



# Amigo

Number 9 — June 2025

Servas France members' magazine

BeW... FarmShowers • ASF  
Route... SIGHT • Pasporta Servo  
CouchS... Come To My Garden • Amikumu  
Co... doCyclo • Les Amis de la Nature  
A... postelle • Trustsroots • Sleepy Bike  
N... cyclo • Greeters • Cyclo Accueil Cyclo  
• International Greeters • Route des stages ...



- 2 Editor's Note  
The "Folle Journée" of the Servas members in Nantes
- 3 In Port de Bouc, our first Conferences

4-9, 12 **Associations  
with similar values  
to Servas**

- 10 My SYLE experience in France
- 11 SICOGA, Episode 2 : half way through
- 12 The Readers' Corner





## EDITOR'S NOTE

### An invitation to discover other ways of practising hospitality

Servas may be one of the oldest associations offering a free welcome to strangers, but there are other organisations that do the same. Who are they?

In this issue, many of us write about our experiences in associations such as *WarmShowers*, *BeWelcome*, the *SEL Route*, *Les Amis de la nature* and *Pasporta Servo* to name but a few.

These are other ways of meeting travellers and, in any case, of cultivating peace, because sharing and tolerance are always the order of the day.

You'll also find out about the amazing preparatory work done by the team organising the next SICOGA (Servas International Conference and General Assembly) in Dijon, and you'll read about our first Servas France «Conference» in Port de Bouc which was a real success.

Let's continue to open our doors and our hearts to travellers, whether they're like us or not.

**amiGo**

## THE "FOLLE JOURNÉE" OF THE SERVAS MEMBERS IN NANTES

To mark the occasion of the 'Folle Journée de Nantes' classical music festival, the Servas of the Pays de la Loire region and their friends got together to welcome some sixty Servas visitors from all over France for the five days of the festival.



As well as the individual selection of concerts from the 270 on offer at the festival, the participants were able to take advantage of tours of the city and its past, prepared and offered by Hélène and Pascal: the discovery of Trentemoult, the old fishing village on the Loire; the history of the Loire docks and the old shipyards; a walk from the belvederes to the Jardin extraordinaire; the history of the port city of Nantes and its slave trade and colonial past.

Over eighty people took part in the event, which included a shared meal, followed by a screening of Agnès Varda's film 'Jacquot de Nantes' at a local community cinema. The film tells the story of her partner Jacques Demy, a local boy and champion of the musical.

And, of course, there were also the welcomes from the guests in each home, which, as always, were moments of sharing and rich encounters.

It was certainly a rich and dynamic experience, and one that should certainly be repeated... and spread!

The organization team  
Annick G., Dominique C., Hélène B., Pascal R.  
Pays-de-la-Loire

# In Port de Bouc, our very first Conference<sup>(1)</sup>

From 19 to 21 April, the first Conference of Servas France was held in Port de Bouc, near Marseille, with presentations and discussions on our issues, but not only that. For those who had arrived the day before, there was a film followed by a debate on an Italian village which, as an act of resistance, welcomes migrants. On Saturday, a round table discussion on the theme of hospitality hosted representatives from the Hôtel du Nord cooperative in Marseille. The workshops and visits were varied... The whole event was rich, instructive and harmonious. A big well done to the whole preparation team!

The first Conference of Servas France followed the change in the procedure for adopting reports decided last year in Blois. A representative of Servas Spain was present. The proposed format was much appreciated, and the hard work of the preparation group bore fruit.

## Spreading the word about Servas

Word of mouth is still by far the main way people find out about Servas, but 14% of the new members found out about Servas via its website, at trade fairs/exhibitions or through the media. So we're continuing our efforts to raise awareness of our fantastic association.



Round-table on hospitality with Hôtel du Nord

Servas meetings are very popular. Those taking place 'just about everywhere in the world' are listed in a forum on the French Servas site. Servas members from various European countries who have been members for less than three years were interviewed: most have taken part in Servas meetings, especially regional ones, and many would like to see more. The Servas France youth group communicates on Whatsapp and Tiktok and continues to hold regional, national and international meetings.

## Servas France wants to get younger!

Most of our members are over sixty. Rejuvenating our membership is an important issue for the long-term survival of the association. It started in 2024... The number of members under 30 has increased, as has the number under 40. How can we attract young people? How can we make them stay? These questions were the subject of a workshop at the Conference and will continue to be our focus for some time to come...

