

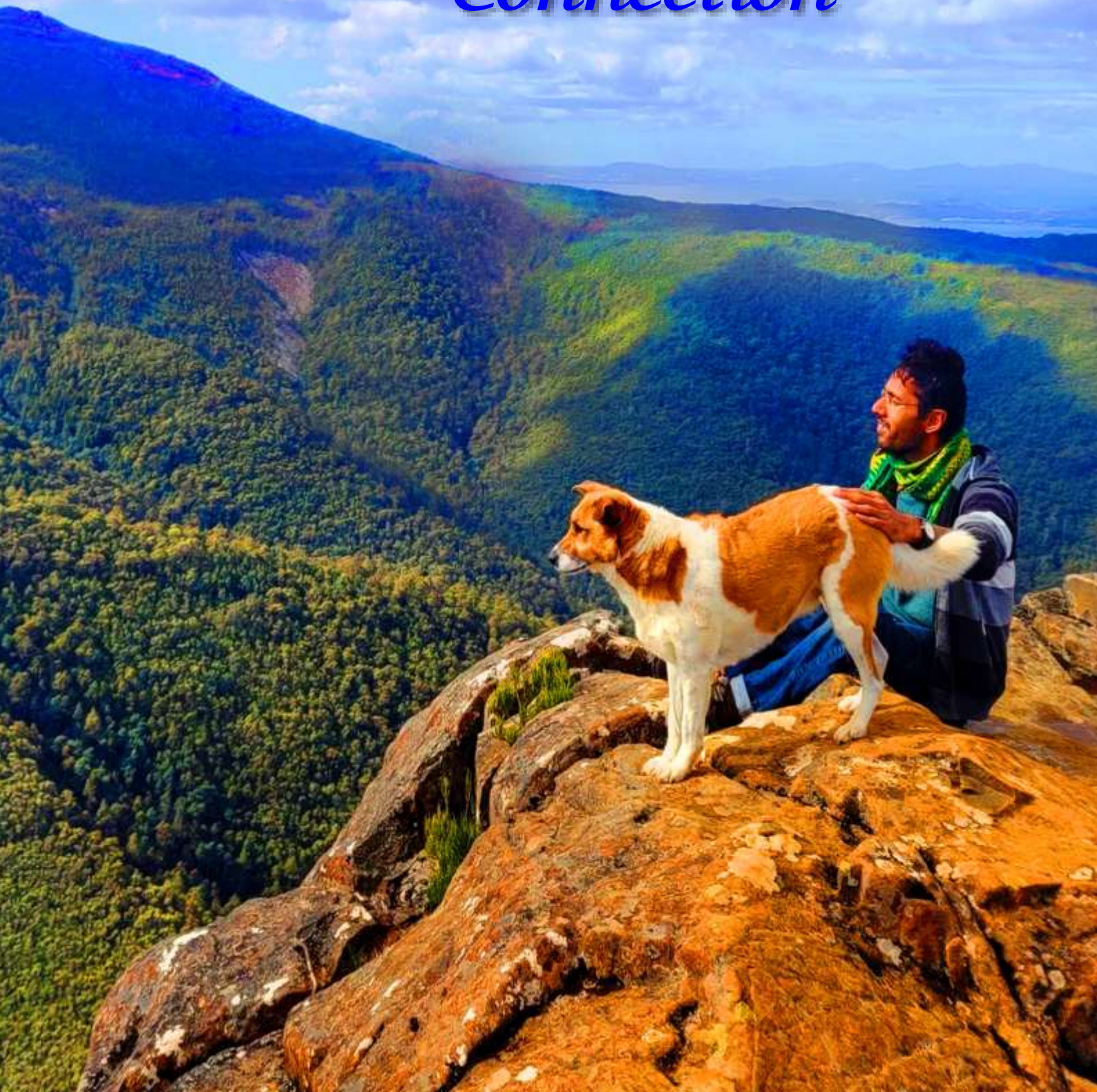


News Bulletin

Vol.37 • No.2 • 2026

Produced by and for members of the Servas community

The Heart of Human Connection





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President's Message

Greetings!

Recently, we had a meeting of all the national secretaries and key people to discuss some questions important to Servas. You will find a full report of that meeting elsewhere in this bulletin. In that meeting, I also provided information on the hard work that all the Servas teams and committees (including Exco) have been doing since the SICOGA in France. I would like you to find that report and read it.

In this column, I want to ask all of you a couple of questions. I received these questions recently from a member. She asked – “Is it possible for a potential member to read our website to understand quickly the benefit of becoming a Servas member? Do we explain clearly, in simple terms, how to become a member?” Before I provide you with my answer, I would like all of you to think about it. If the answer to either question is not Yes, what can we do about it?

For me, a person becoming a Servas member becomes a part of a community. We are a peace organization whose members are happy to invite you to their homes to learn about you – and to work together with you doing myriad activities for peace, friendship, goodwill, building solidarity and preserving the planet. It is important that we never lose that spirit of wanting to invite and help people.



That starts from the moment we receive a query from another member. When Servas started 77 years ago, communication meant writing letters or post cards, and it took a month or longer each time to connect. These days, with instant email and text messaging, we need to reset our thinking and do it more quickly (maybe in 2 to 3 days) and devise methods to be helpful to the person reaching out even if we cannot host.



It is important that we orient ourselves to this way of thinking if we wish Servas to flourish and adapt to modern times.

It is frustrating not to know how well we are meeting our objectives, especially with respect to hosting. The technology team is working on developing new ways to collect information about our hosting and traveling experiences. The key is to do it in a way that does not burden our members but enriches their involvement. If we build it into something every member already does, then it becomes simple. For example, we apply for LOIs/ e-stamps by submitting a form. It would be easy to collect some useful information on this form. Every year, our members renew their membership. Having them answer a few questions while doing it would be quite easy.

For every member who does not renew, we should do an exit interview, asking them to tell us why they are not renewing.

I plan to talk with key people in every country to start gathering this information before the end of this year, so that we can make more informed decisions helping our members. It will also assist us to show potential members the benefits of joining Servas. It will make it easier for applicants to become members.

I hope all of you have a great summer. [or winter in some places] Till next time.

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

• • •



2026 Servas Events

2026-07-04 -> 2026-07-14

Peace School in Turkiye 2026

2026-08-07 -> 2026-08-09

US Servas National Conference

2026-08-17 -> 2026-08-23

Servas Portugal Youth & Families Peace Camp

2026-08-22 -> 2026-08-27

Servas Spain » Catalunya
Servas Pyrenees Trek 2026

2026-08-26 -> 2026-08-30

Peace School in Argentina

2026-09-04 -> 2026-09-06

5th International Servas Ruhr Area Meeting

2026-09-04 -> 2026-09-07

Servas Britain and Ireland
Youth Gathering in the UK

2026-09-19 -> 2026-09-20

Indonesia Meeting and Trip

2026-09-21 -> 2026-09-26

Servas Spain » Murcia
International Creative Meeting

2026-09-21 -> 2026-09-30

Servas India
Servas India Cultural Gathering

2026-09-25 -> 2026-09-28

Servas Poland » Kraków
33d Alpe-Adria Meeting

2026-10-05 -> 2026-10-10

Servas Tanzania » Arusha
East Africa Regional Meeting

2026-11-12 -> 2026-11-19

Servas China Annual Meeting

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2026 World Events

See a full list of 2026 Servas International Events at:
[Events](#) | [ServasOnline V2](#)

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Letters to the Editor

Our first SINB issue in 2026, by editor Carla K., received much praise. Here's a typical example:

Absolutely beautiful.
 Thank you for all your work putting together this newsletter.
 —Evelyn,
 BC, Canada

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LATAM 2026

January 7 - 11, 2026. Tabio, Cundinamarca, Columbia



Official Opening

The official opening of LATAM 2026 took place at the Tabio Cultural Center, marking the start of this important international gathering that brought together 53 participants from 12 Latin American countries, along with invited nations. The opening ceremony included welcoming remarks from the mayor of Tabio, Carlos Javier Julio Torres, who highlighted the cultural significance of the event and its positive impact on the municipality.

