



Open Doors

Fall 2015

Tis the Season!

Traditionally this is the time each year when we launch Host Renewals for the coming year. As we transition to a new website & database we are also transitioning to host renewals taking place 12 months after you last renewed or perhaps joined for the first time. EACH year we ask our hosts to review their host listing and commit to continuing as an active Servas host, willing to greet visitors from around the globe! We ask this of our hosts annually to verify that all the households listed currently in the US Host List are there intentionally and with the purpose of opening their doors to opportunities to engage with others in a shared mission to create a more peaceful world.

Besides the benefits of meeting travelers from different countries and different parts of the good ol' United States, hosts may also enjoy participating in the Host-to-Host program. This means that as an active US host you may visit other hosts throughout our 50 states, without paying a traveler fee. No Letter of Introduction is required. Simply point to your listing in our host list to demonstrate your qualification.



The Day Host option – if your circumstances have changed and you just don't have the space or time to host guests for 2 nights at a time you may wish to be a Day Host. Day hosts are terrific ambassadors for their local community, sharing the best, and sometimes, hidden gems of their area, be it a hole-in-the-wall café, a favorite hiking trail or museum of oddities.

So be on the lookout for an email prompting you to go to our website and renew your host listing. While you are there you can also take the opportunity to make a much-appreciated donation! Your generosity will go a long way to keeping our humble office up and running.

Attention photographers! The long-awaited **New US Servas Website** is nearly ready to launch. One thing it is still missing...your photos! Photos of Servas visits and adventures -- your favorite moments as host and/or traveler. We expect to see a lot of pictures of gatherings around kitchen tables because so much connection happens when we share meals together. Send your photos to tech@usservas.org.



Open Doors is a publication of United States Servas.

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What can you do when you find a Servas visit turns out to be a very unsatisfactory experience, more than a minor inconvenience or irritation?

Whether you are a host or a traveler there are resources available. US Servas has a Complaint Resolution Committee (CRC) that meets on a monthly basis to address concerns. This committee has been available to Servas members for many years and communicates with National Secretaries or area coordinators in all Servas countries. The first point of contact will be the US Servas office who will assist you in the process. Before a complaint reaches the committee we require that a detailed written report be sent via mail or email to the US Servas office. The CRC will assign members to investigate the complaint and the Servas International National Secretaries or area coordinators will be contacted. The committee strives for objectivity and operates in strict confidentiality. The committee makes no assumptions and forms no opinion until after all parties have been interviewed. This process may take several months and you will be informed of any decisions from the resulting investigation.

Whether a host or a traveler the key to a successful Servas visit is open, honest communication. Keep in mind language and cultural differences. Be sure to read the host listings or LOI carefully and don't forget those important front pages of the host lists that inform about country specific requirements or customs. Let's keep surprises to a minimum by communicating clearly with the host or traveler about availability of meals, arrival times, house rules, and sleeping arrangements. SBN or sleeping bag necessary may mean a place on the floor. Be sure to inform any potential hosts if you have dietary or mobility issues. A host may or may not be able to accommodate you and knowing ahead of time allows for alternate plans.

Not every travel or hosting experience will be memorable but small kindnesses and laughter are welcome in every culture.

Open Doors is an email publication—also available on our website, free to all members. If you would prefer to receive a full-color copy by mail, you may subscribe for \$10/year (including postage). Just send your check to the office at 1125 16th Street, Suite 201, Arcata, CA 95521 or add it to your annual host donation.

Servas Gatherings

This past summer and fall saw several Servas Gatherings.

- In the Philadelphia area (Princeton Junction, NJ) 9/26 Hosted by Nan Simon, Rob & Bette Allekotte
- In the Seattle area with guests and friends from Canada hosted by Parvin Barharloo 8/16
- Ossining, NY 8/9 Rolande Hodel, host
- Portland, OR Meetups hosted by Shyla & Dan Bare – ongoing!
- Banks, OR 7/19 Karen Graham, host; with Oregon Partners for the Americas

Upcoming Events: So Cal area SERVAS Gathering: **Saturday Dec. 5th**

Times and location to come! Check with the Servas Office for more info information.