## Servas France's international involvement

In addition to organising Sicoga in Dijon in October 2025, Servas France is putting forward two motions. The first aims to reorganise the wording of Servas International's articles of association with a clear definition of who we are: 'an international network of hosts and travellers with a global and long-term vision of a peaceful world'. The second is to allocate part of Servas International's (substantial) financial reserves to project funding.<sup>(2)</sup>

## A round-table discussion on hospitality

Two representatives of the Hôtel du Nord cooperative in Marseille, Prosper Wanner and Agnès Mazzoco, and a representative of Servas, Françoise Lacanal, took part in the discussion. The cooperative aims to promote humane accommodation in the northern districts of Marseille. Its network of hosts includes professional organisations and private individuals. A third of overnight stays are not on the market. HDN does not just cater for tourists. It is also involved in neighbourhood life, working to enhance the local heritage, among other things.

Françoise explains that Servas is all about meeting people. This requires more availability than

hospitality: "Opening our door to the Servas member who visits us is a small miracle. This openness is possible because we are certain of sharing our values of peace and openness to others. The interview that takes place when people join our network makes a major contribution to this."

The common basis of our two organisations could be summed up as **'turning the stranger into a friend'**.

(1) Until now, Servas France organised an Annual General Meeting  
(2) This second motion was not retained by EXCO





# Associations with similar values to Servas

## Our experiences of different hospitality organisations

We have been members of Servas since 2003, **Warmshowers** since 2005 and **Be Welcome** for 2 years, on the advice of Servas members we have met..

With **WarmShowers**, we get a lot of requests (ten times a year) and we've had a lot of visitors. It's a cyclists' network and we're just 50m from the Vélofrancette greenway and 5kms from the Vélomaritime. We generally turn down requests for the same day or when there are too many in quick succession. We're not too particular about who we welcome, because we want to be of service.

Putting ourselves in the shoes of the cyclists who are tired from their day, we are not too demanding and offer the services we like to find, in particular good meals and the possibility of washing their clothes. Some of the people we meet are really nice, and if they are, we give them a Servas card!

We welcomed a family with 3 children on holiday, another family of 5 on a round-the-world trip, 2 young Englishwomen cycling to Singapore, an American couple carrying a heavy load who bumped into a Belgian travelling with only a small piece of luggage ; they exchanged tips and maps over dinner. Lots of them are in their thirties looking for a new direction in their lives, and independent young women who are afraid of nothing.

The most memorable meeting was when we welcomed 7 eco-minded Irish people who were going to Cop 21 in Paris and wanted to meet people to raise awareness of ecology or debate. We invited a few friends for an evening discussion, which ended with them singing. Great fun!

We also used this network a lot, which we joined free of charge at the time, during our cycling trips: as there are so many people (185,000 members worldwide), it's pretty easy to find people. The description of life paths and interests on the profiles and the fact that there are reviews on the site sometimes help us to choose. We prefer hosts or travellers who seem to have an interest in meeting people and not just in providing accommodation. As travellers, we have appreciated that some people show us around their town or give us advice on itineraries.

Finally, this network means that the average age of the people we meet is much younger, and these intergenerational links are a real pleasure!

**BeWelcome** seems attractive at first glance: free, with 200,000 members, it's a very functional site. But we didn't find any hosts on our travels. And we turned down several requests that were purely utilitarian or with profiles that we felt were too marginal. On the other hand, last year we welcomed 4 girlfriends in their forties, all cyclists, with whom we had some fantastic discussions and kept in touch. Of course, we told them about Servas!

### What should we remember?

We always give priority to finding Servas hosts and welcoming them if we have requests: the meeting is longer, often genuine and almost always warmer; the fact of sharing values and the feeling of being 'part of the family' means that you immediately feel confident and the quality of the encounters is rarely disappointing. Real friendships have been made with Servas! The problem is that there aren't enough of us to find hosts every time we travel, and we only get 2-3 requests for hospitality a year. So as we're keen to meet new people, the 2 other networks complement each other! And when we receive guests, we welcome them all in the same way: Servas style!

Brigitte and Marco L.  
Normandie



*A French family of Warmshowers leaving for a European tour*

# La Route des SEL, SUPPORTIVE housing

**L**a Route des SEL is an association whose aim is to encourage meetings between SEL members using their accommodation facilities.

As a reminder, the **SEL** or **Local Exchange System** is an alternative exchange system to the traditional monetary and economic system that brings together people who exchange goods and services, without any commercial concerns and using a symbolic currency such as grains of salt, truffles, pesquits...

You can ask for emergency accommodation or accommodation while travelling.

You can also offer your accommodation for house-sitting, or even a home exchange.