As part of the cultural opening, a demonstration of the traditional Torbellino dance was presented, an emblematic expression of local identity. Afterward, the participants toured Tabio Plaza, a historic space surrounded by the Town Hall, the Church of the

Immaculate Conception, and the Municipal Forum, introducing the history, architecture, and cultural life of the municipality.

LATAM 2026 Program Launch

The activities continued at the Tabio Ecopark Convention Center, where the program officially began with birdwatching, highlighting the region's biodiversity, followed by a cultural dance class.

The event included welcoming remarks from the National Secretary of Servas Panama, Eufrazio Centella, and the National Secretary of Servas Colombia, Mónica García. Additionally, the International President, Radha Radhakrishna, shared details on the organization's regional growth.

The SI Secretary of Peace, Francisco Salomón, spoke about peace programs and Servas's fundamental role in promoting these values. Neuma Dantas, a member of the International Development Committee, presented an analysis of Servas's areas of opportunity, based on data collected over the past three years.

The day concluded with the presentation of project proposals by country, followed by a mandala and dreamcatcher craft workshop. There also was a group walk for orchid observation; these activities strengthened integration, creativity and well-being among the participants.

Cultural Tourism and Coexistence

As part of the cultural tourism activities, a breakfast meeting was held at El Rancho de Pipe,

a space that fostered close dialogue and strengthened relationships among the participants. Later, a cultural lunch took place where food, music, and local traditions became the focus of the cultural exchange.

The agenda included a visit to the Salt Cathedral, an emblematic site that integrates history, spirituality and architecture, offering participants a space for reflection and cultural connection.

Countries Fair and Cultural Activities

The Countries Fair was filled with cultural exchanges. On its first day, Panama, Colombia, Costa Rica, Brazil, Portugal, Mexico, and Uruguay participated, sharing a representative sample of their cultural, geographical, and artistic richness. As part of this





event, 60 tree saplings were planted, symbolizing a commitment to environmental stewardship, and a collaborative mural was created, strengthening ties between the countries.

In the second edition of the Countries Fair, Canada, Guatemala, Spain, Chile, and Argentina took center stage, showcasing representative elements of their cultural identity, including food, music, dance, and artistic expressions, promoting respect and appreciation for cultural diversity. The event also included a presentation on the School of Peace program by Ezra, a representative from Turkey, who shared the history, evolution, and

explained ways participants can promote peace.

Four core projects were chosen that met Servas International's criteria. Their leaders will be required to present their development plans, timelines, and concrete actions, with projected results for the next three years. To conclude the day and the program, a city tour of the town of Tabio was held, followed by a lively bonfire. There participants shared stories, sang and closed LATAM 2026 with a spirit of community, friendship and international cooperation.

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Hiking in the Hessian Rhön Nature Park

Text and Photo: Roland K. and Rolf A.

Setting off from Gersfeld on Saturday, July 12, 2025, eleven Servas members from Hesse, Thuringia and Berlin went for a hike through the Rhön Mountains in Germany. After a brief tour of the town, we headed to the Wachtkueppel, a 705-metre

hill affectionately called the "Rascal of the Rhön."

The Wachtkueppel is located in a fenced goat pasture so it's best to go without dogs. After refreshments at a rustic forest inn, our journey continued to the Ebersburg

Castle ruins, where we climbed the tower.

There, as well as along the way, the Rhön lived up to its name of the "Land of Open Distances" with stunning panoramic views. We finished with delicious ice cream at an ice cream parlour in Hettenhausen.

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Servas Youth Gathering in England

September 4—7 2026

IOU Hostel, Hebden Bridge, Yorkshire,
HX7 8DG, UK

info@hebdenbridgehostel.org

We're excited to announce that we're ready to welcome you to the UK! If you're able to make it between September 4 and 7, we'd love you to join our camp event. It's completely free for those who are unemployed, and a student discount is also available — so we hope as many of you as possible can join us! Details here:

<https://event.servas.org.uk/event/7/servas-youth-gathering-discount-code-servas2026?aff=Q2I8KZYW>

Please share all the information above with members in your country — the more people who know about these opportunities, the better!

Thank you, Akif

Servas Youth & Family Community Member and SYLE Coordinator

<https://www.servas.org/member/mehmet-akif-yegin>

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If you'd like to know more about what SYLE is, please book a meeting with our team:

<https://cal.rustywendy.io/team/servas-syle-youth/syle?overlayCalendar=true>

For Applicants:

If you're interested in the SYLE Programme, please fill out this form for this year:

<https://forms.gle/F2ZojpohokoMQCAG7>

For Hosts:

If you think you'd be able to host a SYLE applicant this summer, please fill out this survey so we can match you with the right candidate:

<https://formbricks.rustywendy.io/s/cmmc-q1bbc001kuo01wwtxfuzp>

Note: SYLE or SLE is available to all members 18+ years of age.

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Chopsticks: A Servas Journey of "Quick Joy"

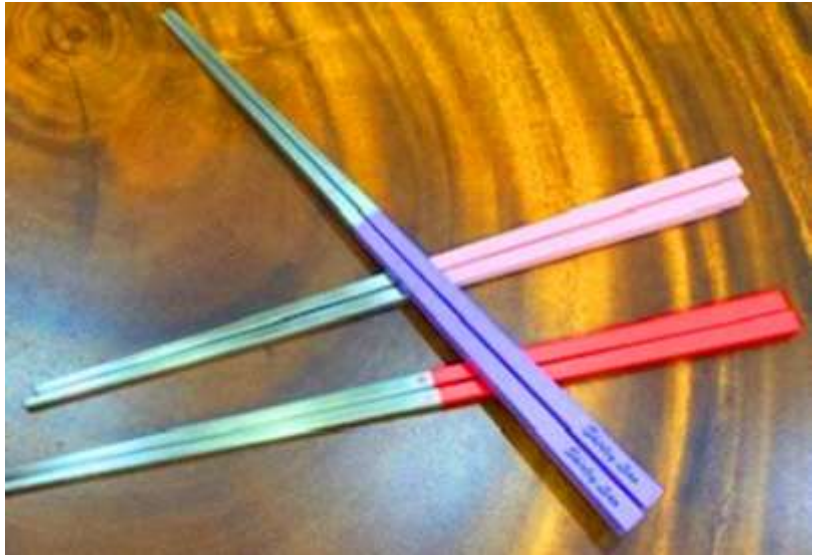
By Shirley L, Servas Taiwan

In Taiwan, the word for chopsticks—*kuài zi*—is a homophone for "quick happiness". Because they always come in pairs, chopsticks serve as a timeless symbol of harmony and a life shared side-by-side.

Last summer, I decided to pack this "joy" into my suitcase and, alongside my young sister and brother-in-law, embarked on a journey through Switzerland and France. Our goal was simple: to practise the Servas spirit of peace through a delicious chapter of cultural diplomacy.

The Rhythm of the Open Door

Throughout July and August, eight different Servas hosts opened their homes and hearts to us. Our days fell into a soulful melody of shared labour and local flavours. We would stroll into our hosts' backyards to harvest sun-warmed scallions, tomatoes and crisp



zucchini—European treasures that found a new soul in our Taiwanese home-style cooking.

Inside these international kitchens, language barriers simply melted away in the steam of the wok. As the savoury aroma of Taiwanese fried rice noodles filled the air, our hosts watched with fascination as their local ingredients were transformed by our practiced hands. We didn't need fluent French or German; a nod of approval, a shared laugh over a runaway noodle, and the rhythmic clatter of pans became our universal tongue.

The Perfect Pair

At every table, we presented our hosts with a symbolic pair of chopsticks. We explained that much like the Servas philosophy of bringing people together, chopsticks only find their purpose when they have a partner to lean on.

