

BOSIA

Student Delegation Manual

Purpose

The purpose of the Bainbridge Ometepe Sister Islands Association is to encourage mutual understanding, education, friendship, and cultural and peaceful exchanges between the people of Bainbridge Island and Ometepe Island, and between the peoples of the United States and Nicaragua.

Philosophy

The Bainbridge Ometepe Sister Islands Association (BOSIA) is devoted to cultural exchange, education, and humanitarian efforts. We believe that the peoples of Ometepe, Nicaragua, and the Puget Sound area can learn from each other while building a lasting friendship. Our relationship is based on mutual respect and trust. We help with projects that are initiated by groups on Ometepe and which are important to the community rather than to individuals or one family. We are non-partisan and non-sectarian. Working together we learn about each other and derive mutual benefit. Keeping this process in place helps prevent us from seeing ourselves as "do-gooders" and helps our partners on Ometepe to not see us as "patrones." When we travel to Ometepe as a part of BOSIA, we are not on a personal vacation, but become citizen diplomats who represent our community. We extend and nurture the relationships that have been carefully built by previous delegations. The people on Ometepe see the actions and the commitment we make as actions and commitments of BOSIA.

Description and History

BOSIA is a non-profit educational organization founded in 1987 by Bainbridge Islanders who had been concerned with the long history of poor relations between the U.S. and Nicaragua. The charter of the organization is to educate residents of both islands about each other's cultures, and to establish person-to-person ties between the islands. The Association also provides material aid to Ometepe, particularly to promote education and improved health.

BOSIA is a membership organization, with dues helping to fund on-going work. Membership is open to anyone sympathetic with the goals of the group, and residency on either island is not a requirement. Contributions to BOSIA are tax-deductible under Section 501(c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

BOSIA celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2017. Over the last thirty years the focus of BOSIA has remained on building relationships between the two islands. Since 1991, student delegations have traveled to Ometepe and lived with host families while working on community projects all over the island. In addition to Student Delegation trips, groups from the Health, Library, Coffee and Special Needs Committees have visited Ometepe

to build connections with the many different groups BOSIA works with. More information about the history of BOSIA can be found on the website www.bainbridgeometepe.org.

What the Student Delegation Does

Student Delegations make friends, learn first-hand about life on Ometepe, strengthen the bonds between Bainbridge and Ometepe, and have fun. Some groups work with communities to paint schools, construct facilities for schools, or work on projects for the community.

Delegates usually take one checked suitcase of materials for their project, or medical, school, and sports supplies for schools on Ometepe.

Being well-prepared for your trip will increase the success of your delegation and your own personal satisfaction. Attending all delegation meetings and town meetings is key to being prepared for the trip; therefore, attendance is mandatory. The process of the meetings, gathering materials, and packing together for the trip creates a team out of the individual delegates before the delegation begins. When delegates return home they report back to the Sister Islands Association and to the community.

Cultural Preparation and Awareness

We are guests on Ometepe, and our actions should reflect our understanding of and respect for our hosts, their customs, and their values. While working as a team is important for us, it is also important to work, interact, and play with our friends on Ometepe as much as possible. We are primarily a cultural exchange organization. Homestays with families are an important component of our trips because they allow an opportunity to get to know individuals on Ometepe and give them a chance to know us. It is challenging and worthwhile at times to set aside your opinions and feelings to listen to Nicaraguans. It is also useful to express your own ideas. The homestay and working on your project provide a wonderful opportunity for cross-cultural exchanges of ideas.

Here are a few of the cultural issues and experiences that may await you during your stay on Ometepe:

Conception of time

On Ometepe one's conception of time is closely linked to the experience of living with uncertainty. Transportation, electricity, water, and other resources we may rely on without much thought are in short supply or involve a more time-consuming process on Ometepe. If you set up a meeting with some Nicaraguans, they may be late. The bus may have broken down, the power may have gone out, or they may not own a clock. The list of possibilities is endless! Please be on time and be patient. The cogs turn at a slower pace on Ometepe.

