

TRAVEL REPORTS - EUROPE

Spain and Portugal Hints

For several weeks prior to our departure we had been contacting Servas hosts in the hope of spending some, but not all, of our time staying with Servas. We had few responses, and some of these were not able to host us. No one in Barcelona itself was able to put us up, (I think only 1 person actually answered). We chose people on e-mail for ease of communication, so it is possible some addresses may have been wrong; but we felt strongly that hosts in Barcelona are not interested in travellers! In contrast Sabadell is within easy reach of Barcelona, and there are several willing hosts there; Lleida, too, is well worth a visit - about 2 ½ hours from Barcelona on the train - and there are several hosts.

We flew from Bristol to Bilbao, and returned from Barcelona, travelling by train across the north of Spain. As ever, we enjoyed this way of experiencing the country, but found train travel and ticketing structures almost as complex as British Rail! Needs a good Tourist Information person to help the traveller through. In Barcelona itself we were lucky to find a Hostel at Sans where we paid 33€ per night for a room - clean and reasonably comfortable stay. But do not go in March! The weather was appalling, temperatures of 9.5°C to 13°C; we had a blizzard, cars covered in snow, and howling gales with torrential rain.

Hilary Noakes, Peter Nickol, Exeter, England

Slovenia

The main co-ordinator was most helpful and friendly. She invited us to see the school where she teaches. We met her class of 6 year olds and helped with classes of older children who were learning English. Slovenian schools seem to be happy places, not so 'driven' as British schools. She invited us to a local Servas meeting one evening. Another Servas host picked us up. They were disappointed with the low attendance.. The meeting was planning a regional get together (Slovenia, Austria, Croatia). I suggested Servas as, although it only has 2 hosts, one of these is keen on expanding Servas and meeting others. As very few people came the meeting dispersed after an hour. One of the others at the meeting runs a Slovene folk art gallery and shop. He invited us to 'drop by'. We did this and were very impressed by his huge collection of varied arts and crafts.

Marian Liebmann, Mike Coldham, Bristol, England

Scandinavia - Denmark, Sweden

Gloriously multicultural - one Brit with her Tunisian niece and Danish friend were shown the delights of old Stockholm at night by a Japanese host married to a Swedish man. We were all broadening our knowledge and understanding of different people and their cultures. This was part of a short time in exploring Sweden and also travelling together in life. Could the 3 of us manage to have peaceful co-existence in a different environment with new people as hosts and also some camping. Could we accept each other's

Bulgaria

Onto Varna by train to stay with the next family. They live in a part built house 15km outside Varna about 20 minutes walk from the Black Sea.

They were very kind and really made me feel at home. After the 2 days they asked me to stay on for the rest of my time. I met lots of their friends and relations. It was a privilege to see a bit of their family life. The Bulgarians are a charming race, they have a great sense of humour and are quite dotty in a nice sort of way, they have no sense of time (even less than the Spaniards!) and any arrangements were changed by the minute. The food was delicious and it was insisted that I was stuffed to capacity at every opportunity.

Judy Hill, Hereford, England

France and Spain, and a hiccup

I travelled 6,200km, was away for 22 days, stayed with 4 hosts in Spain, 2 in France and met some really nice people. I found it was very good staying with people as I did not speak the language and was on my own. I find you do need to balance your time by staying in hotels as it gets very tiring talking to new people all the time. I decided to spend no more than 4 nights in a row with Servas hosts. I only had one host who was not very hospitable. I felt like she was only offering a bed. She was not rude but I did not feel like I could do anything without her permission, even get a glass of tap water. It is a shame that people do not say NO if it is not convenient for them. Anyway, other than that it was a great experience. Hopefully some of the people I met will come to Australia one day and I can return the hospitality.

Veronica Layton, Australia

Germany

Germany is a very good country to travel. The Hosts are all well aware of the Servas aims and ideals and offer excellent and understanding hospitality. The problem for Hosts in Germany is that Traveller numbers are decreasing. Although I targeted Hosts in more rural Locations I am told it is a similar story for town/city-dwellers as well. True, there are many hosts in Germany, (so the travellers may become thinly spread), but I am told that it is generally known that Hosting experiences are lower than before.

Although travelled at the height of the summer, the prime travelling time for Hosts, there were more than enough Hosts who do not holiday at that time, and look at a Traveller visit as an opportunity to have a bit of a holiday come to them!

Adam O'Neil, Southampton, England

interests, me with my flying and the girls with shopping. Yes we could. We were willing to listen to each other, share with each other and accept advice from each other. We did not always agree with each other but accepted differences. This is part of life. It was a great couple of weeks. Tusind tak to all.

Jane Giffould, Halstead, England