Watching our new friends "test-drive" eating their noodles with chopsticks was a pure delight. Some were graceful, others hilariously clumsy, but every face beamed with a radiant smile. In those moments, I realized that "joy" isn't just a clever pun; it is the warmth of a shared plate and the discovery that, across continents, an open heart speaks the same language.

Through Servas, I've learned that the world doesn't feel so vast when you share a meal. It is an invitation to rediscover humanity, one pair of chopsticks at a time.

Photos:

Hosts are happy to receive chopsticks engraved with their names.

Enjoying our meal while admiring beautiful garden views.

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My Gap Year in South East Asia 2025/26

By Amélie

Hey Servas friends,

I am 20 years old. After finishing high school in Germany in 2025, I decided to take a gap year before starting my studies.

Being very interested in the different countries and cultures of Asia, in September I boarded the plane to Bali, completely on my own.

In total, I spent three months in Indonesia, as I fell in love with this beautiful country and its kind people. I had the chance to experience the many temples and festivities as well as the yogi lifestyle in Bali. I explored the many gorgeous beaches and the stunning nature in Lombok with many waterfalls and ricefields and then continued to climb breathtaking volcanoes in Java.

But now, when I think of my time in Indonesia, some of the first memories that come to my mind are the heartwarming meetings and stays with my Servas hosts!

First I visited Kahari's family who showed me beautiful rice fields, took me to play badminton at their local court and to meet very nice local students at their Japanese



school. I felt really honoured to get to know that I was the first foreigner to ever talk to most of the students and make friends with them.

From one Servas host I moved to the next, everywhere feeling welcome. I saw how happy they were to have a guest. Few travellers visit small or remote villages away from the known tourist trails. I was able to learn how people in Indonesia



live, what an old traditional Javanese house looks like, and I even got the chance to help some farmers plant a new rice field. What a unique experience!

On another day trip, an Indian volunteer, a Japanese school teacher and I were taken by three Servas hosts to try the various delicious food, to visit an active volcano, and sing karaoke together with a local band.

On a short stop in Singapore, I visited my next Servas hosts. Without them, I would have never known that you can go hiking in a beautiful jungle in the middle of the city.

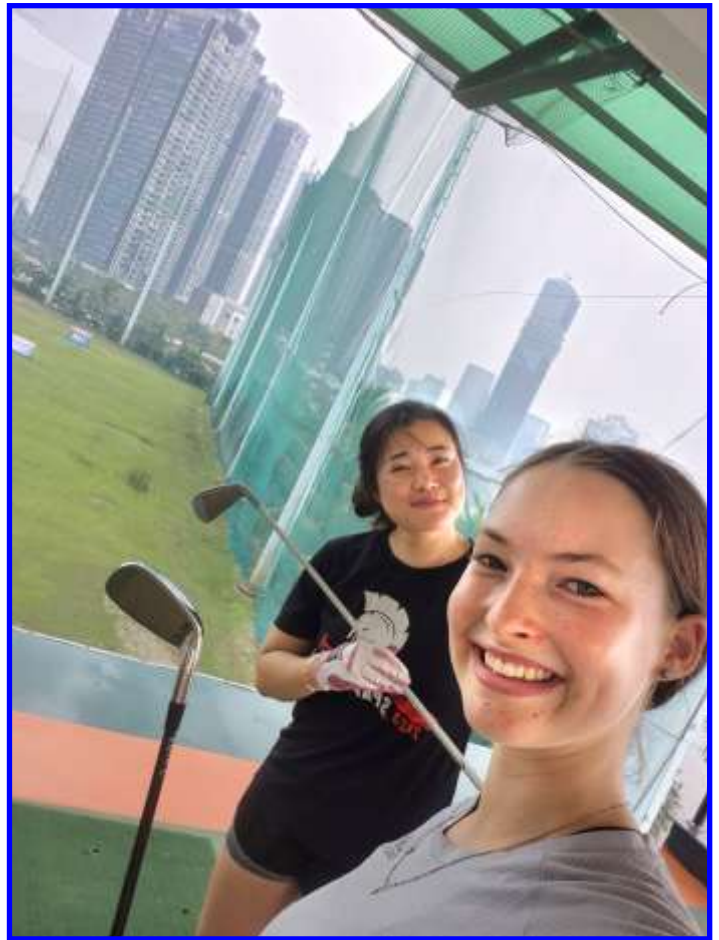


My next destination was Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Never did I think that here I would again meet Bonnie, my Taiwanese friend who I first met at the Servas youth camp in Germany. We had a great time meeting and playing golf with the Saigon skyline as a backdrop. She also showed me a very local Vietnamese coffee place, brought me to an inspiring philosophy discussion and started teaching me Vietnamese.

Around Christmas and New Year, my family from Germany joined me and I was very glad to see them again. We enjoyed three weeks together in the south and middle of Vietnam, and in Cambodia. In these parts, there are not many hosts but one meet-up with a young Cambodian woman was possible. We drove in a tuktuk with six people through Phnom Penh and I learned about her daily life and thoughts.

The next stages of my travels led me through Laos, the north of Vietnam and the Philippines. I had many more amazing moments but without any Servas hosts, until I arrived in Japan in March to travel with my mum again.

Together we went from Fukuoka up to Tokyo, staying with kind hosts in Hiroshima, Kyoto, Suwa Lake and Tokyo. It was a memorable time and we were so happy to reunite with some Servas members who we had hosted in Germany two years ago.



I really enjoyed learning about the Japanese traditions and culture better, how to cook miso soup and to visit some less well-known temples. We went hiking in the Japanese Alps, I was able to dress in a kimono, to learn some Japanese words and expressions. Best of all was experiencing some private tea ceremonies and being taught how to prepare a real matcha for myself.

Following Japan, I continued to travel through Thailand until I finally headed back home to Germany in April 2026 with a fulfilled heart, having had countless new and unique experiences.

I feel very grateful to travel for eight months through Asia. I am so happy to have known about Servas and greatly appreciate all the beautiful moments I was able to experience thanks to it. I got to know so many kind people and found new family members on the other side of the world. Thanks to Servas!

Visit some of these hosts and countries if you ever have the chance!

I would be happy to help or host you near Frankfurt.
In Servas friendship,
Amélie

...



A Great 2025

By Ana-María Nacif

Sarmiento

In 2025, I was invited again to present my books at the International Book Fair in Buenos Aires, Argentina, where I sold many books and donated to the Children's Hospice; something I often do. On that trip I met a group of Servas members in Gonnet, a small city close to the Argentine capital. I've known most of these members for more than ten years. Coming back there again, we had a big meeting with "local Servas" and got to know each other.

During the summer, I hosted a Servas Canada couple before heading to Nordic countries. I then stayed with a couple in Copenhagen. In Helsinki, I was invited to take part in a hack lab by Servas member Otto M. Often Servas friends came to meet me at train stations.

Before coming back, I set foot in Italy, my beloved ancestors' country, and it was amazing to stay in four Italian cities hosted by very kind and fun people.

I was in Bergamo at the perfect time when the Italy Servas National Assembly was taking place. That was another

unforgettable experience – six people spoke about their time at SICOGA.

Many young Servas members also told of their travel experiences.

Every time I go abroad, I meet great people who are a pleasure to keep in touch with. The Servas community is so warm-hearted and amazing that it really feels like a big family.

Published books:

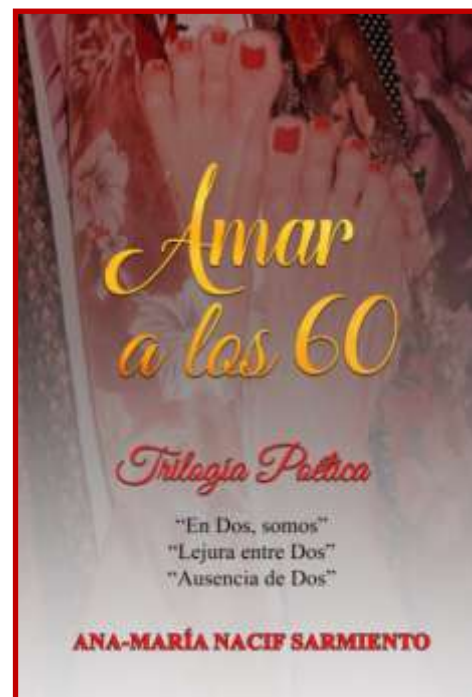
My Glance Within: My reflections on nature, trips, friendship, encouragement, freedom and consciousness

Sales:

https://mybook.to/MyGlance-Within_PaperBk

Amar a los 60 ~ *Trilogía Poética Completa (in Spanish).

