

COUNTRY REPORTS - EUROPE

Denmark- Birgitte Damsgaard

Earlier this year Birgitte Damsgaard reluctantly stepped down as national secretary for Servas Denmark aged 90. Many Danish and international Servas hosts and travellers have benefited from Birgitte's seemingly boundless energy and enthusiasm - not to mention her outspoken, often colourful and sometimes controversial opinions - Birgitte Damsgaard was synonymous with Servas Denmark.

Birgitte took up the challenge of reviving the moribund Servas organization, at retirement age, after a long career as medical secretary in Denmark and abroad. Birgitte first met Servas in 1967, when she and her daughter visited the U.S. After taking over the post of secretary in 1970, Birgitte wrote dozens of articles about Servas in local newspapers, all over the country with hardly any response. The breakthrough came in 1971 with a major article in the Sunday travel section of a national newspaper, which resulted in some 50 new hosts and over 100 travellers.

Birgitte's watchwords were tolerance and trust. For years she refused to interview Danish travellers, believing that good information and self-selection would be more effective than a short interview, and Danish travellers almost always lived up to her expectations. And the prospective host who rejected "hippies" or unmarried couples never made the Danish host list.

Birgitte managed alone for 30 years, Servas has now been handed on to a whole group of successors...

*Ingrid Pedersen, translated by Lila Towle
Denmark*

Scotland - Regional Meeting:

Sat 4th & Sun 5th Sept 2004

The generous hospitality of Mike and Maggie Pringle, allowed hosts in Scotland to gather in Glenshielbanks Cottage, near Traquair in the Borders, formerly used by shepherds from the local estate. Despite being at 370 metres, glorious weather allowed us to eat shared food outside, walk in the hills and even, in one case, swim in the nearby loch. There were 19 adults and 5 children from 11 households present (around 25% of those in Scotland). Most folk stayed in or camped nearby the cottage but some stayed with local hosts. It was felt that an overnight event had encouraged a better than usual attendance with some folk travelling considerable distances.

There was practical discussion of how more hosts and travellers could be encouraged but one member commented that there is a natural ebb and flow in organisations. Smaller numbers of travellers and hosts doesn't mean Servas is any less valuable though, of course, the more people who experience it the better! Our national Treasurer joined us and provided an update on a number of developments at international level. Overall, it was a convivial and memorable event.

*Bob Turner
Area Co-ordinator, Scotland*

Germany -The Baltic Sea

Surrounded by nine countries

In the northernmost corner of Germany, next to Flensburg and even closer to the sea that the Germans call "Ostsee", (East Sea) (Baltic Sea in the English speaking countries), the next yearly assembly of Servas Germany will take place from Friday Sept 23rd to Sunday Sept 25th 2005.

We would especially like to invite Servas members of the other eight countries surrounding the Baltic Sea to join us for our conference! The motto of the conference will be "The Baltic Sea - Surrounded by nine countries". We will have a special program for the young Servas members -to produce a video tape by themselves; for the adult Servas members there will be some workshops on Sunday morning dealing with the motto. On Saturday we will mainly discuss and "workshop" items of Servas Germany. On Friday evening and Saturday evening we will have a cultural program where contributions are welcomed!

For further information you may contact me (e-mail Nationalsecretary@servas.de). You will find information about the venue at www.scheersberg.de

We are looking forward to meet you in Quern!

*Inken Resa-Thomas,
National Secretary of Servas Germany.*

Italy 2005 - Pathways together

"Sentierinsieme"/Pathway together will return next year in Italy to a valley near Monte Rosa, in Piedmont: the green **Valsesia**. It is for the **weekend 15-17 July 2005**. After the weekend there will be **four days of trekking** for a limited number of people (max 30) in the "Walser" area. We will be at Cerva, a small locality in the little Val Sermenza, municipality of Rossa. The building can take 70 people. We can have space for tents and caravans.

As there is a limit to the places, it is essential to **book in advance**. The people who book for two full days will have priority, as well as participants in the trekking.

The daily cost (dinner, night, breakfast, exclusive of beverages) is 32 Euro + 2Euro fees. For booking: Write your name, address, telephone, e-mail, your intention (or not) to participate to the trekking, to:Luigi Uslenghi, uslenghi@novara.alpcom.it Tel 0039 0321 402842

Although the required date due is 31-12-04, the final limit of the booking date is 30-04-2005.

After "Sentierinsieme" there is the possibility of staying with Servas families and after trekking for a maximum of 20 people, to stay for 2 or 3 days following the paths which link the famous "Cinque Terre", overlooking the Ligurian sea (for information about "Cinque Terre" : Adriano Ferrero, adrianoferrero@aliceposta.it , tel 0039 011 9880817).

We warmly invite you to join us: Valsesia -with its Alpine "attractions" (historical and artistic too)- and Italy await for you, as well as your old and new Servas friends.

Luigi Uslenghi, Italy