Members offer all kinds of short- and medium-term accommodation, from a spare room or sofa in the living room to a pitch for a tent, as well as bed and breakfast and even the use of their house, caravan or boat...

The aim is to move away from a commercial system and enter a chain of solidarity, sharing, meeting and conviviality.

In 2024, the Route des Sel had around 1,500 members, mainly in France, but also in Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland and, at present, one in Canada and one in Italy.

It is based on 'a commitment to trust, openness and dialogue; it's a state of mind'. Like SEL, it is based on a charter.

Every year, there are meetings of the collegial councils to exchange ideas and, if necessary, update the way things work. There is a quarterly newsletter, "Parchemins", which publishes, among other things, personal accounts of the experience of welcoming newcomers.

## **As far as we're concerned, we've been "Routoselistes" for about ten years.**

Here are some of the latest exchanges we've had:

- We were hosted during a stay in Burgundy in 2019 by Bernadette and her partner, and we're still in touch.
- In 2021, we hosted Nathacha and Julien, both comedians, who also live in Burgundy, for several days and who gave our neighbourhood a show to thank us. We've also been to their house and they came back last year too.

- In 2022 Anne-Pascale came from Belgium to do house-sitting for 3 weeks. It was another great experience. She invited us to stay with her.



Routoselistes, Brigitte and Didier L.C

And from time to time, to join our family on one side of France or the other, we stop off for a shared meal and an evening at the homes of other "routoselistes". The encounters are more ephemeral, but nonetheless warm. And some of the encounters are quite improbable! *'If you are different from me, far from harming me, you enrich me'* as St Exupéry wrote. The conviviality and sharing of the Route des Sel is an ever-new source of richness, and, as in Servas, a real drive to reach out to others.

Brigitte and Didier L.C.  
Western Occitania

### Requirements:

- Be a member of a Local Exchange System (LETS) for at least 6 months
- Offer accommodation





# Discovering Hospitality Networks: From Esperanto to Servas

Hello, Servas members!

In the past, I was lucky enough to travel around Europe with my children, meeting families who spoke Esperanto, the language without borders, to help them discover other languages and other countries, in the most authentic way possible. Today, it's different: I travel alone and in an adapted vehicle. Here's my experience and my impressions of the hospitality networks I've discovered over the years.

**Pasporta Servo** (<https://www.pasportaservo.org>): For more than 30 years, my family and I have been using Pasporta Servo, a worldwide network that connects Esperanto speakers who want to stay with each other. Thanks to Pasporta Servo, we've never camped or stayed in a hotel with our children, we've always had personalised guided tours and a cool place for the baby to nap! We also always let Esperanto-speaking strangers have the key, because you have to be a bit of an idealist to believe in brotherhood between humans! Initially based on paper directories, this network is now accessible online. I can say that it is thanks to our visitors from all over the world, sometimes of four different nationalities in our little house, that my husband and three children have really progressed in Esperanto. However, some addresses may not be available, and it is advisable to send several requests at the same time. To optimise your chances, I advise you to contact local Esperanto groups. But there are also groups of Pasporta Servo members on all the social networks, which is very useful for updates, occasional help and, above all, for organising car pooling or "caravans", as we say in Esperanto, to go to events.

**Amikumu** (<https://www.amikumu.com>): Amikumu is a mobile application that connects language enthusiasts. Thanks to geolocation, you can meet native speakers or learners near you or when you're travelling. It's a great way to take a coffee break every two hours! Or during an incident on the Flixbus bus in Paris, where I ate with the President of Esperanto France. I also had a pleasant experience in Switzerland, with a 16-year-old Esperantist who spoke Esperanto, who invited me to stay with her parents, who had just returned from a trip to South America in a camper van. The app is free, but the community is small in some countries (e.g. Macedonia). Created by Esperantists, it allows you to speak over 7,000 languages, including Toki Pona!

**Servas**: during a trip through northern Italy, my son expressed his regret that all the families hosting us only spoke Esperanto, even though he was starting Italian at secondary school. That's how we discovered Servas, of which Aldo and Antonella were also members. What's more, Servas promotes peace! And to top it all off, 'Servas' means 'I serve' in Esperanto, if that doesn't make your mouth water...

Compared with other networks, **Servas** has the advantage of filtered access, which guarantees the quality of its hosts. Another advantage of Servas is its annual membership, which guarantees that the list of hosts is up to date.