Sales: https://mybook.to/AMARaLos60_PaperBk



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Japan 2026



By Ana M.

I am a passionate admirer of Japanese culture. Over the years, I took classes to learn how to make sushi and I met my husband at a sushi bar. In my artistic work, Japanese textiles and prints have always been important elements.

For months I planned this trip to Japan, seeking a deep immersion—one that would be as non-touristy as possible—visiting places that are not usually explored and staying in the homes of Servas members. Many of them had already stayed at my home in Buenos Aires over the years; others I knew from my previous trip to Japan, and there were also new hosts whom I loved meeting.

My journey was long and ambitious. It was a great challenge: I never stayed more than three days in the same place. Along the way I took many trains, buses and ferries, guided by Google Maps, personal recommendations and AI.

Photos:

Hiromi K and I cycling in Ueno Park

With Sue in Nagano eating wasabi ice cream



To prepare myself by watching thousands of videos, reading books and viewing documentaries... Japan is complex and wonderful. To truly experience it, some prior knowledge is necessary; otherwise, it can feel overwhelming and many important details go unnoticed.

All the food I ate was Japanese, and all the accommodations were in ryokan (a traditional Japanese inn). The exhaustion of walking all day, every day—combined with following countless tips, including products bought at convenience stores and pharmacies—made the journey quite an odyssey. I returned home after 33 hours on a plane, completely exhausted. I noticed a week later that my body had developed remarkable resilience: the jet lag disappeared and my energy returned.

My trip was fantastic. I want to go back—I still have so much to see in Japan. I couldn't have done it without Yamato Transport, which shipped my



luggage several times meaning I didn't have to carry it. Nor could I have done it without my Servas hosts, who were my allies throughout this adventure.

They communicated with each other before and after my visits, sending me perfectly organized schedules for taking trains. They understood that I didn't just want to visit museums—I also enjoyed going to supermarkets, walking along rivers, or simply observing how a dish was prepared.

And they were always so kind and thoughtful, with a way of being so different from mine, which I deeply respected.

So much love—that's what stays with me: a deep love for this country that seeks beauty and perfection in everything.

My deepest thanks to Yoshiko, Shigeko, Yoko, Sue, Yuko, Masumi and Shigeichi, Tomo, Taro, Jiro, Hiroko, Tomoko and Riho, Nobuko, and Tomoko H. I am very happy to have made this journey and that they were part of it.

Photos:

Previous page:
Masumi, Shigeichi,
Mayu and her
adorable daughter
eating temaki in
Nagoya

Tomoko H and
Hiroko W in Kyoto
[above]

Nobuko O in
Hozenji Temple,
Osaka [right]

...



War in Iran

By Khadijeh, Servas Iran

[Editor's Note: Some of the graphic descriptions have been removed. What remains is still quite moving. This is a much longer article than normal.]

When the war began on March 9, 2026, I was at work.

Suddenly, we heard several massive explosions. News quickly spread that Iran had been attacked.

At that exact moment, I was in the restroom because I was suffering from severe intestinal pain. I could hear the explosions and the terrified screams of my coworkers outside, but my pain was so intense that I could not leave

immediately. I remained there for several minutes, listening to the sounds of fear, panic and chaos around me.

Management ordered the company to shut down immediately because our office was located very close to military and sensitive areas.

Outside, it felt like the end of the world. People were running desperately toward metro stations or their cars, trying to reach safer places.

Near the company, I saw one of my coworkers—someone I had never been close to and usually tried to avoid. Yet in that moment, without even thinking, I looked at her and





simply said, "Take care of yourself."

War changes human emotions in strange ways.

There were also two schools near my workplace, and terrified parents were rushing toward them to pick up their children.

Although I have never considered myself afraid of war, explosions, or even death itself, seeing so many frightened people running for safety overwhelmed me emotionally. I felt a lump in my throat and wanted to cry.

I remember telling myself that I needed to stay calm and help others if I could. Then I noticed a young schoolgirl, perhaps 13

years old, leaning against a wall. She looked completely frozen with fear and was trembling uncontrollably. I immediately hugged her and took her inside a nearby shop. She was shaking, crying intensely, and repeatedly calling for her father. I held her trembling hands and told her, "Scream if you need to, cry, and say whatever you want. Let the fear out."

She clung to me tightly and continued sobbing. I asked for her father's phone number, but communication networks were unstable. After several attempts, I finally reached him. I told him that she was safe, but the streets were extremely

dangerous and crowded, and that he should not come into that area. I promised him that I would take his daughter by metro to a safer meeting point where he could pick her up by car.

In the following days, large numbers of people were trying to leave Tehran. I went toward one of the city's exit routes because I was searching for a car to help evacuate a mother and her young child.

The roads were filled with terrified people fleeing the capital. Cars moved slowly through endless traffic while car horns echoed constantly in the air. Faces looked exhausted, anxious and emotionally overwhelmed. One car passed near me with its windows rolled down. Inside, a woman was crying uncontrollably. I asked

her husband if one of their relatives had been killed. He replied, "No... but ever since we left home, she hasn't stopped crying."

Several families stopped their cars when they saw me standing alone and offered me a seat with them so I could leave Tehran safely. They said, "We have space for one more person. Come with us."

What struck me deeply was how people suddenly became kinder to strangers. I thanked them, but explained that I was searching for an empty car for a mother and her small son. I searched for hours, but I could not find transportation. Finally, I called the mother and told her, "Please don't panic. I'm coming back and we will find a solution together."

*none of the normal
social boundaries
seemed to matter*

Because almost no vehicles remained inside the city, for the first time in my life I got on the back of a motorcycle driven by a man I did not know. In Iran, this is still considered socially unusual for many women, but under those circumstances none of the normal social boundaries seemed to matter



anymore When I arrived, I went to check on the little boy. He was quietly playing with his cat and softly whispering to it “I’m sorry I bombed you... I’m sorry missiles hit you.” He repeated those words over and over.

I could not stop thinking about how a three-year-old child had already absorbed the language of war so quickly—probably from television, frightened adults, and phone conversations around him.

Later that night, with the help of an acquaintance, we finally managed to leave Tehran through the heavy traffic. We were carrying bags full of colorful snacks and junk food for the two children traveling with us. We tried to distract them from the smoke, the fear, the sirens and the panic surrounding us. One of the children happily said: “What a fun trip this is! I wish we could always eat chips, candy, and snacks like this.”

That sentence stayed in my mind for a long time.

Eventually we reached the north of Iran, which was considered relatively safe. We went back to my family’s ancestral village. Many relatives and families who had been living in dangerous areas had also returned to their



hometowns. For the first time in my life, I saw almost the entire extended family gathered together in one place.

Children filled the village streets, gardens, beaches and riverbanks. They were playing constantly, trying to turn fear into something that looked like an endless holiday.

One day, I asked a young child: “Would you like to stay here forever?”.

The child immediately replied, “No, no.”

I smiled and said: “But here you have forests, gardens, the sea, and no school. You can play all day.”

The child suddenly became quiet and emotional and answered: “I miss my toys. I’m worried about them.”



Then, after a pause, the child added: “If my toys come here too and my teacher comes and my mom and dad are here, then I would want to stay forever.”

