



## THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC IN THE STAYCATION BUSINESS IN THE PHILIPPINES

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to discuss the impact of the global pandemic on accommodation establishments or staycation businesses in the Philippines and the changes that have occurred as a result of the pandemic. The coronavirus (COVID-19) global pandemic poses a significant challenge to everyone, particularly businesses that are not prepared for such a crisis. Following the guidelines and protocols that assist the accommodation establishment in operating and providing its services to the consumer.

**Keywords:** Covid19, Global Pandemic, Quarantine, New Normal, Staycation, Guidelines, Protocols, Vaccine, Accommodation.

### INTRODUCTION

Staycations are visiting a familiar area with fresh eyes; they can be very joyful and can be spent with family or friends; they may be a vacation without the stress of planning a long trip and also without the worry of packing too much or too little for the leisure time.

Covid-19 spread globally in the first quarter of 2020, with an increase in the number of patients and deaths. The global pandemic has had a major impact on staycation businesses all over the world. Due to the ongoing situation travel restrictions are being observed at national and international levels. These travel bans, border closures, event cancellations, quarantine requirements, and fear of spread, have placed extreme challenges on the tourism and hospitality sectors (Gössling et al., 2020a, b) and this is also why this type of business seems to be on the verge of closing or going bankrupt.

Businesses have been exposed to various challenges during the global pandemic, and their response to this disruption has impacted their resilience as well as their chances to overcome this crisis. (Gregurec et al., 2021). Staycation businesses should be aware of the guidelines and follow government instructions, as well as be authorized by the Department of Tourism (DOT) to operate and provide customer service during pandemics. Adapting to environmental changes will have a major impact and will take a lot of changes.

In some aspects, we're all adjusting to the new normal way of life, such as the quarantine classification and government protocols such as wearing a face-shield and wearing a facemask, and we've also observed social distancing in public places, but As Prayag (2020, p. 179) states, however, 'pandemics are not new'; and the impacts of previous crises, such as SARS, on the tourism and hospitality industries, have been investigated (Chen, 2011; Chien & Law, 2003; Tse et al., 2006; Zeng et al., 2005). The impact of the current coronavirus outbreak to date has long surpassed those that were observed during the SARS epidemic in 2002–2003. Coronavirus cases stand at over 10 million worldwide and the reported deaths due to the infection have crossed 500,000 (Kaushal, V., & Srivastava, S., 2021) The fear of COVID-19 has put cities on lockdown and left streets deserted in many countries (Bae, S. Y., & Chang, P. J., 2020).

## DISCUSSION

### Adapting the “new normal”

Tourism is still not back to normal, and no one knows how long the crisis will persist, but many accommodation establishments have learned to adapt to the "new normal," and the safety of employees and guests while on duty and during their staycation must be prioritized.

In the DOT Memorandum Circular No. 2020-002, Section 5, Guest Handling Policy, the health and safety norms governing the operations of accommodation establishments under the new normal should be followed by everyone to be protected against the virus. Also, since the pandemic began, we have done these things every single day of our lives. Such as proper handwashing etiquette/hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, and proper use of face masks, strict physical distancing, no sharing of food or any personal or non-personal belongings, use of PPE for employees or frontline workers, filling out the health declaration form, and the majority of the transactions must do thru online like shopping, bookings, ordering food and etc.

Considering the “new normal” for customers, there is an immediate need for the hotel industry to revamp its service design by mainly practicing disinfection and sanitation activities, re-designing overall infrastructure, and introducing promotional offers (Awan et al., 2021).