Regional gatherings are a terrific way to build upon your local peacemaking communities! Get to know other Servas members and share the Servas spirit with others!



Recipe for a Memorable Servas Gathering

- Set a date
- Find a place
- Choose a theme (5 Minutes And 5 Travel Photos Each, Food From My Best Servas Trip, a speaker from your community).
- Let the office know. They will send announcements to all hosts and travelers within whatever radius of the event you choose
- Send out a PSA—most TV stations, public radio stations, newspapers will run them for free.
- Invite like-minded groups (exchange students, travel clubs and other organizations with international and peace interests)
- Bring great food, share your Servas experiences, enjoy stimulating conversations, make new friends, learn something new, take photos.
- Write a short article and send it, and your photos to the office for the Facebook page, website or newsletter.

Planned Giving

By including US Servas in your will, trust, retirement account or life insurance policy you can leave a lasting legacy of Peace, Cultural Exchange and Love of Travel.

You'll be supporting our efforts to keep current with technology and attract more youthful members to share in the values of US Servas. Your legacy will make a powerful difference.

If you would like to speak to someone about making a gift please contact the office and speak to Tracy or email her at tracy@usservas.org



Servas Interviewers

Servas would not be possible without a worldwide network of volunteers who serve as interviewers. The importance of the interview cannot be overemphasized. Hosts all over the world are opening their doors to strangers, with the confidence that each has been personally screened. The interviewer's signature shows the host that a Servas member with training and experience has met the traveller and considers him/her to be trustworthy, reliable, and interested in the aims of Servas. Many areas do not have interviewers. Consider volunteering: you will receive training, support and mentoring. Interviews are at the convenience of the interviewer and you may commit as much time as you choose. Besides approving travellers and hosts, interviewers promote Servas in their communities. Interviewers are expected to be overnight or day hosts. Contact the office for an application!



Many thanks to our outgoing interviewers!

- Gail van der Linde of Skaneateles, NY
- Nancy Nugent of Seattle, WA
- Callie Wilson of Olympia, WA

And Welcome to Incoming Interviewers

Judi Scharnberg of Arcata, CA and Mimi Rosen of Philadelphia, PA



Travel and Learn a Language: Servas Youth Language Experience

Are you between 18 and 30-something? Would you like to improve your foreign language skills outside of a classroom?? Would you like to have a meaningful cultural exchange? Do you have a month or more to commit to the unique learning

experience that can only be found in travel? The SYLE program is free with Servas membership (travel expenses, of course, are the responsibility of the participant) and is seeking participants. SYLE (Servas Youth Language Experience) is a program designed for young Servas members to learn a language through a Servas cultural exchange during one month in a foreign country. Through SYLE we also hope to strengthen the integration of national local groups, as well as promote the participation of young people in Servas.

But wait! There's more! US Servas is proud to present the Dennis Mogerman Youth Scholarship fund!!! Dennis Mogerman, long time Servas member and traveler, is now generously offering Servas Youth from the US the financial assistance you may need to make your dreams of travel a reality. These \$1,000 scholarships are currently available for individuals who are looking to participate in a SYLE. They are awarded twice a year based on demonstrated financial need and a commitment to the promotion of Servas among youth. For more information on SYLE and Servas Youth contact youth@servas.org.

Servas Travel Notes

Norway: I have been traveling in rural Norway. I had a fantastic time with my Norwegian Servas hosts in Oslo. They were very kind and gracious hosts who I hope to visit again when I leave Norway later this summer. Some of my favorite memories from my 2-day visit include the dinners and conversation we all had together, walking around Oslo with their daughter who is my age, and making American pancakes for them! ~ **Linnea Burnham a 23-year-old traveler from Vermont.**

Finland: Why Finland? That is the #1 question I was asked, both from friends & family before leaving, and while there, by several Finns I got to know. Also, "What is this Servas" you talk about?" And, "Are you REALLY going to spend a month in Finland by yourself at your age?" How does one explain the desire to have 1st hand experiences of another culture and its people?