That conversation stayed in my mind because it reminded me that for children, safety alone is not enough. Their world is built from emotional attachments— toys, routines, teachers, familiar spaces and the feeling that life is still normal. Because so many relatives had gathered together in the village, I naturally became responsible for much of the food preparation and daily shopping, so I spent a lot of time outside the house. One day, at a bakery, I noticed several unfamiliar women buying unusually large amounts of bread. I gave them my phone number. I said, “Please don’t

feel like strangers here. If you need anything, call me.”

They told me there was a pregnant woman among them. I gave them the address of an affordable fruit shop and also directed them to the local health center.

Since it was close to Nowruz, the Persian New Year, I mentioned that I also work in women’s hairstyling and beauty services. I told them that if they needed any help related to hairdressing or personal care, they could contact me anytime. During war and displacement, even small acts of care could ease a little of their emotional weight.

As the days passed, the conflict continued. My father owned a large citrus garden



with a small villa in another nearby village. He had offered the house to distant acquaintances who had escaped from Tehran and had nowhere safe to stay, so they could rest there for a few days and find some peace in nature.

Around that time, we heard that one of our neighbors from Tehran—a father of two young children, aged two and six — had been diagnosed with cancer and was in very poor condition. At my brother's suggestion, we invited the family to come to northern Iran and stay for a few days at my father's villa. Coincidentally, the day they arrived was also the father's birthday. We hesitated for a moment. Between war, fear, uncertainty and his illness, we did not know whether organizing a birthday

celebration was appropriate or meaningful at all, but, in the end, we decided that perhaps people need small moments of humanity during dark times.

With very little time to prepare, we organized a small surprise birthday celebration for him. We smiled, decorated the space as best we could and tried to create joy for the sick father and his two small children—even though deep inside, our hearts were heavy with sorrow and uncertainty. For a few brief hours, that small family of four laughed together instead of thinking about war, illness, displacement, and fear.

After the Nowruz holiday ended and the first ceasefire was announced, we returned to Tehran. It was time to return to work and daily life. During the



journey back, many children were asking their parents questions like *When will we go back to school? Or will we see ruined buildings?* As I walked through the streets, I noticed that the metro, buses and some forms of public transportation had temporarily become free. People seemed strangely emotional and grateful simply to see one another again. In workplaces, streets and neighborhoods, many were

trying to help each other in small ways.

One of my coworkers, who had remained in Tehran throughout the conflict, told me that they had tried to protect their young daughter from fear by telling her that the explosions were only fireworks. But one day, their seven-year-old daughter quietly said: “Mom, I know you are lying. Those are bombs and war sounds.”



Even after the ceasefire, fear continued living inside people's bodies.

One day at work, a door suddenly slammed shut with a loud noise because of the wind. Instantly, everyone in the room threw themselves under the desks for protection before realizing it was not another explosion.

It took many days before even we adults stopped reacting to every loud sound as if another attack had begun. Beyond the visible destruction, war leaves behind many invisible wounds.

From my personal observations, I noticed changes in women's physical and emotional wellbeing, especially among those visiting beauty and laser treatment centers during that period. In conversations with

people, I also heard repeated mentions and concerns about pregnancy complications and miscarriages among acquaintances.

Among elderly people, I noticed something else: many became unusually sensitive to ordinary daily sounds. A sudden loud sound could immediately trigger fear and panic.

These are the hidden scars of war—the psychological and emotional damage that often remains long after the explosions end. I hope that one day peace can exist everywhere in a world filled with dignity and compassion.

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Takenaka Travel Fund

By Yomiko Tomono, Former NS, Servas Japan



In 2023, Servas Japan started the Takenaka Fund to promote Servas travel, based on a generous donation made in 2019 by Mr. Kazuo Takenaka, a former Servas member, who, sadly, passed away shortly afterwards.

Mr. Takenaka-san travelled to many countries in his youth and found those experiences deeply meaningful. He hoped that young people could also experience this.

To honour his wishes, we decided to use the fund to support the activities of Servas Japan and to provide travel assistance to young people and individuals with disabilities, so they could experience Servas travel.

In the fall of 2023, a young man from Tokyo received the first such travel grant. He visited the United Kingdom, and he reported that he had a truly enjoyable time.

In 2024, other participants reported having a wonderful experience.

Here is a recent example...

Taiwan Experience

By Hikari Murashima

February 2026

Through Servas, on this trip, I was able to connect with wonderful hosts and friends in Taiwan and experience the local culture and warmth firsthand.

Photo: Ms Liu (in Taipei)



In Taipei, I met Ms Liu, who is fluent in Japanese and about my age. The conversation flowed so naturally that we spoke for about three hours. She currently works as a manager at a beauty salon, but she told me she used to work at an advertising agency. Since I also work in a creative field, we were able to deeply share the challenges and rewards of our jobs, making it a very meaningful time. I was also surprised by a cute shop she took me to, which had a carefully curated menu. Her comment really struck me.

“You wouldn’t know about local places like this without local knowledge, so Servas is great, isn’t it?”.

Photo: Sunny Wu (in Tainan)

After my stay in Taipei, I traveled to Tainan, where I had lived for six years. Although Sunny currently lives in Pingtung, she made a special trip all the way to Tainan to meet me. She had just joined Servas recently, and I was her first guest. On the day we met, the annual Lantern Festival—a Chinese New Year tradition—was taking place, so we strolled together along a path lined with glowing lanterns. It was a truly beautiful and unforgettable night.



While we were walking, we also found a gallery featuring beautiful works that looked like “hand-sewn ball bonsai”. I was drawn to the color sense in their work. When I asked them about it, the artist couple told me they used to work in graphic design and curate art exhibitions.

“the Taiwanese people truly warmed my heart”

When I expressed my regret that I couldn’t take the pieces back to Japan, they enthusiastically told me they wanted to “stay in Okinawa for about a month to create art” and gave me their business card. Experiencing the warmth and friendliness of the Taiwanese people truly warmed my heart.

Photo: Liting Yu and Jen-Yu Wen (in Tainan)

As we sipped tea and chatted leisurely at this couple's home, we gained insight into their diverse perspectives on life. Liting used to work as an engineer but now he is active as an investor. They learned about Servas on the radio and registered as hosts because they wanted to give back the kindness they had received during their own study abroad and world travels. It was fascinating to hear how, as valued hosts in Tainan, they now welcome travelers from all over the world almost every month. Liting's wife, Jen-Yu, works as an obstetrician and gynecologist. Although she had a busy day at work the next morning, she spoke of the deep sense of fulfillment she finds in "a job that allows me to witness people's moments of happiness."

The next morning, they made us a delicious traditional Taiwanese breakfast called *danbing* from scratch. They own a small boat at the harbour, and taking travelers out on it is a regular tradition. Although we couldn't do it this time due to a boat malfunction, they invited us, saying, "Please do come next time!" so I promised to visit again.

Photo: Liting cooking



Photo. Bonnie (Tainan, Old Friend)

“we never run out of things to talk about”

I also got to meet Bonnie, a friend from my time living in Tainan. Bonnie is fluent not only in Mandarin, Taiwanese, and English, but also in French and Vietnamese. She is incredibly curious, and whenever we're together, we never run out of things to talk about. She currently lives in Vietnam, but happily she was back in Tainan when I was there.

Through this trip to Taiwan, I was able to once again experience firsthand the Servas philosophy of “building bridges for peace”. The time we shared through deep conversations with local hosts, transcending language and national borders, is truly the essence of travel.

I will always treasure:

- The creative connection I felt with Ms Liu as we reminisced about our days in the advertising industry,
- the memorable Lantern Festival I experienced with Sunny, who had just joined the program,
- and the warm hospitality of the Yus along with the taste of their *danbing*.



In particular, having them guide me through the city from a local perspective allowed me to experience daily life in Taiwan, something you could never get from typical sightseeing. It was a wonderful trip that reaffirmed the importance of human warmth and connection.

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Oceania: Community, Nature, and Human Connection

By Vipul S., Servas India, April 2026

What if the most meaningful part of travel isn't the places you visit, but the people who invite you into their everyday lives?