Flexibility

It is important to realize that plans are often changed. Flexibility, better known as "going with the flow," is essential to your enjoyment and to the success of the delegation.

Language and communication

Sometimes students preparing for Ometepe feel frustrated by their lack of speaking/ understanding ability. Student delegation after student delegation has proven that the level of Spanish you have is sufficient to have strong, meaningful relationships with your families. This does not mean that it will be easy. Be sure to brush up on common phrases, greetings, and important verbs. Do not worry about conjugating everything perfectly.

Regardless of your language ability, it is important to express your appreciation for your host family's efforts. There are many effective forms of communication that are not spoken. Smiles will relax you and your Nicaraguan friends. People understand body language, tone of voice, and facial expressions, even if you are not trying to communicate with them.

Food

Rice, beans, plátanos, and fruit are the staple foods of the people of Ometepe. As guests you will probably be given large portions, often including meat. Some Nicaraguans do not eat meat because they cannot afford the luxury. They may make a special effort to prepare a dish with meat for you because you are a guest in their home.

Vegetarians should explain to their families what their dietary need is. This discussion is often an interesting and somewhat humorous opportunity for cross- cultural discussion. Many Nicaraguans do not understand why one would choose not to eat meat because they view it as a great treat.

Be aware of differences in diet and that this may very well cause problems in your digestion. At first you may find yourself eating less food than normal as you adjust to the different food and preparation of it. Do not turn all food away and quit eating, but do be aware of food that could harbor bacteria (raw vegetables is a common worry), and avoid it if you feel uncomfortable or are worried about your health.

Role in family

Sometimes students feel awkward at first with their family. They want to help their Nicaraguan family wash clothes, cook, clean the house, and feed the animals. The Nicaraguans are sometimes unsure how to treat their guests as well. If you offer to help wash the clothes, for example, your host may insist on doing it for you. If you phrase the question slightly differently, "Could you teach me to wash my clothes Nicaraguan style?" you may have better luck.

To ease into communication you might plan to teach your family some simple games and ask them to teach you some. Games are good icebreakers that allow a lot of interaction without requiring an extensive vocabulary. Sharing pictures you have brought of your family and life on Bainbridge can also be a great way to break the ice and get discussions going about the similarities and differences between our two islands.

Formality

It is important to appreciate the concept of formality on Ometepe. As a guest from the Sister Island, you may be invited to an event and given special recognition. To show

appreciation of this honor, there are several small things you can do -- wear "formal" clothing to events (skirt or dress for women, dress shirt and chino style slacks for men); interact with your hosts during the events; ask questions; make a statement of gratitude. These actions show interest and respect.

Culture Shock

If you feel frustrated, depressed, alone, or "peopled-out," chances are you are experiencing "The Dreaded Culture Shock." Each person deals with culture shock differently, but the following is a brief list of suggestions to help you:

- Keep a journal. Write out your frustrations. Find a quiet place to write and reflect on your experience.
- Do something you are familiar with. Play a sport, speak in English, have a town hangout afternoon, read a book.

Machismo

Some people are very offended by the machismo aspect of Nicaraguan culture. Machismo in a culture is commonly interpreted to mean a sense of superiority held by males over females that is overtly expressed through enforcing domestic roles, an elevated sense of male sexual superiority and desirability, and the objectification of women.

There is no prescribed way of dealing with the frustrations that we feel when thrust into this culture. It is an issue that Nicaraguan women are often willing to talk about. Dialogue seems to be a very effective way to understand and better cope with cultural differences.

If you are feeling uncomfortable due to machismo or specifically someone's actions towards you, talk to your chaperone. They are there to help you deal with your situation. If the person who is making you feel uncomfortable is a member of your family DO NOT HESITATE to talk to your chaperone.