Yes, I was lucky enough to go. My friend, Bill, joined me for the first half. Thanks to my 7 home stays & a Day Host, covering the whole country from the arctic, to the Russian border to the east, to the "Swedish-Finish Aland islands to the west, and finally to Helsinki, the most smoothly running & cleanest city I've ever seen, I can now say that yes, I truly know Finland and its people.

The warm hospitality, the eager interest in me & life in California, the openness to share their lives with me, the variations among the families, and the national allegiance to their precious saunas and summer cottages...all warmed my heart and gave me the deepest respect for this little country. They don't publicize triumphs in rebuilding an independent, peaceful and successful country over only the past 100 years after having been occupied by various neighbors for the 600 years prior. The sense of Finnish design...elegant, functional, simple...is everywhere, in household conveniences, in buildings, in roads with adjacent pedestrian/bicycle paths. There are no "stop signs"; they are not needed. Drivers courteously observe the "Yield" signs at intersections. I deliberately chose families that represent the 4 major cultural backgrounds among its population of 5.2 million.



* **Janne**, a dairy farmer in Rodankyla, Lapland, from where we visited Inari in the far north, the cultural center of the native Sami people.

* **Piavi**, a single Mom, her Chinese son (11), daughter (8), and Spanish au pair in Oulu, on the western Arctic Circle. Besides working full time, Piavi also is a volunteer working to assimilate the 800 refugees newly sent to the area by the EU mandate.

* **Katrina & Ben**, who have a team of 8 sled dogs, 2 kids, plus a pet dog. They apologized that I wasn't able to have a real sled ride, as September was still balmy & devoid of snow.

* **Vivica & Lars-Johan**, in Vallgrund, with Eda-Marie (16) who came out of her teen-aged shell to play her violin for our departing breakfast.

* **Sirpa & Jari**, in Salo, who vacated their loft bedroom for us, and set themselves up "camping" in the basement, against our embarrassed protests. They are concerned about the Russian shenanigans down south, and the risk of Finland suffering yet another similar episode. When we were saying goodbye, they invited us to come back any time, "and bring NATO with us." We all sort of laughed, but they were serious.

* My Gold Medal sauna experience was **with Riita & Jouko** in Liperi. She goes to their near-by summer cottage daily and swims in the huge cold lake after her sauna... all year! When it is frozen over, Jouko saws a big hole in the ice for her entry.

* **Inkeri & Paavo**, in Laapeeranta, said that they were "so happy & flattered that I chose them, in spite of their ages" (82 & 85) Since Paavo's stroke 12 years ago, their lives have been limited to basics, after a lifetime of world travel. So they welcome visitors bringing in the outside world to enrich their experience. Imagine! THEY are thanking ME! Now I'm getting Inkeri's e-mails weekly; we've become pen pals.

"Why Finland?" My memories and contacts from these Finnish families warm my heart every day. And I'm inspired by the intelligence, social cohesion and creativity that builds this peaceful country. I wish we in the USA, and all the world could take lessons from Finland. They have much to teach us.

~ **From Joan Procter (age 77; Sausalito, CA)**

New Zealand, Australia & Japan I am a relatively new Servas Traveler, from San Diego, CA. Recently I returned from a trip to the Australia Asia Pacific region. I visited six countries over a period of nine months. I had the opportunity to stay at two great hosts during my time in Sydney, AU and in Christchurch, NZ and attempted to stay at host in the Kansai Region of Japan.



Chance Billmeyer at the Koza-no-Taki Waterfall near Arima Hot Springs, Kobe, Japan - 2015

The experiences I had both in Sydney and in Christchurch were very memorable and the hosts were gracious, informative and caring. I will always remember the views of Palm Beach and the surrounding inlets from West Head Lookout in the Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park with my host. The view was spectacular and the surrounding "bush" or native forest provided an excellent backdrop to our conversation about the history and fauna of Australia. My Sydney host went out of her way to show me some of the beauty of her great country as well as introduce me to some new fresh water swimming spots.

