

Servas Information for hosts

Servas aims

Servas is an Esperanto word meaning 'serve'. It is a world-wide, non-profit, non-governmental co-operative network of hosts and travellers, set up with the purpose of helping to build world peace, goodwill, understanding and mutual tolerance. It seeks to realize these aims by providing opportunities for personal contacts between individuals of diverse cultures and backgrounds.

Servas history

In 1949 some young pacifists from several countries attending a folk high school in Denmark started a movement called Peacebuilders. Inspired by Bob Luitweiler, an American conscientious objector, they established a code of work –study –travel, opening their homes to like-minded people from other countries, in order to actively work for peace. In 1972 Servas International was registered in Switzerland, and the year after it was included in the United Nations' list of non-governmental organisations.

Servas how it works

As a host, your name will be put on the list of your country. Other information may be included:

- Your year of birth and your sex (male/female)
- Your address and phone number, and directions for getting there♦if relevant
- How much advance notice you would like (default is 1 day)
- how you would like to be contacted (write/phone)
- how many people you can accommodate
- whether you are willing to consider a family with children for a longer stay
- whether you will accept visitors the same day (npnr=no prior notice required)
- whether you require visitors to use a sleeping bag, or offer accommodation to more
- if they have sleeping bags
- whether you offer contact but no accommodation (day host)
- whether you are interested in exchange of young people in the family (14–17) with Servas hosts in other countries for some weeks
- Your occupation, other family members (name/sex/year of birth)
- Languages you can use/understand (distinguishing between confidently and slightly)
- Your main interests, other countries you have travelled to or lived in
- Organizations you belong to which have aims related to Servas (save space by being selective)
- Significant house rules such as no smoking, no alcohol, share food expenses
- Other relevant information such as have cats/dogs/gorillas/snakes, good wheelchair access/many steps, you may help on the farm.

Suggestions for contact with travellers

- Don't let anyone pressure you into receiving them good travellers don't try to. If you don't feel you can be sociable, it is better to say no you needn't explain why. You are not committed to accepting every traveller who makes contact. It is better to have one good visit than twenty poor visits.
- You may find it useful to have a short, written list of house rules, particularly if you have special conditions, such as a temperamental shower, a temperamental landlady or a temperamental neighbour!

You may include when it is convenient for the traveller to have a shower/bath; when you would like to have meals with your traveller; whether there are doors which must be kept closed/open/locked; lights which must be left on/turned off. You know your own conditions best. But try to keep the list short. If you would prefer to tell travellers these things yourself, that is fine!

- No-one can guarantee that you will like every traveller you receive. You have no responsibility to go to a lot of extra trouble just to please them if you don't feel like it, but of course you can if you want to. If you feel travellers are behaving unreasonably, tell them politely how you feel it may just be thoughtlessness. Clearing up minor conflicts is good peace work!
- If Servas travellers write to you and enclose a reply coupon, it is considerate to reply as soon as you can. If they have not enclosed a copy of their Letter(s) of Introduction, you may ask for a full name and town, so that you can report to a coordinator if they don't arrive as arranged.
- If you have said "yes" to travellers, and then cannot receive them, it is considerate to try to let them know. You may be able to make arrangements for them to stay with another host in your area, or get help from a co-ordinator.
- All Servas travellers should show you their Letter of Introduction—the original, not a copy—soon after they arrive. You may check that it is valid (has a stamp and interviewer's signature, and has not expired) and contact a co-ordinator if it is not. If you like, you may keep it until the travellers leave.
- Most Servas hosts like to keep a visitors' book. You may note the names and addresses of the travellers, the dates of their visit, and any other applicable comments—or perhaps you prefer the travellers to write in the book themselves.
- You may assist with transport of travellers, but you do not have to. Travellers should normally expect to make their own

way to hosts' homes. If your entry in the host list says you can collect travellers, but you are unable to when a traveller contacts you, you may let the traveller choose to find another host or you may ask him/her to make his/her own transport arrangements to your home.

- The standard Servas arrangement is that travellers should stay for two nights, and should not ask to stay longer. If you have specified longer stay in the host list, they may ask, but you can still say "no" without giving a reason. If they do not seem to know this rule, you can explain it to them, or contact a co-ordinator for help. You may of course ask travellers to stay longer if you want to, or accept them for a 1-night stay.
- You may give travellers meals as convenient for you. Do not be offended if they offer to contribute some food or drink for a meal even if this is unusual in your culture—in many countries this is considerate behaviour.
- Expect to spend some time with Servas travellers—this is the real value of Servas. Remember, travellers will gain most by learning how you live!
- Remember that travellers have their needs too! They may feel tired and/or dirty after a long journey when they arrive. Be prepared to give them time for rest, refreshment and a shower, so they can feel that they are at their best when you start talking together.
- If you suggest places to go out for a meal or entertainment, remember that travellers may have a limited budget.
- If you arrange to go out together—for example for a meal—there are no Servas rules for who should pay. It will probably avoid misunderstanding if you agree together who is paying before you go out, even though you may find this difficult to discuss. You or the traveller may of course insist on paying, but the best starting point is probably that everyone pays for themselves.

Ways to deal with problems

- Remember that travellers may not understand your language perfectly—even the English, French or Spanish spoken on opposite sides of the Atlantic may not be understood in the same way! People from different cultures may expect different behaviour in a certain situation. If you say “Help yourself to food from the fridge”, you may mean “Take a little food if you are hungry”, but travellers may think you mean “Take as much food as you like”—and eat everything! Perhaps that is what they would have meant if they had said it to you at their home! Nobody ever said that international understanding was easy—it may involve discussions about what is acceptable behaviour, or what people really mean when they say something.
- If there is a “problem” with travellers, first make sure that they understand the responsibilities of a Servas traveller, and that the problem is not a misunderstanding because of culture or language. If you feel they are intentionally abusing Servas, and they continue to behave unreasonably, then immediately contact your national co-ordinator (and your local co-ordinator, if there is one), so that they can try to help.

Routine points to consider

- Advise your host co-ordinator and/or national host list co-ordinator as soon as possible of any changes to your host listing, or if you wish to be deleted from the list.