Over six weeks, I travelled across Oceania, seeing: ancient forests, bird sanctuaries, rugged mountains and quiet coastlines. But what made this journey truly memorable were the Servas hosts. This was a journey into the heart of human connection.

Walking Through Forests, Walking Into Friendship

In Auckland, I met up with Deborah, a psychotherapist. >

As fellow therapists, we quickly found common ground. bush-walking and talking, about psychotherapy, cultural differences, and shared professional interests.

Deborah, with over thirty years of clinical experience, carried a grounded wisdom that I deeply appreciated. I was especially intrigued to learn how Māori practices and indigenous wisdom are increasingly being



integrated into mental health training and public health systems in New Zealand.

This was one of my first glimpses into something I would notice repeatedly throughout the country: a sincere effort to honour indigenous knowledge and weave it into modern systems of care.

New Zealand: Where Ecology Feels Personal

In Wellington, I stayed with Paul and Gaylene, retired teachers and founders of a Waldorf [independent, holistic] school.

Their home reflected a life of intention—with a thriving organic vegetable garden and a quiet sense of harmony.

Gaylene, also a mindfulness teacher, introduced me to a contemplative writing practice called *seminaria* combining mindfulness with poetry and reflective expression—something that felt deeply aligned with my own interests.

Paul later took me to visit Zealandia, a remarkable urban sanctuary protecting native birds and wildlife.

I was deeply inspired by the ecological consciousness I encountered across New Zealand. Conservation here is personal, lived, and collective.

Tasmania: Stories of Activism and Belonging

I met Amanda, who shared stories of Tasmania's environmental history, along with maps, postcards, books and reflections from her own activism. Through her, I learned about the historic campaign to stop the damming of the Franklin River—a movement



that helped shape Australia's environmental consciousness.

Amanda had herself been involved in environmental activism, including the campaign that helped protect the river.

She took me hiking around Kunanyi / Mount Wellington. Amanda recommended the film *Lion*—the moving true story of



an Indian boy adopted by a Tasmanian family.

Castlemaine: Community in Unexpected Places

In Castlemaine, my host Jane D. introduced me to a side of Australia I would never have discovered as a regular tourist.

She took me to visit a local Men's Shed—part of a global movement where men gather in community spaces to connect, work on practical projects, learn skills and support one another's wellbeing.

At a time when loneliness, mental health struggles and disconnection are increasingly common, the Men's Shed movement felt both practical and deeply humane. <https://menshed.com/>

Jane also introduced me to Roger Mckindley, an artist and gardener living off grid in a remote natural setting.

Roger has transformed what was once effectively a dump yard into an artistic sanctuary filled with sculptures made from discarded iron and

reclaimed materials. His home, earthy and minimal, reflected a life of profound simplicity and intentionality.

Two things he said stayed with me:

“With the power of love, one can transform anything.”

And:

“When one deeply cares for something, one can always find the time, energy and resources to protect it.”

I offered him the saffron yoga T-shirt I was wearing from



Kaivalyadhama, one of India's oldest yoga institutions. Given his affection for India, the gesture felt meaningful.

Music, Forest Living, and an Interfaith Stupa

My final hosts were Nita and Aaron, an Indonesian-Australian couple living off-the-grid in a forest outside Bendigo.

Musicians immersed in Indonesian music and dance, they

The place felt like a quiet symbol of the trip itself: different cultures, beliefs, and traditions coexisting in mutual respect.

This Trip Left Me With

This journey reminded me that travel, at its best, is not consumption—it is relationship.

Through Servas, I was invited into homes, gardens, schools, forests, kitchens and conversations. I encountered not only landscapes, but values: ecological stewardship, intergenerational living, mindfulness, simplicity, creativity, activism and hospitality.

Across six weeks, this journey reaffirmed something:

There are no strangers—only friends waiting to be discovered.

I returned home grateful—to my hosts, to Servas, and to the many quiet moments that made this journey unforgettable.

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welcomed me with immediate warmth—taking me hiking, sharing meals, introducing me to gamelan instruments, and inviting friends for dinner.

They also brought me to the Great Stupa of Universal Compassion, a vast Buddhist stupa surrounded by an interfaith peace park.



Peace Day in Montreal

By Suzie Bogos, Servas Canada Peace Secretary



Under glorious blue sunny skies, Servas members gathered to celebrate International Peace Day at the amazing Mount Royal Park.

Starting at 2pm on a flat area overlooking the city, about 30 Servas members joined the Danse de la Paix organized by the Mouvement Paix. Accompanied by live musicians, participants were guided through various symbolic movements. From there, our energized group walked to Beaver Lake where we held our own intimate and meaningful event.

I spoke about our concerns for peace and our commitment to achieve our goals through local actions. Then Alexa Bailey a student at McGill University [in Montreal] shared her experience from the Servas Peace school in Turkey last summer. With her youthful enthusiasm, Alexa convinced a few members to join a peace school. My husband Vikram then introduced and recited the Servas song.



Finally, Diego, a world-renowned artist, had prepared symbols of peace which he had drawn on small squares of biodegradable paper. Each one of us wrote a wish on the square: we could either keep it or deposit it in the lake where we watched it magically dissolve. A graceful and heartwarming moment!

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What a Gentle Friendly Country



By Dafi G, Servas Canada

During our month in Japan we were honoured to be hosted at four different Servas homes.

It made a big difference that we could stay three nights to get to know the Japanese way of living better, and not have to move every second day.

It would have been nice to meet more hosts but few can accommodate two guests, so we stayed mostly in conventional hotels. Alternately we rented small apartments that allowed us to prepare food in small kitchens.

Don't hesitate to take your host out for a meal, it is much appreciated and gives an opportunity for good chat with the hosts.



We registered and attended a few hours of a “youth conference” in Kyoto where only three young women attended. The rest of us (eight people) were over 50. We had a chance to

wear a kimono and participate in the famous tea ceremony.

For travel in Japan you must have a working phone (or get a Japanese Sim card, about Y3000 a month) for contacting people and getting data for



transportation. To reach one host, we took two trains, a subway and a bus—but this is considered as one trip costing only ¥400. Some hosts met us at the train station or bus stop, which was a bonus.

Regular trains are cheap and frequent. Local rides are ¥200-¥400. The bullet train—Shinkansen—is not cheap: ¥14,000 from Tokyo to Kyoto with reserved tickets and a seat, but it cuts a 10-hour trip to 2.5 hours.

We found the best way to travel is to get a SUICA card at the airport or in town. Load it (using cash or credit) easily in every station or the many convenience shops [e.g. 7/11] as

needed. Use it for trains, subways, buses, ferry boats, even to buy things in shops. [Exception: bullet trains]

We enjoyed meals where locals eat (between ¥800 to ¥1500 if you avoid red meat.) In very touristy places things cost more. Cabbage, noodles and onion are in most dishes. Free cold water is available in every restaurant.

Curiously there are toilets everywhere in public places, which are clean, with heated seats, and a bidet with a staggering number of options, but no trash cans anywhere. No paper towels either — women always carry a small towel to dry hands. No graffiti anywhere.

Hurray for Google maps, it was our biggest help. It shows how, where and when to get to anywhere. Count on travel taking more time than Google maps estimates. Train stations are huge and confusing at times, one can have 10 exits, and you may need to use lots of stairs or spend time looking for escalators or elevators. Traveling is much easier with a carry-on size bag.



Cash is king in Japan, so always have enough in your pocket. At 7/11 shops you can find anything one needs including cash machines and good, prepared meals.

Japan is a very safe country. I saw a wallet hanging on a fence of a parking lot. A few years ago, 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. In the front of shops, you can find big transparent umbrellas to borrow if needed on rainy days. Japanese people are very respectful and try to help even if English is hard for them; we used Google translate. Despite the crowds I was never bumped by anyone.

Hopefully the young Servas generation in this wonderful country will grow.

Arigato.

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South East Asia: Chapter 2: Indonesia

A little about us

Tatjana from Berlin and **Debbie** from England met two years ago through Servas.