Nicaraguan History

We recommend that you read about Nicaraguan history and culture before your trip. If you want to read some novels, several great books to look for are *The Country Under My Skin* by Gioconda Belli and *The Jaguar Smile* by Salman Rushdie. For non-fiction, you could read *Blood of Brothers: Life and War in Nicaragua* by Stephen Kinzer, *Nicaragua: Living in the Shadow of the Eagle* by Thomas Walker, *Unfinished Revolution: Daniel Ortega and Nicaragua's Struggle for Liberation* by Kenneth Morris, or *Nicaragua in Focus: a Guide to the People, Politics and Culture* by Nick Castor.

If you want to improve your Spanish skills and learn more about current events in Nicaragua, two Nicaraguan newspapers are <https://www.laprensa.com.ni/> and <https://www.elnuevodiario.com.ni/>. The Nicaragua page in Wikipedia has an excellent overview of Nicaraguan history.

Recent Political Events

In 2018 the government initiated social security reforms that would significantly reduce benefits for people reaching retirement age. The initiative was stridently opposed by many people, including students and senior groups. This resulted in sustained street protests in cities; even peaceful Ometepe had protests.

Because of the unpredictability of the unrest and disruption to the transportation links, the BOSIA board cancelled the 2018 and 2019 high school delegations. The level of unrest did not warrant cancellation of other BOSIA adult delegations, such as the Coffee, Special Needs, and Student Delegation Committee trips. By the fall of 2019, the Board, informed by Nicaraguan friends and office staff, concluded that civic life had returned to a new normal and that it would be safe to resume the student trips.

What to Bring

Gifts

You will be staying with a host family. By sharing the joys and struggles of daily life on Ometepe, very special friendships can emerge. Islanders from both communities gain a deeper understanding of a foreign culture and an appreciation of the different challenges each face. As we leave to return to our homes in the North, we often want to leave a "recuerdo" with our friends and "family" on Ometepe.

Gift giving is a sensitive issue in both cultures. It is essential to show one's appreciation for Nicaraguan hospitality while also respecting the Nicaraguans' sense of dignity and pride. Although it may be tempting to leave lavish gifts with one's host family, it is important to remember that our relationship is based on community cooperation and a growing sense of international awareness and understanding. Gifts should reflect these principles. Lavish gifts can also set up competition among families.

Some Suggested Gifts and "Recuerdos"

- A little photo album of your family
- Postcards of Bainbridge
- Calendars with scenes of the U.S.
- Headlamps or flashlights and batteries. Avoid items that use "C" batteries as these are not available on Ometepe. Solar-powered or hand-cranked are options also.
- Books in Spanish
- Spanish-English dictionary
- Hair accessories, bandanas
- Baseball caps
- T-shirts
- Kazoos or harmonicas
- Pocket knives, tools
- CDs of popular music
- Colored pens or pencils, crayons

- Canvas tote bags, paracord
- Small balls, jacks sets, playing cards, UNO cards
- Tupperware, long wooden spoons and other cooking utensils, kitchen towels
- Common tools—screwdrivers, pocketknives,
- Solar charger

Annotated Packing List

Clothes

- Lightweight long pants. Pants protect from sun and mosquitoes. Think about keeping cool yet covered at all times. Capris are fine.
- Quick-drying (lightweight cotton or synthetic) "long" shorts. Short shorts are inappropriate.
- Skirt or slacks. Bring one item for "events"- understated fun "summer" wear that gives a good impression.
- Lightweight, quick-drying shirts. These are cooler than cotton T-shirts. Synthetics, wool, linen or thin-woven cotton. Tanks are fine, but girls' tanks should have a strap at least an inch wide and not reveal cleavage.
- Cotton T-shirts, including your Sister Island T-shirt.
- Socks, underwear. Pack smart. You don't need a new pair of socks or underwear every day. Underwear should be full coverage; pack what you would be comfortable having hung in the yard to dry.
- Closed shoes for hiking and working outdoors. Scorpions, rocks, and thorns abound, so it is important to keep feet healthy. Athletic shoes or light hikers.
- Sandals for beach/swimming/bathing. Chacos, Tevas, Keens best for beach and walking, flip-flops best in shower or evening visits to outhouse.
- Lightweight rain jacket is optional. It will rain, but it's a warm rain.
- Sleepwear. Think about having to go to the bathroom at night and maybe sharing a room with someone in your family.
- Swimwear. Lightweight shorts, added shirts and sports bras for girls. Girls may bring a swimsuit, but should wear shorts and shirt over it.
- Sun hat - floppy fabric or baseball cap. Not required, but if you burn easily it would be good to have.
- Bandanas