**CouchSurfing** (<https://www.couchsurfing.com>): almost 30 years after the Pasporta Servo, CouchSurfing was born. It became very popular and I too used it, then left because of its increasing commercialisation and the introduction of a compulsory paying system. I preferred to turn to more community-based alternatives that respect the values of exchange and solidarity, such as BeWelcome, which has groups, a forum and, what's more, an interface in Esperanto!

**BeWelcome** (<https://www.bewelcome.org>): BeWelcome is a free, open platform, run by volunteers, multilingual and offering an alternative to commercial networks. The site is comprehensive, with attention paid to security, a rich community, a wiki and detailed profiles. It seems to me that more young people come via BeWelcome. They are open to the Servas spirit!

**Couchers.org** (<https://www.couchers.org>): created in response to the commercialisation of other platforms, Couchers.org is a non-profit network, built by volunteers, which supposedly soon has as many hosts as BeWelcome, although I've never hosted anyone. The site could not be more basic and is only in English, which doesn't offer much in the way of openness to the world. Given that 5% of the world's population are native English speakers and 5-10% have a bachelor's degree in English, you'd think that the bed and breakfast wouldn't be the best way to discover a less westernised world.

**WarmShowers** (<https://www.warmshowers.org>): as a Bretagne woman without a car, I used WarmShowers for tours in my region. WarmShowers is a worldwide community dedicated to cycle tourists. Hosts generally offer a place to sleep and a hot shower, hence the name of the network. A one-off contribution is required to join the platform, with the option of leaving a comment (which would force the potential grumpy person to close their profile to create another and pay for their membership again). There is now a paying application. The rule is to stay for one night only. Some people then cultivate the link by sending photos and postcards. Some come back later, just to see me again.

**DodoCyclo** (<https://www.dodocyclo.fr>): for those who prefer an unregulated alternative, DodoCyclo is a Facebook group dedicated to cycle tourists, with just a spreadsheet listing the addresses. Completely free (on FB, you're the product), this network contributes half and half with WS for my two-, three- and four-wheeled visitors (yes, a 4-wheeled recumbent tandem with solar panels all the way round!) The only downside, and a big one: I'm now boycotting Facebook for ethical reasons, and I'm not setting foot (or wheels) on it any more. As I'm not going to encourage you to continue using Facebook, I invite you to use the new site of the (controversial) founder of DodoCyclo.

**Héberge un cyclo:** Héberge un cyclo is also a Facebook group, with all the drawbacks that go with that: confidentiality issues and a lack of dedicated features. In any case, I don't use Facebook anymore.

**Sleepy Bike** (<https://sleepy.bike>): a modern, ethical alternative for cyclists is Sleepy Bike, a decentralised, open source network. Sleepy Bike is aligned with the values of sharing and independence, but is still in development.

**Welcome To My Garden** (<https://welcometomygarden.org>): I didn't appreciate the attitude of the cyclists I hosted via WTMG, who thought they were staying in a hotel and then preferred to eat alone in my garage. I immediately withdrew from this network.

**Cyclo Accueil Cyclo (CAC)** (<https://www.cyclo-camping.international>): an initiative of the Cyclo-Camping International association, the CAC offers a network of accommodation for members of the association. Here you'll find experienced cyclotourists who are very welcoming, in keeping with the "association" atmosphere! Many addresses in Brittany.



My first electically assisted recumbent tricycle with solar panels

**NomadSister** (<https://www.nomadsister.com>): for women travelling alone or with friends, NomadSister offers a network of accommodation exclusively for women. Membership is based on the same model as Warmshowers, and I've actually met two female cyclist who came via another network, and who introduced me to the platform.

**Trustroots** (<https://www.trustroots.org>): Trustroots has a fairly multilingual and open source platform, which means that its code is accessible and can be improved by the community. It is particularly well known among alternative travellers, cycle tourists and people committed to collaborative lifestyles. I haven't practised yet.

As far as alternative networks are concerned: I'm also part of the **SEL (Local Exchange System) Route**, a network based on the exchange of services and knowledge without money. However, I've never yet had the opportunity to host someone via this platform.

However, thanks to **la Route des Stages** (<https://www.route-des-stages.org>), I welcomed an atypical couple who helped me in my garden, a bit like WWOOFers (World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms) and left me with an incredible memory. The young man had been enslaved in Libya.

**The Global Greeters Network** (<https://internationalgreeter.org/fr>): in major cities, there is a worldwide host network, where local students offer to show travellers around their city free of charge. In other words, it's just a daytime service, with help finding a hotel, for example. I discovered this in South-East Asia, with some friendly tourism students who were visiting the Vietnam History Museum in Ho Chi Minh City for the umpteenth time, just for the pleasure of speaking French.