We decided to travel together to Malaysia, Thailand and Japan.

We have summarised the Servas highlights. This is our second “chapter”.

#2: Indonesia/Sumatra (26 Feb. - 13 March, 2025)

Luckily one of us, Tatjana, had a friend, Efrieda who lives in Samosir on Lake Toba in Indonesia.. Efrieda was not a Servas member but enrolled before we left.

Samosir is a large island in Lake Toba which was formed 75,000 years ago by a massive volcanic eruption and that's where we were heading.

It was lovely to see Tatjana meet her friend after almost ten years. The home facilities were basic. We were given a room to ourselves with a bed. The rest of the family slept on mats on the floor in the main living area.

There is no running water; water comes into a cistern in the bathroom from a stream (if it's been raining); washing is done in the lake. There is electricity and they have gas for cooking.

Efrieda's family are Batak, which is an ethnic group thought to have moved to the area from Taiwan via the Philippines some 2,500 years ago.

Efrieda has three pigs, lots of chickens and a variety of fruit trees including, avocado, coffee, durian, cacao, snake fruit, turmeric, ginger, maize, chillies and cassava.



Photo: Efrieda's pigs

All the time we were serenaded by cicadas.

We went to see Efrieda's mum at the market.



We went by motorcycle sidecar (a sort of local taxi). The market was an amazing sight; all the traders with their food piled up on display.

Photo: Batak House

During our stay we had the opportunity to see traditional Batak houses.

They are extraordinary wooden structures, originally made with no nails. The original would have had a shingle roof or palm leaf thatch ...the modern equivalent uses corrugated steel. The houses are airy inside and quite cool compared to outside. They

come in various sizes and nowadays have an extension on the back. Traditionally a group of families would live in one house, and some buildings were for storing rice.

We also visited Efrieda's brother Heri on several occasions. He runs a camping site and organic farm. We helped him a little by weeding his pineapples and staking chilies. We became expert garlic peelers for our supper!

On another occasion we helped harvest the maize [corn] and then Tatjana suggested we do a



litter pick up and get the young children to help.

Unfortunately, there is insufficient refuse collection, so much of it gets burned on the farms or just lies in the countryside forever.

We were invited to go to church, so we borrowed some suitable clothing from Efrieda's mother.

We were also invited to a pregnancy celebration where Tatjana gave an impromptu blessing in Indonesian, thinking on her feet!

At this event I tried to chew betel nuts, something the

women partake of here, but it was disgusting and I spat it out within seconds.

Photo: Food preparation for the guests

After this we also ended up at a wedding but we didn't realise it was until about halfway through the event.

We did so many things with Efrieda including a drive around the island, a thermal bath that was so hot it had to be cooled with spring water! She even accompanied us when we visited the Gunung Leuser National Park almost a day away from Samosir. Here we saw Orangutan and other wildlife. We spent one night camping in the jungle and encountered our least favourite animals, leeches!

Efrieda and Sumatra were definitely a high point in our journey. Then as planned we went to Thailand. [Stay tuned for that chapter in the next newsletter.]

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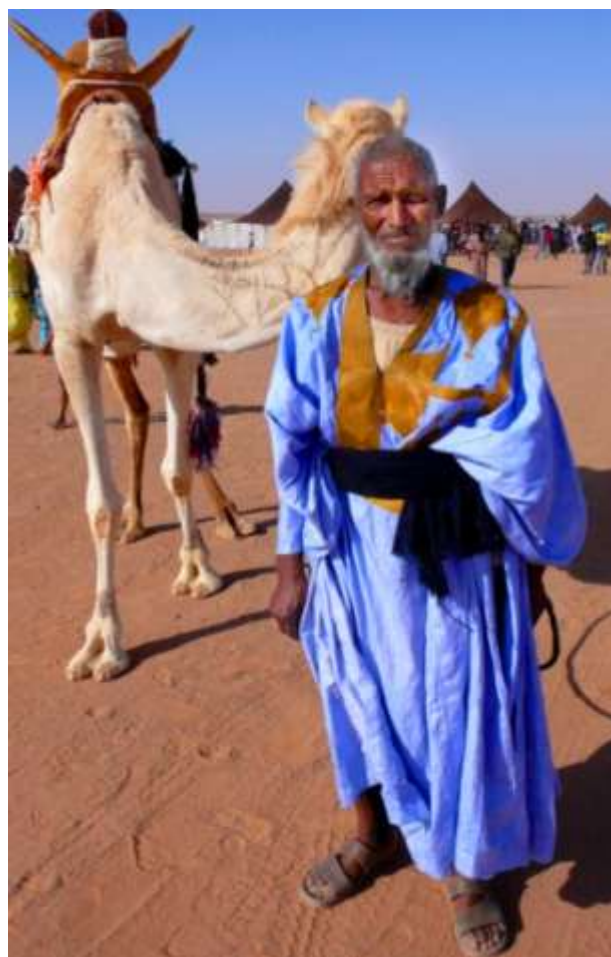
A UN Visit Changed My Life

By Ingrid Pedersen, Denmark

In the late 1970s' I stayed with Reva King a Servas host in New York City. At that time, she represented Servas in the UN. She invited me to an NGO Forum. There I spoke with Gail Lerner from a Christian Lutheran organization. At that time, the UN was planning the second summit on Women, which took place in Copenhagen in 1980, and Gail was looking for accommodation for three women from *Polisario*, a movement that was (and is) struggling against the Moroccan occupation of Western Sahara. I offered them to stay with me in central Copenhagen. And they did.

It was a true eye-opener for me to become so close to a people's struggle for their independence. Western Sahara, which was a Spanish colony, was not decolonized along with the rest of the former colonies despite promises from the UN and plans for a referendum so the Sahrawis could decide their own future. Neighboring Morocco took over the country and is still occupying it. The Sahrawis fled into the desert and later formed a refugee camp in Algeria, where most of them still live.

The women participating in the UN summit in 1980 stayed with me, as the hotels in Copenhagen were too expensive. A couple of years later, I went to the refugee camp in Algeria, to which some of the Sahrawis fled. I went to do research for my project when I graduated in Journalism.



One time years later, when it was possible to visit the occupied territory, I visited a Servas family there. They had not fled, but the family asked me not to write about them in my articles. So, I respected their wish.

