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BOSIA DELEGATES MANUAL (Revised 1/2007)
PURPOSE (from Bylaws)

The purpose of the Bainbridge Ometepe Sister Islands Association is to encourage mutual understanding, education, friendship, 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 actions and the commitment we make are seen by the people on Ometepe as actions and commitments of BOSIA.

The fact that you represent a larger community gives you a comfortable way to handle the requests for aid that you may receive on your trip. Community leaders may show you partially completed schools, roads, clinics, or housing and ask for help. You will see and hear of needs for medical and school supplies. You can explain that you can't make decisions about the requests yourself, but that you would carry a written request to the board on Bainbridge.

DESCRIPTION AND HISTORY

BOSIA is a non-profit educational organization founded in 1987 by Kim Esterberg and other Bainbridge Islanders who have 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 of either island is not a requirement. Contributions to BOSIA are tax deductible under Section 501(c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

In November of 1986 a group of about 60 people made small contributions to send Kim Esterberg to Nicaragua to search for a sister island. DAMUR, the Nicaraguan government office responsible for managing the nearly 100 US-Nicaragua sister relationships at that time, suggested Ometepe and sent a representative with Esterberg to the Island. He returned home with photographs, stories, and an ambitious program to begin building inter-island ties. The association hosted Nicaraguan visitors and sponsored cultural and educational events on Bainbridge.

In the spring of 1987 videographers Mark Dworkin and Melissa Young carried a video portrait of Bainbridge to Ometepe and brought back footage from the Nicaraguan island. In early 1988 they released *Island Sisters*, an excellent 20-minute video about the developing relationship. Interest in Ometepe and has grown steadily since then. Mark and Melissa recently finished a new video that shows the breadth of the ties between our two communities.

WHAT DELEGATIONS DO

Delegations make friends, learn first-hand about life on Ometepe, strengthen the bonds between Bainbridge and Ometepe, and have fun. Some work in construction, provide medical care, gather information, help with reforestation, teach, assess possibilities for future projects and delegations.... use your imagination!

Delegates traditionally carry two suitcases of materials for their project, or medical, school, and sports supplies for schools and clinics on Ometepe. They pack their personal belongings into a carry-on bag.

Being well prepared for your trip will increase the success of your delegation and your own personal satisfaction. Previous delegations to Ometepe have brought back specific information that will be useful in preparing medical, construction, and environmental teams for new and continuing projects. Be sure to network with previous delegates and tap into the information which the BOSIA has already gathered. The process of planning projects, 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 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. Home stays with families are an important component of our trips because they give an opportunity to get to know real people on Ometepe and give them a chance to know us. It would be easy for us to be seen as the rich people staying at the *hospedaje* who only meet with them in formal settings.

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 are simply more time-consuming 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; 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 team.

Language and Communication

Sometimes people feel frustrated by their lack of speaking/understanding ability. It is important to brush up on some useful phrases before you arrive on Ometepe. At a minimum you should know polite greetings, words of thanks, and a few useful questions. Your trip will be more rewarding to you and more effective if you learn some Spanish before you go.

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, platanos, fish, and fruit are the staple foods of the people of Ometepe. As guests you will probably be given large portions. Many 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. Many Nicaraguans do not understand why one would choose not to eat meat. This discussion is often an interesting, and somewhat humorous opportunity for cross-cultural discussion.

Role in Family

Sometimes folks 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.

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 (skirt or dress for women, dress shirt and slacks for men) to a school graduation; take notes during meetings; 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, listen to music, take a walk, and speak in English.

Machismo

Some people are very offended by the machismo aspect of Nicaraguan culture. There is no prescribed way of dealing with these frustrations. 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.

Nicaraguan History

It is important to read about Nicaraguan history and culture before your trip. You may borrow some books from BOSIA, and also the video Melissa Young and Mark Dworkin made in 2002 about the sister island relationship. Remember that you are part of the Sisters Island Association. Your opinions and actions will be associated with the group. It is challenging and worthwhile at times to set aside your opinions to listen to Nicaraguans. It is also useful to express your own ideas. Sister island projects provide a wonderful opportunity for cross-cultural exchange of ideas.

Gifts

Often when people travel to Ometepe they live with host families. 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. When we return to our homes in the North we 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 also set up competition among folks on Ometepe.

Some Suggested Gifts and "Recuerdos"

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| Photos or a little photo album of your family | Kazoos or harmonicas (muy popular!) |
| Post cards of Bainbridge, Maps | Pocket knives, tools |
| Calendars with scenes of life in the U.S. | Cassette tapes of popular music |
| Flashlights and batteries | Artwork |
| Books in Spanish | Colored pens or pencils, crayons |
| Spanish-English dictionary | Canvas tote bags |
| Caps, hair accessories, bandannas | Small balls, jacks sets, playing cards for kids |
| Tee shirts | |

PACKING LIST

The following is a checklist of items that previous delegates have found useful during their travels to Ometepe. All this will fit snugly in a carry-on suitcase/backpack style bag.