**SIGHT, Mensa programme** (<https://www.mensa.org/program-sight>): as a member of Mensa, an association for people with high IQs, I discovered SIGHT, the hosting network dedicated to hospitality between members. I've registered my profile there, but I have to admit that activity seems to be more intense in the big cities. As for me, I haven't yet had the opportunity to host anyone... Furthermore, since I've chosen not to fly any more, I'm happily leaving the big international cities behind, preferring to explore by bike and enjoy the nature we still have.

**Evolution of hospitality networks:** over decades, these networks have evolved from paper directories to online platforms that are supposed to be up to date. This digital transition has introduced new challenges, such as managing member security. But the spirit of trust and sharing has grown. People are carpooling and hospitality platforms are multiplying... On the other hand, I deplore the fact that pacifism is little known and the word is virtually absent from social networks.

**What about Servas?** Servas stands out as one of the oldest and most structured hospitality networks. Its recognition as an NGO by UNESCO attests to its commitment to peace, intercultural dialogue and education for global citizenship. Much more than a simple accommodation platform, Servas embodies humanist and fraternal values.

If you travel to meet people, not just to visit or find a free bed, if you are open to intercultural exchanges and the languages of the world, Servas is the network of choice. By supporting Servas, you are contributing to a more fraternal and peaceful world. And why not learn Esperanto so that you can exchange ideas with your hosts on an equal footing?

Françoise N.  
(esperanto teacher), Bretagne

(\*) In amiGo N°10, an article will present esperanto and its uses





## Bob Luitweiler and esperanto... Travelling with Pasporta servo

Yes, Bob Luitweiler learnt and taught Esperanto.

Like him, we also learnt this pacifist language... in 2004. Like him, we wanted to visit the world and above all meet and greet people. Like him, we have travelled and welcomed Esperantists: Vietnamese, Chinese, Brazilians, Russians, Hungarians, Americans, Togolese, Slovaks,

Czechs, Italians, Swiss, French, etc. We are members of [UEA \(Universala Esperanta Asocio\)](#) and [Pasporta servo \(www.pasportaservo.org\)](#), network of Esperantist hosts and travellers.

We only became aware of Servas late last year, through friends who we taught Esperanto to. Since then, of course, we've been members of Servas.



So we use both networks. The Pasporta servo network is very similar to Servas. Like Servas, it allows you to host or visit Esperantists around the world. The only requirement is that you speak Esperanto, and also that you are «samideano» (in agreement with the founding values of Esperanto, peace and respect).

We can't advise you enough to take a look at this beautiful pacifist solution. Esperanto has a strong presence on the internet, with free courses (ikurso). On the website in which we participate, [www.esperanto-vendee.fr](http://www.esperanto-vendee.fr), you'll find trips and encounters we've already made.

**Gis!**

Stéphane and Betty R.  
nicknamed *la frenezaj geavoj*  
(the crazy grand-parents)  
Pays-de-la-Loire



*Travelling in Togo*

## Friends of Nature



This international movement for social tourism and popular leisure activities was founded in Austria in 1895.

It has around 350,000 members in 45 countries, most of them in Europe.

In France, around a hundred independent local associations are grouped into twelve committees, and they all belong to the national federation, which is affiliated to the international movement.

The associations own collective holiday centres that welcome members and possibly non-members.

The partnership with SERVAS is just perfect. At Servas, we welcome strangers into our homes as if they were friends. Friends of Nature brings people together in pleasant places that they own to spend holidays together. In both cases, sharing values and meeting new people are central. In both associations, voluntary work is the basis of operations. Many retired people are active members. The members of a local group manage the association's premises, with a lot of improvement and maintenance work, linked to the fact that they own buildings and land. As a result, members of the local sections generally meet and get to know each other well.

The associations also offer events and training courses, as well as discussion papers, particularly on ecology. The use of their premises for SERVAS meetings could be an idea worth exploring.

Don't hesitate to visit their website [amis-nature.org](http://amis-nature.org) and find out more about their actions and commitments.

Every year I use a Friends of Nature centre in the Pyrenees to accommodate a group of 18 students that I accompany on hikes. Everyone is delighted with the place and the service, and no one is reluctant to clean up when they leave.

Loïc G., Pays-de-la-Loire



*Aderville Centre in the Pyrenees*





# AFS American Field Service

*As a member of SERVAS for several years, I would like to share my experience and knowledge of an association whose objectives are very close to those of Servas in its goals : AFS American Field Service (Vivre sans frontière in French)*

**AFS Vivre sans frontière** gives young people the opportunity to experience life abroad with a volunteer family over a long period, well beyond a language stay.