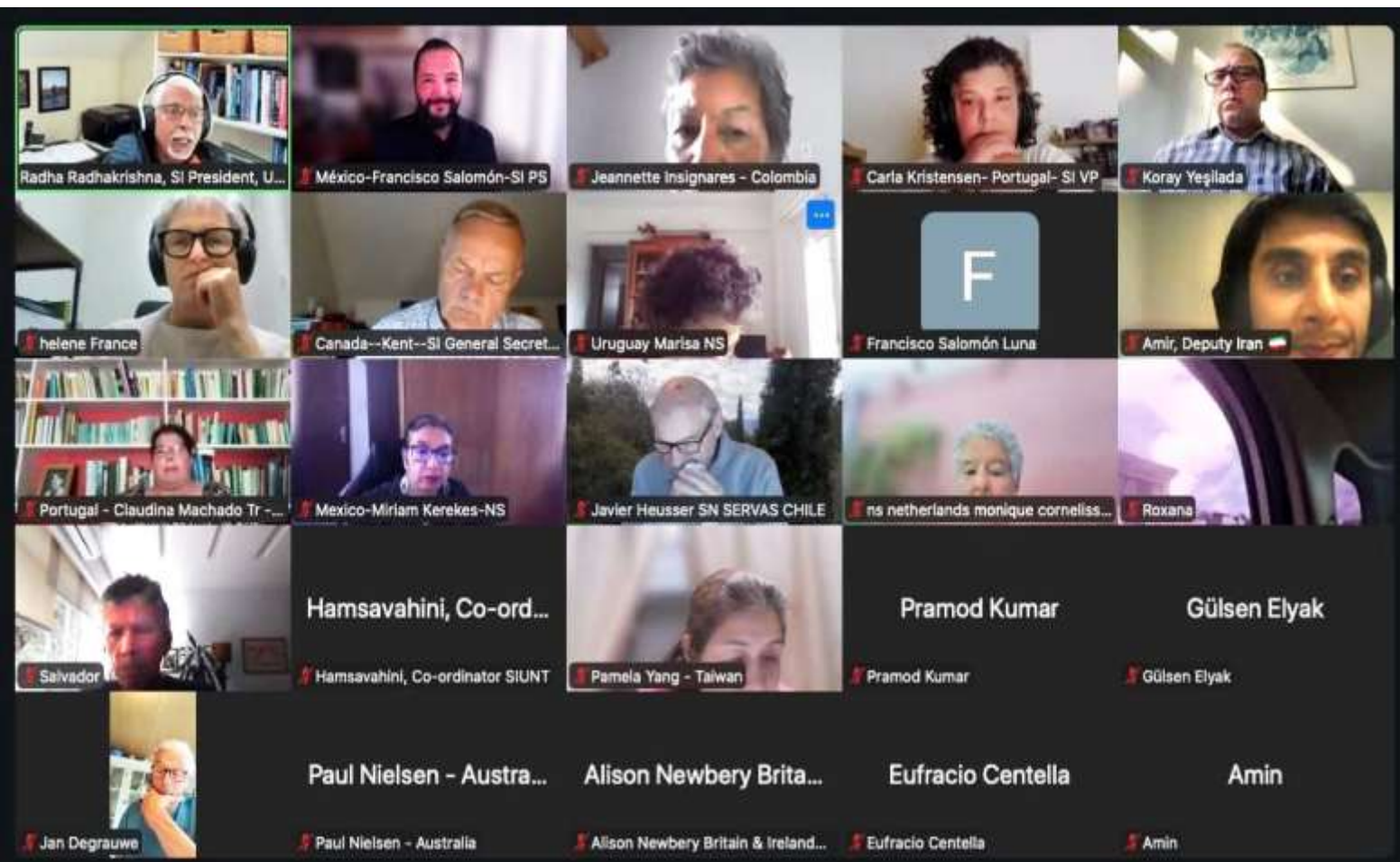
I have written many articles for Danish media over the years, and I keep in contact with the Sahrawis. I would never have heard of the occupation of Western Sahara if Reva King hadn't invited me to a meeting in the UN.

If you want to follow the Sahrawis' ongoing struggle for independence, you can read more at: <https://wsrw.org/>

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SI Zoom Meetings (31 May 2026)

By Carla, SI Vice-President and Radha, SI President



On May 31 2026, the Servas international executive committee, or SI Exco, held an inspiring online meeting with national secretaries, key people and members of various Servas international committees and teams. This was the first gathering of its kind since SICOGA2025, and provided a valuable opportunity to reconnect, exchange ideas and reflect on one of the core pillars of Servas ... hosting and traveling.

The meeting was held in two time slots to allow worldwide participation. It generated lively discussion and a rich exchange of experiences, perspectives, suggestions and concerns. Participants shared innovative ideas, highlighted current challenges and explored ways to strengthen and revitalize hosting and traveling within our global community. We are deeply grateful to everyone who took part and contributed their time energy and insights. Together, we continue building a stronger, more connected and more welcoming Servas for the future.

Hosting Challenges

The main concerns centered on the low response rates from hosts to traveler requests, with some reports indicating less than 50% response rates, which was identified as a failure to strengthen the "open doors" philosophy of Servas International. The problem was particularly acute in large cities. Participants in the two meetings shared various solutions including:

- > implementing an etiquette code for members,
- > creating automated tracking systems for host responses,
- > establishing clearer expectations in host profiles, and
- > forming local WhatsApp groups to share hosting burdens among members.

Additional ideas in the second meeting included:

- > setting up automatic follow-up systems after 5 days,
- > better host education during the onboarding process, and
- > regional coordination to help travelers find alternate hosts.

Executive Update

The meeting also covered updates from various committees, with reports on recent activities and ongoing projects.

Announcements

Radha announced the need for additional members for the Servaa Statutes and Rules Committee, as well as the deadline for submitting motions for the November Distant Vote.

IDEAS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Meeting on 31 May 2026

National Secretaries

1. DEADLINE 31 JUL 2026 – Present any new motions for Distant Vote in November 2026 by this date.

2. DEADLINE 30 SEP 2026 – Nominate members for Servas Statutes Review Committee for election in the Distant Vote in November 2026 by this date.

Technology Teams

1. DEADLINE 31 DEC 2026 – Development of new Servas Online communications and travel planner platforms, including monitoring travel requests and tracking host response rates where technically and ethically feasible.

2. DEADLINE ASAP – Work with Admins with processing membership applications, so that all applications are responded to within a week. Consider organizing a Zoom meeting for application administrators to ensure

consistent support, education, and monitoring of interviewers in all countries.

All Admins (DEADLINE ASAP)

1. Educating hosts:

Set up interview protocols for educating hosts on (a) proper etiquette on receiving travel requests (i) Respond to all requests with 48 to 72 hours, (ii) If unable to host how to suggest alternatives to the guest; (b) To post clear expectations of travelers in their host profiles, including the best way to reach the host. (c) Invite non-members to meals when a Servas traveler visits, to enable them to better understand the Servas experience.

2. Profile Confirmation:

Encourage members to confirm and update their profiles annually, including adding photos and clear expectations in their host profiles.

3. Local WhatsApp groups:

Consider establishing or promoting local/regional WhatsApp or social media groups to facilitate host coordination and sharing of guest requests. Consider creating a local/national forum to share successful hosting and membership growth stories, especially targeting youth and underrepresented groups

4. Membership application processing time:

Ensure that all membership applications received are processed within a week of receipt.

5. Events information dissemination:

Share international event announcements within their respective groups within 24 hours of receipt to increase member participation.

6. Organize events – such as camps, regional meetings to create community and attract new members

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Youth and Families Camp in Portugal

August 17-23

The Youth and Families Camp offers a unique programme that combines outdoor adventure, intercultural learning, peacebuilding and community engagement in one of Portugal's most distinctive coastal regions.

Taking full advantage of its beachfront location in Apúlia, the camp includes water-based activities in the Atlantic Ocean and on the River Cávado, such as surfing, kayaking and stand-up paddleboarding.

Participants will also discover Apúlia's unique heritage, where the traditions of the sea and agriculture have shaped local life for centuries.

Just a short distance away, the historic city of Braga, with more than 2,000 years of history, will be explored through a scavenger hunt.

With participants from different countries, the camp provides a rich intercultural experience through creative workshops, music, dance, storytelling and games. In addition, group activities on human rights, peace and global citizenship will encourage dialogue, cooperation and mutual understanding.

A key feature of the camp is its commitment to leaving a positive impact on both the local community and the environment. In this sense, it offers meaningful opportunities for exchange between participants and local residents of all ages. Participants will also take part in an environ-



mental action to control invasive plants in the dune area, helping to protect this valuable coastal ecosystem.

The Youth and Families Camp is an opportunity to learn, have fun, build friendships and make a positive impact while contributing to a more peaceful, inclusive and sustainable world.

Sign up at:

<https://event.servas.org.uk/event/8/youth-families-peace-camp>

See you soon in Apúlia!

Alice Delerue Matos,
National Secretary of
Servas Portugal

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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: Hélène Périn & her team,
plus Cynthia Granados Posada & Luis Miguel Avendaño Barbero

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 2025 — 2028

President: Radha Radhakrishna president@servas.org

Vice-President: Carla Kristensen vicepresident@servas.org

Treasurer: Gülşen Elyak treasurer@servas.org

General Secretary: Kent Macaulay generalsecretary@servas.org

Membership & Technology Secretary: Paul Nielsen mts@servas.org

Peace Secretary: Francisco Salomón Luna Aburto peacesecretary@servas.org

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



Kent Macaulay



Gülşen Elyak



Francisco Salomón Luna



Mei Wang



Paul Nielsen