In New Zealand, I was treated to a local celebration of an international biking competition in Christchurch by my Kiwi hosts. They had an extra bike, so we all, mother, father and daughter, biked up Summit

Road to sit on the lawn, eat local food and cheer on competitors. This fun, family filled day lead to many introductions of other community members and friends. By the end of the day I felt like one of the locals.

When traveling to Japan I decided to contact several hosts during my stay. I used email as I had done in the past and included my Letter of Introduction as an attachment. I did not feel that I was fluent enough in Japanese to call. Japan has a 90-day VOA (Visa on Arrival) program and I chose to stay for 48 of those days. It quickly became apparent through the emails that Japan's hosts have different requirements than those of Australia and New Zealand.

Two of the hosts thanked me for my email and directed me to the Regional Service Director for the Kansai Area. Through our interaction I learned some important cultural differences when traveling to Japan. The main difference is that email is not the best method for contacting your hosts and that the hosts require a much longer period of time to prepare for a traveler's arrival. Like many of the major tourist destinations in Kyoto, it is necessary to write a letter 30 to 90 days in advance of your arrival and send it by regular mail. Hosts also require a hard copy of your Letter of Introduction as well as the purpose of your visit.

Japanese hosts want to make the most of your and their time so it is important to include your interests, as well as availability. Since Japanese culture is so rich, it would be helpful to select down to a specific area

of interest and because schedules are very full, it is helpful to know how much time a traveler has and options for days of availability. I sincerely appreciate the thoroughness involved in this process and I now understand the intentions behind it. Since I did not give the hosts enough time and contacted them via a “non-preferred” method I was not able to stay at any of the seven hosts I contacted during my stay.

I hope this helps other travelers when traveling to Japan. I realize that this may not be everyone’s experience and welcome stories from those who have had a different one. Happy travels to all Servas Travelers and a big thanks to the hosts who give of their time and invite us into their homes to share their culture. ~ **Chance Billmeyer, San Diego, CA**

Servas Friendships in Portugal

If I had left Portugal with only my photos of colorful tiles, idyllic landscapes, the ornate doors and windows of stylish old buildings, and the ephemeral net sculpture made by American Artist Janet Echelman fluttering in the Matosinhos* sea breeze, I’d have been happy. But as beautiful and as meaningful as those images are, they pale next to the memories of friendships I made as I crisscrossed Northern Portugal, following a route based on the location of Servas homes.

A few of the highlights:

- Understanding the importance of the Servas letter of introduction: My first host insisted on a paper copy of my letter rather than the electronic version others accepted. Since joining the organization in 1986, she has tracked every one of her visitors by filing their letters a large book. My letter was number 336!
- Watching barriers break down: I enjoyed an unforgettable evening with members of a French family staying with my host’s sister. During our second joint dinner, we applauded recited poetry and other dramatic presentations, contrasting with the first shared meal in which some were unduly shy.
- Helping other people learn a language: Though all my Portuguese hosts spoke English, at least half of them deliberately worked at building their vocabulary, jotting down new words in notebooks or on flash cards.
- Extra effort: Everyone offered me much more than I expected. They took me on special outings, fed me scrumptious meals, helped me learn *their* language and talked about future trips we could experience together. One host truly went the extra kilometer when we missed my train early one morning. (Somehow, we’d not taken the time difference between Portugal and Spain into account when we set the alarm clock.) After already driving me across the border, she sped down the freeway for another hour to get to the train’s next stop.

Other than attending a US Servas conference in Florida in 2007, staying in a few East Coast homes that year, and hosting five or six Servas travelers in my California home over the same number of years, this was my first *real* Servas travel experience. Now I’m looking forward to the next one – back to Portugal or elsewhere. ~ **Lindajoy Fenley, Santa Rosa, CA**



Dinner group from left to right: Delfina, Lau, Isabel, Lindajoy, Maëlan, Yanis, Frank

United States Servas

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