Thanks to this association, we welcomed 2 young people in 2007 and 2008 (2 months then 5 months) and Théo, one of our sons, went to Spain for 3 months. Pascal went on to become the Finistère referral volunteer for 10 years.

Two months with Maria Luisa, 17, from Costa Rica, five months with Adam, 16, from the USA... the time it takes for a teenager to get

*Adam's departure*



his bearings, understand cultural differences and accept them, in the same way as for us.

One unforgettable anecdote involved a young Japanese girl who was very reserved and unaccustomed to familiarity!

In her AFS host family, it was customary to say hello every morning with a kiss and to kiss visitors (visiting friends); in Japan this is not common, but this young woman accepted this local custom and, being alone at home that day, it was she who opened the door to the postman, who was surprised by a hello with a kiss!

Three months in Spain for our son Théo wasn't exactly 'exotic', but it made him mature at breakneck speed and completely changed his self-confidence.

*Contact us to speak of it!*

Jocelyne and Pascal P., Bretagne



## AFS and Servas : two very close associations

The history of AFS began during the First World War when American Field Service ambulance drivers helped the wounded on the battlefields. They returned to service during the Second World War.

After the war, in 1947, a distinction was made: Servas was aimed at adults and AFS at teenagers. The ideals were identical: to create a better, peaceful world by bringing people together.

Every year, AFS's international network <https://afs.fr/> enables almost 12,000 young people to discover another culture, by being hosted in a family on a voluntary basis, and by attending classes in a secondary school in the host country.

AFS VSF is recognised as a charitable organisation. In France, 900 volunteers, spread across 27 local associations, prepare 350 young people for this experience every year and look after the well-being of 400 hosted youth (AFS VSF offers grants to enable everyone to take part).

Liliane M., PACA-Corse



# My SYLE experience in France

*Servas members since last year, we responded to a request from Sigrid, a young Danish woman, to come and live with us for 2 weeks, as part of the SYLE program. We got on very well and were keen to meet Sigrid's family in Copenhagen in October 2024.*

*Since January 2025, Sigrid has been back home for 6 months, continuing to learn French and working at the same time.*

*Here is Sigrid's account of the experience.*

Yvelise L., Xavier G. and Léonie L.  
Nouvelle Aquitaine Nord

Travelling abroad isn't just about discovering new places: it's also about discovering new perspectives, connecting with people and understanding cultures on a deeper level. My SYLE trip to France was an eye-opening experience that taught me lessons far beyond the classroom.

My name is Sigrid. I'm originally from Denmark and I'm currently 20. I graduated last summer in Denmark and decided to take a gap year before going to university.

I'm lucky enough to come from a family that has always welcomed people from different parts of the world into our home. This has inspired me to look for opportunities to meet new people from different countries and backgrounds. I was looking for a way to be in France to learn more about the language and culture when my father told me about Servas. Through Servas, I discovered the SYLE programme. I then contacted Claude Basile, who helped me to find a host in France who was prepared to welcome me for a week or more. The hosts I contacted were quick to respond and eager to welcome me. I decided to buy an Interrail ticket, which allowed me to travel by train from Denmark to France and visit different families. I planned a six-week trip, staying with five different hosts in La Rochelle, Bordeaux (twice) and Angoulême.

I chose France as my destination mainly because I studied French for two years at school. Over time, I became fascinated not only by the language, but also by the culture. I found it interesting that, despite their geographical proximity, France and Denmark have very different cultures,

customs, traditions and daily lives. This became even more apparent when I stayed with the hosts. I saw more and more how different we are, but also how much we have in common. My knowledge of French culture grew, but I also learned more about Danish culture, the culture I grew up in. Conversations about culture have often made me more aware of my own cultural background while deepening my understanding of French culture.

sharing their lives and experiences with others. Of course, each family has its own constraints, as you enter into their daily lives, with work, school and often hectic schedules. But after my experience, I found that all the hosts made an effort to get to know me and connect with me. Even though some families were busier than others, I always sat down to dinner with them, which was a great way to become part of their daily routine. I also tried my hand at cooking French food and prepared Danish dishes for some of the hosts.

