

Article in the daily newspaper Dagbladet Roskilde, Friday 5 August 2011.

Front page:

Crazy about other cultures

Cecilie (23) has stayed with many people in their homes when travelling and she is used to people from other countries staying at the house of her parents. She was born into membership of the organisation Servas. The 14,000 members can visit on 2-day stays with each other in 130 countries and get a unique chance to gain insight in everyday life in other cultures.

Page 9 article (text and photos by Rita Vestergård):

Photo captions.

Photo, top: Cecilie Larsen and Susanne Thestrup from Servas Denmark who have organised the international meeting with the primary goal of getting more young people to join.

Photo, middle, right side: The Sågänger family from Stockholm - from the left Gustav, Kristina, Hanna and Jonny.

Photo, bottom left: Bus driver Lars Jørgensen of Soli Bus is talking to Jan Degrauwe about departure for a day trip from Lerbjergcentret to the Viking Ship Museum.

Travelling is staying with local hosts

Hans Christian Andersen said "To travel is to live" and this week's guests at the Lerbjergcentret might add "and stay with the locals". They are all members of the hospitality organisation Servas

Quote:

"I have been a member since 1983 when a friend recommended Servas to me. And it is more exciting to stay in a private home than at a hotel. But you can't expect to stay with people during all of your vacation because a stay is only two days unless the host invites you to extend the stay."

Lerbjerg: The place is buzzing with English-speaking people who are obviously from many different parts of the world. We are at Lerbjergcentret in the woods near the town of Hvalsø where 48 children, young people and adults have gathered for a Servas Youth Meeting with workshops and activities. Among the participants are 23 year old Cecilie from Roskilde, the Sågänger family from Stockholm and the Brazilian mother of a 16 year old girl who has just invited 14 year old Hanna from Sweden to visit them in Brazil. With a smile Hanna tells her parents about the invitation because she really liked Brazil when she travelled there with her family. "Well, we will have to find a way for you to go", says her father. The father of the Swedish family, Jonny Sågänger is a journalist and he is used to travelling. Not just business-related travel but also because he has been a member of Servas since he was young. Members can stay for two days with each other for free. And they have got 130 countries to choose from.

"I have been a member since 1983 when a friend recommended Servas to me. And it is more exciting to stay in a private home than at a hotel. But you can't expect to stay with people during all of your vacation because a stay is only two days unless the host invites you to extend the stay", says Jonny.

Fortunately he married someone who likes the idea, so Kristina has joined him as a member since 1993.

“Our children grew up with people who come to stay at our home in Stockholm or us staying at people’s homes when we are on vacation”, says Kristina.

The membership has offered lots of wonderful experiences. Like when they stayed at a ranch in the US and went horseback riding or when they get a tip that allows them to see interesting things that other people will not find or advice on where not to go in a place like Sao Paolo.

The three children of the family have learned to use their English skills from early on - and they are tolerant.

“Servas is mostly about peace, understanding and tolerance - avoiding a xenophobic attitude. You must be unafraid of the unknown when you get to know people from other cultures because then you gain mutual understanding, Kristina Sågänger explains.

Cecilie Larsen, who is 23 years old and a new member of the board, has been a member all her life. She moved to Copenhagen from Roskilde where she grew up except for a few years when she lived in Namibia with her parents as a young child.

“We lived in Owamboland and it was in the remote countryside. But I went back to visit a few years ago and now they have paved roads and traffic lights”, she says smiling.

When she graduated from the Katedralskolen she travelled for a couple of years and often stayed at people’s homes, so she has already seen much of the world. Now she is a member of the board of Servas Denmark and she is a student at an international programme at Copenhagen Business School university majoring in culture, language and economics.

“At the university I meet an old friend from Namibia, so the world is actually very small”, she says smiling broadly.

Facts box:

- Servas is an international movement based on 14,000 Servas hosts in 130 countries in six continents.
- The hosts welcome travellers into their homes to encourage intercultural understanding. Servas is independent of economic, religious and political affiliation and based on volunteer work.
- The idea was initiated at Askov Folk High School in 1949 by Bob Luitweiler who was an American conscientious objector hoping to avoid new wars by promoting intercultural understanding.