzie Bogos, Servas Montreal Coordinator**

In spite of the heat, 30C+, close to 40 people enjoyed our annual picnic on August 9, 2025, in Montreal. We shared stories about our travels and hosting. This strengthens our network of friendship and corresponds with this year's theme "Le sel du voyage c'est la rencontre" ; in other words, "meeting others is the spice of travelling".

We had a fabulous gourmet potluck lunch.

Our gathering and our new banner attracted passersby who stopped to ask questions and chat. One woman said: *Oh! Servas still exists...my parents hosted often, and I grew up surrounded by Servas travellers!*

Montreal and area members came, some with friends. A truly multicultural exchange. I am happy that

it prompted a few to join as Servas members.

I had invited an artist couple, Diego and Talleen, who had just returned from Japan. Inspired by the commemoration of the tragedy in Hiroshima, Diego had created a beautiful symbol of peace: a crane made of origami and a branch of laurel. The Japanese make paper cranes as a symbol of peace.

Our newest member Ming, whom I had just interviewed, is cultural interpreter and international adviser and responsible for leading the team who created the unique Chinese garden at our Botanical Garden. She invited us to visit in the fall for the spectacular Festival of Lanterns.

As our generation of retirees loses colleagues and friends, it is crucial to continue learning, socializing, making new acquaintances and taking on new challenges. Furthermore, in our days of online activities and echo chambers of Internet, it is enriching to meet in person.

Let us overcome this chaotic political climate which divides people, let's feel joy and spread the word of peace.

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## Rooted in Simplicity, Rich in Connection: Servas Peace School, Türkiye, 2025

“Be the change you wish to see in the world,” —Mahatma Gandhi.



Inspired by this philosophy, we believe that a peaceful, earth-friendly world begins with each of us taking a step—no matter how small. The world today needs fewer words and more action. This is something war-makers have understood for ages. But we believe in a different kind of action—one that builds, connects and heals.

**If you have a great idea, don't wait for the perfect conditions to begin. Create the conditions yourself.**

Since 2009, we have been doing just that through the Servas Peace School—an initiative that started in Ekinçi, Antakya (Hatay), in Türkiye.

In 2024, it expanded to Uganda and Georgia. Our mission is to build a new world for children and their communities through peace, cultural exchange and shared living.

The core idea of [the](#) Servas Peace School is to bring the rich diversity of world cultures to local villages, and to connect local traditions with the global community. By sharing homes and daily life, we create deep and lasting ties between people from different backgrounds. As Bob Luitweiler, founder of Servas (1949), believed: *“If we share homes, we will never think of fighting those friends from 'other' countries.”*





### Who Joined Us This Summer? *(July 4–14, 2025)*

This summer, we welcomed a group of wonderful volunteers who came to live, work and share with us:

- **Radha, Nila, Surya** (USA/ India)
- **Francisco** (Mexico)
- **Luigi and Martha** (Italy)
- **Ana Maria** (Colombia)
- **Elisabeth** (Venezuela/ England)
- **Alexa** (Canada)

More than 15 enthusiastic local young volunteers—many of whom grew up attending the Peace School—actively contributed to and experienced the daily life and events of the Servas Peace School throughout the programme. It was clear that this experience has had a good influence on their personal growth, self-esteem, feeling better after the devastating earthquake and being encouraged to make bigger dreams in and out of this location.

## What Did We Do Together?

During our days at the Servas Peace School, we explored and celebrated:

- Strong friendships and intercultural understanding,
- The spirit of community and cooperation,
- Ecological awareness and environmental responsibility,
- Tree planting on the Servas Peace School campus,
- The beauty of language diversity,
- Traditional street games and toys,
- Outdoor life and the richness of nature,
- Creative expression through art and handcraft,
- World music and musical instruments,
- Folk dances and songs,
- Stories with morals,
- Creating a “wall of peace” picture,
- Culinary exchange: dishes from different cultures and the universal value of bread (especially sourdough!)
- The dream of spreading Servas Peace Schools worldwide
- Reflecting on and sharing emotions about the post-

earthquake realities of Antakya, while exploring the village, the town and its beautiful surrounding landscapes (olive fields, pomegranates, waterfalls, beaches not far from the sea border with Syria).

## Homestay: The Heart of the Experience

One of the most powerful parts of Servas Peace School is the **homestay experience**. Volunteers stayed with **local host families**, many of whom are not members of Servas. These shared living experiences foster spontaneous and deep connections—ones that cannot be scripted or predicted. This is where the real peace-building happens: in kitchens, gardens, and conversations around the dinner table. That's why it is not easy to predict the number of children and adults who have been part of this event.

Let us continue to take action—together—to create the world we dream of.

*One participant, Alexa, 19, from Canada, summarized it this way:*

My time in Ekinçi was unforgettable and full of laughter, warmth and connection that I will carry with me forever. I came to the Servas Peace School to contribute, in some small way, to a more peaceful world, but I left having received far more than I gave. From the very first day, I felt an instant bond with the kids. Each morning, I was greeted by a rush of





smiles and “bone-crushing” hugs that set the tone for days filled with games, stories, music and dance. I shared pieces of Canada: our traditions, the meaning of totem poles, and our values of unity, respect for all cultures, and care for the environment. In return, I listened to their stories of hope, watched their creativity come alive through drawings, and learned from their strength and resilience. My last day was full

of tearful goodbyes, but I know it was not farewell forever. I have found family in Ekinçi, and I look forward to the day I return to this place of peace and love.

Another Peace School student, Umut, 11, was asked: “Please summarize your Servas Peace School experience in three words.”

She replied:

**“Peace, Love and Happiness”**

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## SERVAS INTERNATIONAL NEWS BULLETIN

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

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Please send **your** news for the SI News Bulletin to: [newsletter@servas.org](mailto: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.

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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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