I've had the opportunity to visit some very different hosts across France, and I think it's extremely valuable for a young person to hear different points of view on life, listen to different stories and learn to live in different ways. That said, it's not always easy to integrate into someone else's daily life, especially when there can be language barriers and cultural differences. One of the biggest challenges was the language barrier. Sometimes I was frustrated at not being able to



*Sigrid, her host family and the little mermaid*

Although I had already lived with a host family in France when I was younger, my experience with that other organisation and that other family had not been very positive. That's why I hesitated to try again. However, with Servas, my experience has been much more rewarding. The hosts are really interested in having guests because it adds value to their lives. As Servas is a voluntary programme and hosts are not paid, they do it because they really enjoy

express myself fully, but it forced me to become more resourceful. I learned to communicate not only with words, but also with gestures, expressions and patience. These challenges are part of the experience, and I think I've learned a lot from my travels. Above all, it has made me want to continue travelling with Servas in the future, because it really opens up the world to me.

Sigrid S.P., Denmark



# SICOGA,

## Episode 2 : half way through

We could write 'Episode 36 or 83', there have been so many episodes that some of you have shared with us... but today it's time to bring you a second article for our beautiful AmiGo. So Episode 2.



 Connecting people for peace  
Working together for solutions

Here are some of the main actions carried out during the first three months of the year:

- Drafting documents presenting France, accompanied by Servas regional maps, drawn and illustrated by you, all encouraging people to come and discover the most hidden corners of our country (see [servas.org](https://servas.org), Sicoga 2025 tab).
- Designing an application form for young people to submit their skills and interests to help the organizers before, during, and after Sicoga. Distribution via multiple channels, emails, forums, and Instagram. According to the latest news, 26 young people from different countries have responded, all of whom are well-qualified, making it a difficult choice for Exco\*, which will only select 10.
- Preparing visa application documents and follow-up, a delicate task that will keep the dedicated team busy for several months.
- Unsurprisingly, English is dominant, if not to say that it erases all other languages. This makes it difficult for non-English speakers to understand, express themselves, and even think during debates, leading to frustration and even loss of interest. Interpreters

and translators have therefore been approached to facilitate communication in English\*\*, Spanish\*\*, and French during exchanges, in the corridors, and at evening events. Appropriate technical support systems are currently being developed.

- Implementing technical means to broadcast debates live to as many people as possible around the world. Don't forget to register for the virtual Sicoga (online) to attend.
- Negotiating with the Dijon municipal authorities for the free use of the prestigious 'Salle de la Coupole' in the city centre to host Sicoga's opening day and an exhibition of works by Servas artists.
- Preparing welcome gifts (the famous pen, turned from French wood, personalised invitation cards)

As you can see, Sicoga is not just about the six people who sign at the bottom of this article. It's all of us: without us, without you, it wouldn't be possible.

We've been working for Sicoga for eight months now, and there are still six months to go before October 2025. We've passed the half-way point, so let's continue our journey together.

### Recipe from our recent international face-to-face meeting in Dijon at the beginning of April:

*Take the English language. Put it in a bowl with Indian, Portuguese, Swedish, French, Turkish, Australian, Canadian, Hebrew and Burgundian accents, but not that of the Queen of England or the King.*

*Add spice to it with a pinch of syntax errors and slurred words.*

*Add layers of contrasting personalities: critical, analytical, fussy, meticulous, diplomatic, secretive, warm, cold, bright, dreamy.*

*Add layers of contrasting personalities: critical, analytical, fussy, meticulous, diplomatic, secretive, warm, cold, bright, dreamy.*

*Leave everything to ferment under cover for two days.*

*The result was an intense meeting between the members of Exco, the French organisers of Sicoga and the presidency of Servas France, where we discovered each other, talked to each other, listened to each other despite our differences, our diverse cultures and our singular countries of origin, where a thousand points, from the most sophisticated to the most trivial, were discussed. Servas in action.*

Marité, Isabelle, Michel,  
Jean-Marie, Paul, Hélène

Contact: [sicoga2025.france@gmail.com](mailto:sicoga2025.france@gmail.com)

*Sicoga : Servas International Conference and General Assembly to be held in Dijon from October 3 to October 8, 2025.*

\* Exco: Servas International Committee;