You want to think about how you look overall. We want to be ourselves; we don't want to show up wearing grubby clothes and we also don't want to show up wearing the newest and nicest "travel" gear. Dress *smart*.

Toiletries (all travel-size, liquids must fit in 1-quart Ziploc bag)

- Hand sanitizer
- Toothbrush/toothpaste/floss. Don't bring electronic toothbrushes.
- Contact lens supplies. Also bring your glasses.
- Soap Liquid or bar soap; Dr. Bronner's (cut in ½) or other biodegradable.
- Shampoo, should be biodegradable.
- Deodorant
- Razor

- Brush/comb
- Headbands, hair bands. You will probably wear your hair up a lot if it's long.
- Towel. Microfiber if you have it. Don't pack your heaviest towel; a smaller old towel works great.
- Toilet Paper (2 full rolls)
- Tampons/Pads/etc.
- Laundry bar soap/liquid detergent. Your Dr. Bronner's can double for this, or other biodegradable. Your host family will also have laundry soap.
- Sunscreen. High protection for tropical sun. (Combination products with insect repellent not recommended).
- Insect repellent—either with Picaridin (20%) or DEET (34%, as 100% is not necessary). *Required*, as this prevents insect-borne diseases. Consider Natrapel or 3M's Ultrathon repellent, available at REI, Wildernest, or The Traveler; it can last the majority of the day (8 hrs.) if you don't swim. Do not go "natural;" the risk of tropical illnesses is too high. Insect repellent also helps prevent other bug bites such as flea bites.
- Eye drops. If your eyes dry out often, or just for soothing relief after a long day in the sun. Lubricant eye drops are best.

Miscellaneous

- 3 Water bottles. Nalgene or metal 1-liter size.
- Water Purification. Steri-Pen or pump recommended, iodine or chlorine tablets as back-up.
- Headlamp/Flashlight. Headlamps probably the most practical.
- Batteries. Bring extras.
- Money belt
- Camera. Inexpensive is generally better; waterproof bag is a good idea.
- Sunglasses. Very important, tropical sun is strong.
- Ballpoint Pens and/or pencils
- Notebook/Journal
- Watch with alarm
- Prescription glasses (even if you wear contacts)
- Work gloves
- Ziplock bags, to organize things in your pack
- Spanish/English Dictionary, pocket-sized
- Energy bars or equivalent American snack items
- Book for reading
- Large black garbage bags. To protect backpack from rain during transit.
- Sleeping sheet or sleeping bag liner
- Mosquito net. Nice to keep all sorts of bugs away, not just mosquitoes.
- Sea sickness bands or medicine (non-drowsy). Optional, but consider bringing if you are prone to seasickness for the 1 hr. ferry ride.

What NOT to bring

- Jeans or heavy clothing that does not breathe well
- Spaghetti strap tank tops
- Very short skirts or shorts

- Heels
- Expensive jewelry/clothing
- Things you have to plug in (camera battery or cell phone OK)

Your personal belongings need to fit in a carry-on backpack. We will be flying on American, United or Delta, and all limit carry-ons to 22"x14"x9".

When packing, and while on Ometepe, please be aware of packaging and containers. Recycling does not exist in Nicaragua, and plastics (especially bags and bottles), will be burned or thrown aside. Please think about minimizing this impact before heading down and bring used plastics back to Bainbridge with you. This includes plastic bottles from drinks that are bought on Ometepe, such as juices or sodas.

