

Servas Information for interviewers

Aim of interview

This is to some extent a national issue. Some countries may consider it appropriate to screen prospective travellers, and assess their suitability. In that case, they will probably prefer to use the alternative Interviewer Guide rather than this checklist. On the whole however, faith in human nature and a desire to promote world peace will make most interviewers want to make Servas open doors available to everyone who applies to be a Servas traveller.

Most complaints will probably be avoided if interviewers do enough to make sure that the traveller properly understands the aims of Servas and the way it works. Perhaps some people may become more considerate and peaceful through the experience of being a Servas traveller. However, if you believe that an applicant should not become a Servas traveller, you might recommend another organisation. Servas Canada has produced a booklet, "Alternatives to Servas", which they will send you free if you ask (see Key List for address, or ask your national secretary).

Prepare for the interview

- The traveller reads Information for travellers and fills in Letter of Introduction beforehand whenever practical.
- Arrange where and when to meet. Do not have a guilty conscience about making it somewhere convenient for the interviewer: Servas is not a commercial service organisation, and travellers must be prepared to go to some trouble. But don't go out of your way to make it difficult, either!
- Be flexible, but not self-sacrificing.
- Make arrangements beforehand about payment, according to national practice.
- Set aside enough time. Many interviewers feel that less than two hours is too little.

At the interview

- If the traveller has questions, start with those if appropriate.
- Servas how and when it started, aims. Person-to-person peace organisation.
- Servas how it works. Hosts and travellers. Provides opportunity but no guarantees.

Important practical rules—discuss these with the applicant

- Be observant, listen and be sensitive! This is the most important guideline, and can't be emphasised enough. %Read the instructions in the host list. You may be asked to do certain things it is disrespectful not to do so. %Servas does not exist to provide cheap accommodation. If you don't feel sociable, or you don't find a host, expect to use

alternative accommodation. %Contact in advance as specified (wr/ph/npr), respecting length of notice required (2d, 3wk). Never make first contact same day unless npr. If you write expecting a reply, you are normally asked to enclose postage (reply coupon). If wr is not specified, hosts probably do not want to have the trouble of writing to you, but you may try writing to say you will contact them later without expecting reply.

- Be aware that people on the host list may have stopped being hosts after the list was printed. Be specially considerate in these cases. %Never pressure hosts to take you. They always have the right to say no without telling you why. %Do not phone hosts at unsociable hours. This varies from country to

country (siesta time, normal bedtime) but in many countries 21.00 is the latest you should phone, and earlier for npr. Not too early either!

- If you arrange to arrive at a certain time and can't, let your hosts know as soon as possible. They may have changed their plans in order to meet you, and it is inconsiderate to ignore this. In areas of some unrest, they may worry about you if you just don't turn up, and may go to the trouble of contacting the police, your embassy or your national secretary. This can be embarrassing for all concerned.
- Two nights stay maximum, unless longer specified. Your host may invite you to stay longer, however. %One night is often rather too short a time to make good contact. However, a) arrival 20.00, two nights' stay and departure 09.00 is only one day, whereas b) arrival 10.00, one night's stay and departure 20.00 is two days' stay, so you may try being flexible.
- Give your host your Letter of Introduction immediately on arrival it shows you are an approved Servas traveller. It is up to your host whether to read it or not. Some hosts don't bother, but many will be annoyed if they have to ask. Some may keep it until you leave; some may give it straight back. Some may like to be given a copy to keep; others prefer not to accumulate paper!
- In some countries it is normal to remove footwear before entering the house in others to do so just inside. In other countries it is considered strange to take your shoes off. This is the sort of "small thing" which can be important to hosts. Thoughtlessness could be very offensive.
- Your host has offered you accommodation (and some time). You may well be offered food, but you have no right to expect it. You will probably be offered a bed, but you may get a sofa or a mattress on the floor. You may be offered towels, but don't expect them. If comfort is essential to you, stay at a hotel and visit hosts for the day. %It is usually unwise to travel from host to host without time to yourself in between.
- Be prepared to fit in with your hosts' plans. Some may have taken time off work to be with you, others will have to go out to work. Some may leave their house open for you or give you a key, others will expect you to be out when they are out themselves.
- Don't expect your hosts to take you sightseeing. Some hosts may want to show you round however.
- Avoid using hosts' phones, but if you do, pay for your call immediately.
- Always be sensitive and considerate. Customs, traditions and forms of politeness vary from country to country. As a Servas traveller, feel free to ask what is the polite way to behave. Do not assume that the way you behave at home is considered polite in the country you are visiting.
- Do not pass judgement on your hosts. Attitudes and behaviour are often dictated by the society in which one lives. They have to live with their neighbours after you have left. What may appear to you to be a prejudice may have reasons which you do not understand without having lived in that place. Discuss by all means, but always politely and with an open mind.
- It is not normal Servas practice to give hosts money. However, you should be sensitive to the financial situation of your host. When a host invites you to share a meal, it may be appropriate to offer to bring something to drink (be aware of attitudes to alcohol). In other cases, you could bring some fresh fruit, or you could offer to buy the ingredients for, and to prepare a dish typical of your own country. But be careful not to offend your hosts by suggesting that their hospitality is unsatisfactory. Be sensitive and aware!
- If you are included in family meals or activities, be prepared to offer to do the tasks which family members would do (washing up, laying table, helping in the garden...). If your host insists on treating you as an honoured guest, accept this graciously and be careful to express your appreciation.
- If you experience serious problems with a host (criminal behaviour, sexual harassment...), you should inform a Servas co-ordinator. This should be reserved for serious cases however: the sort of

misunderstanding which could arise in normal interpersonal contact is a matter for you and your host to clear up, and not a Servas matter.

- Servas is a peace organisation. It is legitimate to touch on sensitive topics like politics and religion, but do not press the matter if your hosts are unwilling to talk about them –they probably have good reason for avoiding them.
- Be prepared to tell the host about yourself and your background, perhaps with photos of your home and family. be

sensitive to how much they want to know: they may already have had a dozen travellers from your town recently!

- Find out a bit about the countries you are going to but don't try to be more knowledgeable than your hosts!
- Don't take consideration too far. Polite honesty is often better than trying to give the reply you think your host wants. For example, if you are asked whether you would like coffee or tea, say "I'd prefer coffee, but I'm quite happy with tea if that's what you're having, thank you." If your host asks, "Would you like to go to bed?" you could reply "Well, I am quite tired, but will we have more time to talk tomorrow?" In this way, you express your own preference while allowing your host to make the decision.
- Hosts' children are people too, and it may be appreciated if you try to make contact with them. As with adults, their reactions to you will vary. Perhaps they will include you in a game or sport which you know or they can teach you. As long as their parents approve, you may like to share something from your country.
- Some hosts like to receive small gifts mementoes of you and your place of origin. But they have no right to expect them. Whether you give gifts or not is your choice.
- Be considerate. The relationship between host and traveller should be equal, not of a giver and a receiver. This involves you giving of yourself.
- If in doubt, show too much gratitude rather than too little! Your hosts will let you know if you are embarrassing them!