\*\* Servas official languages

Sicoga 2025: <https://servas.org/sicoga-2025-dijon>

Tourism and Travel in France: <https://servas.org/france-tourism-and-travel>

Servas Regions Map: <https://www.servas-france.org/welcome-in-france/>

Registration for 'Sicoga on line': <https://forms.gle/r3LUN2NxxV6BJ8ny6>

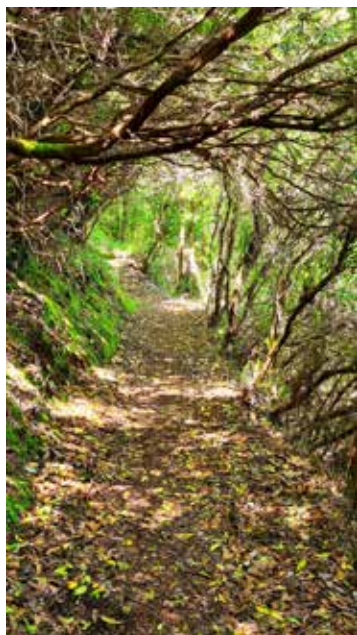


# Jacquets, Miquelots and the friends of Santiago



In the spring of 2001, I was invited by friends for a week's walk along the Pilgrim's Way to Santiago de Compostela, and I discovered the pilgrim's welcome. A welcome that I found generous, warm and delicious. How good it is to be welcomed, how good it must be to welcome, I said to myself. Since then, I too have welcomed pilgrims, first in the Dordogne region, and now in the Loire Atlantique. I welcome «jaquets» or «miquelots»: the former on their way to Santiago de Compostela, the latter to Mont Saint Michel.

The host offers the pilgrim board and lodging, on a voluntary basis, with a contribution towards expenses. Pilgrims can contact a host between a week and two days before the date of their visit, and ask if the host can accommodate them. The route is mainly used from April to September.



I do my utmost to offer pilgrims well-deserved comfort: a good shower, a good bed, a good meal where they can talk about the things in their lives. Sometimes the anonymity of the route means that we say intimate things that we wouldn't say to people close to us. We also share concerns about the route, such as orientation and places where signposts need to be added. And of course we share some wonderful discoveries: little churches, a peaceful place to rest, a gorgeous living nature. Often, the hosts have walked these paths themselves. These are unforgettable evenings of discussion, goodwill and friendship.

Beautiful surprises are frequent: when three pilgrims arrive at the stage with a bouquet of wild flowers, and the next morning before setting off, sing a magnificent lyrical song in chorus. Then sitting on the bench outside, a pilgrim tells me how his life is with the death of a son. He spoke, I listened, we chatted, time stopped.

Sometimes people with no idea of what «the path» is mistake accommodation for a hotel and arrive at a disrespectful hour. On my part, things are said over and over again...

The Association of Friends of Santiago de Compostela provides pilgrims with information about the route, so that they can have confidence in the accommodation offered and, armed with a credential or Miquelot booklet, are welcomed in peace and serenity. The association also informs hosts if abusive or even malicious people are reported.

Marie Luce, friend of Servas, Pays-de-la-Loire region

[www.amis-de-compostelle.fr](http://www.amis-de-compostelle.fr) and [www.lescheminsdumontsaint-michel.com](http://www.lescheminsdumontsaint-michel.com)

## THE READERS' CORNER

### La diagonale du vide - an exotic trip to France

by Mathieu Mouillet (Éditions MaT – €20)

Mathieu caught the travel bug while cycling around the world. He has written about and photographed over 45 countries. But he was struck by the obvious: doesn't travel start at home? Can you take an exotic trip in your own country?



For a year and a half, from the Ardennes to the Basque country, he explored on foot the places that people say «there's nothing to see there», the often ignored France profonde, and collected stories both ordinary and extraordinary. He tells of a France that is proud and enthusiastic in the face of problems.

This travelogue, peppered with black and white photos, touched me with its sincerity and humanity. You don't have to go to the end of the earth to meet people, to get off the beaten track, to take your time and open your eyes and your heart wide, to welcome emotions. From the very first steps, the journey is an endless source of joy, despite the difficulties along the way.

Michèle H.  
Hauts-de-France

### Participate in the next issue

It will be released at the end of 2025. The amiGo Team is waiting for your texts, stories, reports, photos, drawings, illustrations, creations...

[amigo@servas-france.org](mailto:amigo@servas-france.org)

Directrice de la publication :

Marie-Brigitte Sarbach, présidente de Servas France.

L'équipe de rédaction : Fabienne A. (Hauts-de-France),

Annie B. (Occitanie-Ouest), Claire F. (Centre-Val de Loire),

Geneviève L. (Pays-de-la-Loire),

Carole M. (Centre-Val de Loire), Jean-Luc T. (Occitanie-Est).

Merci aux auteur-trices et à celles et ceux qui ont contribué à la réalisation de ce numéro.

Imprimé par CSL Diffusion - BLOIS

The cover page has been designed  
by Marie O. from the PACA region