

Servas – aims

The aims of Servas are, as stated in its charter

...to help build world peace, goodwill and understanding by providing deeper, more personal contacts with people of other cultures and backgrounds

...to share the hosts' life and their concern in social and international problems, their interests in creative activity, and mutual responsibility for their fellow men.

Servas – how does it work?

It is not a matter of exchange. A Servas traveller need not be a host. As a rule, a traveller may spend two nights with a host, unless invited to stay longer (some countries have specified exceptions). It is also possible to be a day host without offering accommodation. A host may always refuse a traveller. Servas opens for possibilities, but it does not give guarantees. Servas is run by volunteers; it is not a travel agency.

Servas – history

The idea was conceived at Askov Folk High School in Denmark in 1948–9 by Bob Luitweiler, a young American conscientious objector, who hoped that a further holocaust could be prevented by international understanding on a “grass roots” level. The name of the organisation—Peace Builders—was changed at its conference in 1952 to Servas, which is an Esperanto word meaning *serve*. At the 1972 conference, Servas International was registered in Switzerland as a Non-Governmental Organization, and is represented at the United Nations in New York, Geneva and Vienna.

The first Servas hosts were recruited in Denmark by Bob, but the idea soon spread to other countries by word of mouth and through pacifist organisations. Committees in several countries collated lists of hosts, and with these the first Servas travellers ventured out. To start with, most hosts and travellers were pacifists, often heavily involved in active peace work. The organisation owes much of its early success to a group of dedicated pacifists in England who—amongst other things—produced a broadsheet to keep members up-to-date on peace matters. As time progressed, it became clear that Servas could not survive as an organisation for the few, and members were recruited outside pacifist circles. It was accepted that Servas should work across all boundaries—nationalities, races, politics, religions, ages, cultures and interests.

We may not be able to prevent war by our own efforts alone, but we can do much to break down the prejudice and mistrust which can so easily come from unfamiliar situations. Servas provides opportunities to get to know countries from inside, and to find a home in a foreign land. As hosts we can receive the world into our homes.

How to become a Servas traveller

A Servas traveller fills in a *Letter of Introduction*, and is interviewed by the national Servas secretary or another experienced Servas host. The Letter of Introduction is stamped and signed, and is then valid for a year. The traveller pays a fee, and is supplied with lists of hosts for the countries to be visited. These lists remain the property of Servas, and must be returned after use (some countries take a deposit). The fee covers running expenses, such as printing and distributing the lists, and a contribution to Servas International (SI). SI publishes SI News, which is distributed to hosts, and gives financial aid to new national Servas groups and to existing groups with scarce resources. Servas is based on voluntary, unpaid work.

How to become a Servas host

Many people who become hosts have either been Servas travellers themselves, or have been introduced to Servas by experienced hosts. Some countries have detailed written information; others have interviews for hosts or support groups. As a host, you may receive many requests from travellers, you may receive few, or even none at all for some time, depending on where you live and how many other hosts there are close by. New lists are normally prepared for publication each year. Your national secretary will tell you the deadline for being included on the next list.

What to do if you want to become a host or traveller

Contact one of these people:

turkey@servas.org