Health Information

The list that follows has recommendations of where to begin. Please contact your personal medical advisor if you have specific questions related to your special health situation.

- Center for Disease Control, www.cdc.gov/travel
- Kitsap County Health Department, (360) 337-5235; 345 6th Street, Bremerton; www.kitsapcountyhealth.com

Primary care provider

- Set up appointment now; medical forms filled out and returned by the deadline.
- Health form guidelines, history and current health
- All medications in original containers; carry on plane
- Special attention to any allergic conditions

Immunizations

This is only a guide. Please check for updated recommendations with your primary care provider and the CDC at

<https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/nicaragua>.

You should have had *all routine childhood immunizations* (including MMR and its booster), some of which are included in the list below.

- Tetanus-diphtheria/pertussis (Tdap) – Booster within the last 5 years
- Polio – One lifetime booster after original series is recommended. However, there is no polio in the western hemisphere.
- Typhoid – Recommended. Talk with your primary care provider. The oral capsules are taken every other day for a total of 4 doses (you need to remember) and lasts 5 years. The shot is over in a moment and lasts 3 years.
- Hepatitis A – Vaccination protects from Hepatitis A, which is spread through fecal contamination. Two shots six months apart. The first injection, at two weeks before, will protect for the trip. You have probably already had this.
- Anti-malarial – Not needed.
- Influenza – Vaccine from previous autumn is adequate.

- Hepatitis B – recommended for everyone, you have undoubtedly had.
- Rabies—this is optional, expensive and not routinely recommended. It is a series of 3 shots and makes sense if you anticipate future developing world travel. Having the immunization protects you from having to make a decision about whether or not a potential exposure was risky or not. If you get exposed to an animal’s saliva and are unimmunized you need to get a shot of rabies immune globulin which is usually unavailable in a low resource country (so you have to decide whether or not to return home). We do not recommend you get vaccinated but do recommend that you do not pet animals—regardless of how cute they might be. Should you get bit let your chaperone know right away.

Common health problems

- Dehydration
- Heat Exhaustion
- Fungal Infections
- Diarrhea (vomiting less common)
- Bug bites, rashes, skin infections
- Dust/eye irritation
- Anxiety/homesickness
- Cuts/Accidents

Mosquito-borne diseases

There are no vaccines available; prevention is *only* by preventing bites. Be aware that mosquitoes bite both during the day and night. There is no antiviral treatment for dengue, chikunguna or zika viruses, and they can sometimes be asymptomatic. You cannot reliably distinguish between them without specialized lab testing, which is not available on Ometepe. If you become ill in the weeks after you return, tell your health care provider where you’ve been.

Dengue Fever

- Also called “Breakbone Fever” because of the muscle/bone pain it causes. Other symptoms besides fever include severe headache and pain behind the eyes.
- There is a very small risk of severe illness; more likely if you have had dengue fever before.
- When severe, dengue fever causes bleeding, so if you get a fever do NOT take ibuprofen or naproxyn (Advil/Aleve) as these medicines affect blood clotting. Acetaminophen (Tylenol) is OK.
- Incubation is 3-10 days.

Chikunguna

- Symptoms include fever, rash, muscle and severe joint pain. Some joint pain/arthritis can last for months.
- Incubation is 3-7 days.

Zika

- There was a large outbreak in Central and South America in 2015-2016, including Ometepe.
- Most infections are mild or asymptomatic.
- Symptoms can include fever, rash, red eyes, joint pain, headache.
- Infection during pregnancy can cause severe neurologic problems in the infant.
- Can be transmitted sexually from person to person as well as through mosquito bites.
- Incubation is 3-12 days.

Malaria

- This is present in parts of Nicaragua but not on Ometepe, so you do not need medication for prevention.