Clothing

Jeans or lighter weight long pants--these protect from sun and mosquitoes
Quick-drying "long" shorts --- short shorts are inappropriate
Lightweight, loosely woven shirts are cooler than tee shirts
Lightweight rain jacket/wind breaker (not necessary for spring trip)
Closed shoes for hiking and working outdoors (tarantulas)
Sandals for beach/swimming/bathing
Socks, underwear Cotton tee shirts Swimsuit
Skirt or slacks for "events" Sleepwear Fabric hat

Toiletries

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| Toothbrush | Shampoo | Sunscreen (high protection for tropical sun) |
| Tooth Paste | Razor | Foot powder |
| Soap | Contact lens supplies | Tears |
| Deodorant | Lotion | Insect repellent with Deet (prevents insect-borne diseases) |
| Brush/comb | Laundry bar soap or Liquid | |
| Towel | Detergent | |
| Toilet Paper | Hand sanitizer | |
| Tampons | Artificial | |

Medicines

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| Malaria pills | Prescription meds in their original bottle | Aspirin, acetaminophen or ibuprophen |
| Alka-seltzer | Anti-bacterial ointment | Water purification tablets and/or filter |
| Pepto Bismol | Imodium | |
| First Aid Kit | | |

Miscellaneous

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| Water bottles | Sewing Kit | Work gloves |
| Sleeping sheet | Sunglasses | Alarm Clock |
| Flashlight | Pens and pencils | Zip lock bags (to organize things in pack) |
| Batteries | Notebook | Spanish/English Dictionary |
| Money belt | Watch | |
| Camera & film | Glasses if you wear contacts | |
| Address book | | |

CONFIRMATION OF TRAVEL: It is essential to reconfirm your international travel plans 72 yours in advance. If you will not be near a phone, be sure to make other arrangements.

IMMUNIZATIONS

This is only a guide. Please check with your county health department for updated recommendations.

1. Tetanus-diphtheria -- booster within 8 years
2. Polio -- One lifetime booster after original series
3. Typhoid -- shots or pills
 - Typhim Vi injection: Booster dose needed every two years. Primary vaccination is a single injection. For people two years old or older.
 - Typhoid injection: Booster required within 3 years. If you have not had a typhoid shot before, you will need one at least 6 weeks ahead, followed by a booster at least 2 weeks before arrival in Nicaragua. These shots give a fever reaction and arm pain, so try to plan a convenient time. Pregnancy warning.
 - Pills: Series of 3 taken over 8 days protects for 5 years. For people six years old or older.
4. 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.
5. Chloroquin for protection against malaria -- take weekly for one to two weeks before your trip, during the trip, and for 4 weeks after you return home. Take weekly on the same day. Take with meal to avoid nausea.
6. Cholera -- check with the Health Department to see if Nicaragua is currently a risk area. Injections provide 40-50% protection (i.e. decrease in severity of illness). Tetracycline or doxycycline is recommended at onset of symptoms. Check with your physician and the Health Dept. before deciding on your protection.
7. Hepatitis B -- recommended for everyone, especially health care workers, people who will come into contact with blood or needles, and long-term volunteers. Shots are a series of 3 (one, another one month later, the third six months later). These are expensive, but may give lifetime protection.

Easy ways to avoid common medical emergencies

- Avoid dehydration: Drink plenty of purified water – at least 3 quarts/day
- Avoid Sunburn: Wear sun screen (don't forget ears & feet) and hat
- Lower risk of insect-borne diseases: Use insect repellent

- Natural bug & sun protection: wear lightweight, long-sleeved shirt & pants
- Wear closed shoes on hikes and for work projects
- Wear work gloves to move rocks and bricks (scorpions)
- Avoid bacterial dysentery: Wash hands well before eating anything
- Use instant hand disinfectant in absence of soap and water
- Asthma: If you have severe asthma, talk with your doctor about the trip. You will encounter lots of dust and smoke on Ometepe.

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 who has opened their home to you and who has 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. 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 or help support a project there. You can also sponsor a scholarship student selected by the committees on Ometepe (though this won't necessarily help your 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. 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.

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

One way to respond is that the Sister Islands Association partners 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 because there is a good chance you'll have to use it.)

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

Many delegation activities are set up for good reasons. For example, a visit to a new school library funded by BOSIA may be important as an acknowledgement of the community's work and it also enables the community to give something in return for the financial aid. As a representative of BOSIA, you are carrying out some of the organization's cultural bridge building by attending such an event.

It is imperative to attend any meals, 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 on your own.

If I am traveling on my own, should I rent a car?

Being in a car will isolate you and set you apart from people. Traveling in the same way as the people of Ometepe is a key part of experiencing their life, even if, to a northerner, it can seem time consuming and sometimes frustrating. There are buses every hour between Altagracia and Moyogalpa and 3 times a day to Balgue. In your community, people will travel together in one truck. There is even a minibus up to the Finca Magdalena.

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.
- Be attentive during group welcomes and good byes even if you don't understand what is being said.
- 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 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.

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

Americans tend to be effusive about thanks for presents they receive but this response is standard cultural practice in Nicaragua. They will undoubtedly be showing off the present to family and neighbors soon.

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.

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 (assuming you can get it!) will probably be interpreted as dislike for your host. If you need time alone, you can sit outside and write in a journal or take a rest and read a book. Sometimes a delegation will create a "meeting" just to allow delegates some time to relax in their own language.

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

Student delegates can ask chaperones to help with communication. Other delegates can make liberal use of the delegation leader or others in the group who speak Spanish. And never underestimate the power of charades!

What “technological toys” are appropriate to take?

Delegates generally take cameras. The more expensive the camera, however, the greater the impact on family and community if it is lost or stolen. Think hard about what you really need. If you are there to experience life on Ometepe, don't import the things that accentuate our economic differences. This might include cell phones, computers, gameboys, and Ipods.

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 with it, a visa to the US). Student delegates are required to refrain from sexual relations while in Nicaragua.

BOSIA Land Purchase Resolution

My Ometepe family or their neighbors offer me a chance to purchase land on Ometepe. It is beautiful, and so reasonably priced. Does BOSIA have a policy about land purchase?

BOSIA office staff and/or equipment will not be used to assist in real estate transactions.

The purpose of BOSIA delegations is cultural exchange and friendship. The BOSIA Board of Directors believes that entering into real estate transactions while a delegation member is not appropriate and we strongly discourage it.