

Letter to Parents

Dear Parents of TOS Participants,

Greetings from Manila!

Each year, one or two students who wish to join the Tagalog On Site Program e-mail me requesting that I write and “assure” their parents that this is a legitimate and safe program.

As such, I have outlined below the safety measures that TOS undertakes each year.

For the last eight years, I have been traveling around the country, including parts of Mindanao. Most of these trips are done in preparation for the TOS program; others I make in line with my profession as a freelance writer and consultant for projects initiated by government and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). The crime rate outside of Manila is quite low. This would include the Los Baños, Laguna area where TOS will be based for most of the seven-week program. This urban-rural center is relatively small thus the municipal government and police are able to better control and manage the peace and order situation.

This summer and fall, TOS will be “housed” at the SEAMEO hostel inside the University of the Philippines, Los Baños (UPLB) campus for the duration of the program. The SEAMEO hostel was built by the Japanese government to house visiting international scholars. Accommodations will be two to three students per room, air-conditioned with private toilet/bath. All meals will be provided. The UPLB campus is a favorite program site because it is safe, readily accessible to Manila (2-3 hour drive), and is pretty (it is on a mountainside and is surrounded by farms and forests). The UPLB campus has its own university police that provides 24-hour security and is very visible on campus. For medical needs, TOS students can go to the UP Los Baños infirmary a short five-minute ride from the SEARCA hostel. There are two hospitals in the Los Baños area that are also readily accessible.

While we feel confident about our participants’ security, we have and will take steps to further ensure their safety:

1. We pay an advance visit to the head of government (in our case, the local mayors) in places TOS stays for an extended visit. Such visits by groups are often done as a courtesy to the head of government of the host municipality. It also creates an informal obligation on the mayor’s part to see to the comfort and safety of the group as long as they are in his/her jurisdiction. In the case of our program, there is the added bonus of seeing the host city from the perspective of the local government.

2. TOS relies on an extended network of nongovernmental (NGOs) and local government organizations to provide support. All our community immersion and field activities are facilitated and guided by NGO grassroots organizers and community workers. Should there be any hint of trouble in these areas, these NGO groups, because of their grassroots work in the most remote areas of the province, would be the first to know.

We are currently working with several community-based organizations, NGOs and people’s organizations such as the Institute for Politics and Governance, PILAR (an NGO that works closely with local government units in the Los Baños area), ATIKHA (an NGO that works with the families of OFWs), the political party Akbayan, etc.)

In Pampanga and Olongapo, community organizers from Angeles City and a people’s organization called Buklod ng Kababaihan have arranged our trips in the area for the last four years.

In Banaue, we are hosted by the influential Beyer family. Our Ifugao guide Gayia Beyer is the great granddaughter of famous anthropologist Otley Beyer. Gayia is herself an anthropologist and has personally assisted several foreign and local anthropologists and researchers, including those from the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, DC, the University of the Philippines, and the WWF, in their work in the area. (Note: The Banaue trip is optional. Although TOS makes the necessary logistical preparations for the Banaue trip, it is no longer included in the seven-week academic program. Students who opt to join the trip pay for it separately. A maximum of 15-18 students can be accommodated for this special trip after the 7 weeks in Laguna.)

3. There will always be a responsible TOS staffer in charge on a day-to-day basis. The TOS teachers, staff and I stay at the same inns with the participants, join them for their meals and will accompany them on each field activity. Assigned TOS staff members will be with the participants, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, for 7 weeks. I will personally be “on site” ninety percent of the time. While there will be times when the participants will choose to venture out on their own, we will advise them to take prudent measures: to travel in groups whenever possible, to sign a logbook indicating their time of departure/arrival and their place of destination, etc.

4. We welcome visits from parents and relatives while the program is in session. Each year, family members of some participants come visit us. I am confident that parents/relatives will see a program that is both academically rigorous, stimulating, fun and safe for everyone concerned.

I hope the above gives you some peace of mind.

Sincerely,

Susan F. Quimpo
Director
Tagalog On Site