Water/food-borne illnesses

- Viral or bacterial gastroenteritis, occasional parasitic infections such as giardia are all possible.
- No immunizations available.
- Can involve vomiting, diarrhea, or both.
- Traveler's diarrhea may be treated with antibiotics (carry with you and notify your chaperone), depending on pattern/severity of illness.
- Incubation period for giardia is 1-3 weeks and treatment is with a different antibiotic than that used for traveler's diarrhea.
- Typhoid vaccination recommended
- If you are ill after you return, tell your health care provider where you've been.

Staying healthy during your trip

Prevent insect bites

- Use insect repellent with 30% DEET or 20% Picaridin, and reapply often.
- Consider buying clothing that has been treated with permethrin, or treat clothing yourself prior to travel.
- Consider wearing lightweight long-sleeved shirts, long pants, and a hat.
- Consider taking a mosquito net to sleep under.

For your personal med kit

- All of your prescription meds as recommended by your doctor in their original bottles.
- An antibiotic for traveler's diarrhea (from your health care provider), e.g. azithromycin.
- Anti-nausea prescription medication if you wish (from your health care provider), we recommend ondansetron oral disintegrating tablets
- 1% Hydrocortisone cream or ointment for rubbing on bug bites

- Bacitracin or polysporin antibacterial ointment (preferably not Neosporin/triple antibiotic as many people develop allergies to the neomycin which is in it)– for minor scratches/cuts
- Loperamide (Imodium) – for diarrhea
- An antihistamine: Loratadine (Claritin), fenofexadine (Allegra) or cetirizine (Zyrtec). Diphenhydramine (Benadryl) can also be used but makes many people sleepy– for itching or nasal allergies, runny nose
- Adhesive Band-aids
- Acetaminophen (Tylenol) AND ibuprofen (or naproxen). If you have a fever, DO NOT use ibuprofen or naproxen (health section), acetaminophen is OK.

Water purification

See: <http://www.rei.com/learn/expert-advice/water-treatment-international.html>
Visit Wildernest or REI.

Choose the method you prefer:

- UV light (e.g. Steri-Pen). Highly effective, though require batteries. Bring chlorine dioxide tablets for back up in case of malfunction.
- Chlorine dioxide tablets. Almost as effective as UV, takes 30 min to purify, does not kill the parasite cryptosporidium well, does kill giardia.
- Backpacker's pumps/ filters. Generally do not remove viruses (better for backpacking than travel, but still helpful but as most traveler's diarrhea is not due to viruses.)
- First Need. This pump device has a special filter that does remove viruses.
- MSR Sweetwater Filter system. Also removes viruses, as liquid bleach drops are added at the end. NOTE: TSA may not allow the liquid bleach solution (sodium hypochlorite) in carry-on luggage.
- Iodine tablets. Do not treat parasites (giardia, cryptosporidium), can be used for back-up.

Be careful about food and water

- Diseases from food and water are the leading cause of illness in travelers.
- Wash hands often with soap and water, especially before eating. Use alcohol-based hand gel (e.g., Purell) if soap and water not available. Bring this with you in bottles that are small enough to keep on your person.
- Drink only (a) water that you have purified yourself, or (b) bottled water or carbonated drinks in cans and bottles. Avoid untreated tap water, AND avoid drinks made from untreated tap water, or homemade ice cubes, refrescos.
- Use purified water even to brush your teeth.
- Avoid eating food from street vendors – you have no way to assure that it was prepared under sanitary conditions.
- Food should be fully-cooked.
- Fruits and vegetables need to be peeled if eaten raw.
- Beware of potential cross-contamination!
- Avoid dairy unless you are sure it is pasteurized.

Avoid injuries

- Wear closed shoes on hikes and for work projects.
- Break in shoes/sandals before trip.
- Wear flip-flops or sandals in shower/bathroom to avoid parasites, fungi.
- Shake out shoes and clothes before putting them on.
- Wear work gloves when hauling rocks and bricks; not just to protect fingers, but also because of potential bites/stings from creatures that you encounter.

Other precautions

- Drink plenty of purified water - about three quarts/day.
- Bring any prescription medications that you need **WITH YOU**.
- Wear sunscreen and use a hat.
- Use insect repellent. Remember that mosquito-borne illnesses do not have vaccines, and also remember that even if you don't catch any illness, the bites from mosquitoes and other bugs can really itch!
- If you have asthma talk to your doctor: lots of smoke and dust exposure can cause asthma to worsen. Take inhaler(s) with you.
- If you have severe cleanliness or bug compulsions this isn't the trip for you!
- Sexual relationships are inappropriate. STDs are not uncommon on the island, but more importantly, remember that you are citizen-diplomats traveling to Ometepe for a very short time.

A last word of caution

Good doctors work on Ometepe but there are few diagnostic tests, little equipment, and no modern ambulances or air evacuation. Medical emergencies are potentially more dangerous.

Delegates often travel standing in the back of old trucks on poorly-maintained roads. Ometepe has earthquakes, two potentially active volcanoes and occasional hurricanes. For other risks see the Disclosure of Risks and Dangers/Assumption of Risk information on the Parent Permission Form or Delegate Waiver.

Following the above precautions will help to make your trip a safe and rewarding time. However, it is important to realize the risks involved as well as the necessary precautions.

Frequently Asked Questions

I want to help my family after I leave. What is the best way to help?

It is natural to want to help a family whose members have opened their home to you and who have many material and financial needs. We think that the best thing you can offer your family is your friendship. Stay connected with them by sending letters with future delegations and through social media. Tell them about your life in the United States. Stay interested and in touch over the years.

There are ways you can help your family indirectly: send school supplies to the town. You and your family can also sponsor a scholarship student selected by the committees on Ometepe (though this won't necessarily help your particular family or town).

Some people have chosen to send direct financial aid to their Ometepe families. This is very understandable; however, it does create difficulties in the long run because it creates expectations of financial gain and long-term support. Other families may choose to host in the future for the money rather than for the friendship connection. We've heard many times regarding other exchange programs that home stays that are financial transactions have a very different quality than homes that are opened out of generosity and friendship.

We strongly urge you to resist the desire to send money to your host family after you return to Bainbridge. They hosted you for the pleasure of getting to know an American. Sending money reinforces the divides that the Student Delegation is attempting to break down.

What if people ask me directly for material or financial aid?

It is possible that someone in your host family will ask for help with the cost of a prescription, school supplies or other needs. Or, a community leader may show you partially completed schools, roads, or clinics and ask for help. A simple answer is that delegates are not in a position to offer any personal financial support or make decisions about requests, then direct them to talk to the BOSIA office staff in Altagracia.

If you want to add more information you can say that the Sister Islands Association partners with communities through a variety of programs – scholarships, projects, health, water – and that the Association requests that visitors direct their contributions through these programs rather than to individuals. The reason is that groups on Ometepe (scholarship committees, Padres de Familia, etc.) direct where the money goes for the greatest benefit to the community. Since you are a delegate of the Association, you want to honor the relationship that has been established with the committees on Ometepe and the decision-making authority those committees have.

You might want to practice saying something like this in Spanish before your trip. If you aren't sure of your Spanish being sufficient to explain this, direct them to your chaperone.

Can I go off on my own to explore when I am on a delegation?

The student delegation's purpose is not to play tourist on Ometepe. We will have opportunities to explore areas around your town in great detail, an experience few tourists on Ometepe get to have. There will be a town trip with your host families to a

local beach or location as a thank you trip and your town may take other small trips to get to know the island. But you should not be leaving your town on your own because you want to see the island. As a representative of BOSIA, you are carrying out some of the organization's cultural bridge-building by remaining in your town and interacting with your families and other individuals in the town.

Unless ill, it is imperative to attend meetings or community events that have been set up especially for the delegation. Your attendance shows respect for the community and the scarce resources they have used for the event. Failing to attend would be insulting. For the same reason, it is imperative to go to meals with your host family.

There will probably be free time other than these events and meals during which you can explore your town as a group or for your town to take a trip or two to get to know more about what BOSIA does on Ometepe.

How do I communicate my respectfulness?

Some simple things that may not be evident to a delegate are:

- Don't speak English in front of people; if you must speak English, have everything you say in English translated for them. It is especially important not to use names of people when talking in English around Nicaraguans.
- Be attentive during group welcomes and goodbyes even if you don't understand what is being said. Try your hardest to understand what is being said; it will help you in the long run as you adjust to Nicaraguan accents and the speed of fluent Spanish speakers.
- Remember, say goodbye to everyone in a group when you leave.
- Treat the food you are being fed as the precious resource it is.

Why am I being fed separately from the rest of the family?

This is quite common on Ometepe so it is not a cause for concern. It could have to do with the scarcity of chairs, plates, silverware, etc. in the family. It could be because the cook needs to see how much food is required for the guest before feeding the rest of the family. Or it could be seen as a sign of honor for the guest that you sit in the kitchen at the table while the rest of the family sits in the living room. If you feel uncomfortable you can move your food into the area where the family is eating or ask to be served where they are eating because you enjoy being with them.

My family just looked at the present I brought and set it aside. Don't they like it?

In Nicaragua, accepting your gift and immediately setting it aside is standard cultural practice. They will undoubtedly be showing off the present to family and neighbors soon. Not using a present immediately could also be a sign of the high regard they hold for the gift. Precious objects tend to be stored away and only brought out when they want to share them (photo albums, calendars, post cards, and some nice tools would be examples of this).

What is appropriate for women to wear?

Delegates will want to dress for the heat but without exposing midriffs, and without wearing revealing tank tops. Nicaraguan men will see revealing clothing as an indication

of loose sexuality or an invitation. Even though many young women on Ometepe wear tight skirts or tops, exposed bellies and breasts are not considered appropriate daily attire. See the comments in the clothing section about what is considered appropriate clothing for women to be wearing.

What if I feel overwhelmed and need time alone?

You will soon discover that individual privacy is not a cultural value on Ometepe. For this reason, spending very much time alone in a room (assuming you can get it!) will probably be interpreted as dislike for your host. If you need time alone, you can sit outside or in a hammock and write in a journal or read a book. It is O.K. to take time for yourself, but do not “hide from your family” every day or every time you are in the house. Making that extra effort to interact even when exhausted is one of the keys to strong connections with your host family and town. The town groups will often have meetings to allow delegates some time to relax in their own language and reflect on their experiences and feelings.

What if there is something important I can't communicate with my family?

Student delegates can ask chaperones to help with communication. And never underestimate the power of charades!

What electronic devices are appropriate to take?

Delegates generally take cameras. However, the more expensive the camera, the greater the emotional impact on family and community if it is lost or stolen. Think hard about what you really need. You are there to experience life on Ometepe; don't take things that accentuate our economic differences. **DO NOT BRING:** computers, gaming devices, Ipods, E-Readers, tablets, etc.

Can I develop a friendship with a person of the opposite sex?

On Ometepe, there are virtually no platonic friendships between men and women outside the family. Ometepinos may very easily misunderstand your overtures of friendship toward someone of the opposite sex. You may not even think you are flirting but your overtures may be fueling unrealistic hopes for a romantic relationship and the unrealistic expectations for the future and access to the United States that would come with it. You are there for two weeks; it can be an intense experience, but any relationship would be unfair for the Nicaraguan and could affect their reputation in the community.

Amorous relationships between delegates are frowned upon during the duration of the trip. You are there as a team and need to think about the impact your relationship can have on the town dynamics. The relationship will also disrupt your interactions with host families and other Nicaraguans in your town.

All student delegates sign a release pledging to refrain from sexual relations while in Nicaragua. The pledge is meant to help you see that such relationships can be damaging. In signing, you are agreeing to behave in a manner appropriate for Nicaraguan culture and for your town group. You are ambassadors of the Sister Islands Association, and your behavior should reflect that.