We are still dealing with the instabilities of the Covid 19 cases report; however, the usual health protocol is always observed. In the published report by Leila B. Salaverria (2021) Staycation hotels accredited by the Department of Tourism (DOT) can now accept guests at 100-percent capacity and can even do away with the required testing for the coronavirus under the latest rules approved by the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF). But these establishments holding “certificates of authority to operate for staycation” can only accept guests between 18 and 65 years old, according to the IATF. Tourism Secretary Bernadette Romulo Puyat thinks this breakthrough shows that the tourism industry has been able to adapt to the government’s rules to address the pandemic. “It’s an indication that the tourism industry is adjusting to health and safety protocols as recommended by our health experts,” she said in a text message. Puyat also said that in lieu of testing for COVID-19, experts from the Department of Health and the DOT had advised the implementation of stricter health and safety protocols including symptom screening.

Different staycation businesses have different protocols inside their buildings, and some amenities are not available to use due to the government and hotel-owned protocols. A negative Swab Test result is one of the most essential requirements before entering the checkpoints and staying in the hotel.

Consider a staycation at Okada Manila, Asia's largest luxury integrated resort and one of the first to receive the Department of Tourism's Certificate to Operate for leisure stays. The published blog by Jose Paolo Dela Cruz (2021) found out that part of Okada Manila's stringent health protocols, guests checking in to the hotel are required to avail of an on-site antigen test before they are officially accepted for their stay. Worry not though, for the reasonably priced swab test (sometimes folded into your bill), is set up in convenient function rooms with plush seating and air-conditioning. After the 15-minute wait for the result, you are then free to check in (as long as you test negative). There's a good chance that this is also one of the swankiest antigens tests you'll ever take. A variety of tests are now available to determine whether or not you are infected with the virus. Checking for availability or completing the required test based on the rules and standards of the business where you plan to spend your vacations will help you make maximize the time, effort, and money before having fun. Some staycations, however, do not need their visitors to undergo a swab test or other tests. Following the guidelines within the premises is enough, and the customer may now relax and enjoy their leisure time.

We are now living in the "new normal," which is a significant challenge, and changes to our daily lifestyles are difficult to implement, even in the staycation industry. However, for the sake of safety, we must all adjust and adapt to the "new normal" way of life in order to continue our lives during this pandemic.

### Changes of Quarantine Classifications

Before the pandemic, the Philippines' tourism arrival had a record-breaking 15.24% increase in foreign tourist arrival in 2019. Then, the pandemic happened and resulted in a massive drop. Based on the Department of Tourism records, the Philippines faced a 73% decline during the first months of 2020, with tourist arrivals dropping to only 1.3 million (Leslie, 2020).

The Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF) created community quarantine protocols when the epidemic began. ECQ, or Enhance Community Quarantine, was first implemented in the Philippines on March 17, 2020. After nearly three months of observation and adjustment, the MECQ (Modified Enhanced Community Quarantine), GCQ (General Community Quarantine), and MECQ (Modified General Community Quarantine) have been established based on the status of the cases and the restrictions needed to control the Covid-19 case increase.

Table 1. Community quarantine protocols, classification parameters, and land transport restrictions in the Philippines.

Community Quarantine Protocol	Healthcare Utilization Rate	Restrictions
Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ)	85% or more	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All forms of public transportation suspended</li> <li>Commissioned shuttle services are allowed for employees of permitted offic-</li> </ul>

		<p>es or establishments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Point-to-point transport services provided by the government are allowed, prioritizing healthcare workers</li> <li>● A strict one-meter distance between passengers shall be observed</li> </ul>
Modified Enhanced Community Quarantine (MECQ)	70–84%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● All forms of public transportation suspended</li> <li>● Commissioned shuttle services are allowed for employees of permitted offices or establishments</li> <li>● Point-to-point transport services provided by the government are allowed, prioritizing healthcare workers</li> <li>● Private transportation and vehicles utilized by persons authorized outside residences (APOR) are allowed, subject to guidelines of the Department of Transportation</li> <li>● A strict one-meter distance between passengers shall be observed</li> <li>● Bicycles and non-motorized vehicles strongly encouraged</li> </ul>
General Community Quarantine (GCQ)	60–69%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Public transportation allowed with restrictions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Public utility buses and Jeepneys not to exceed 50% capacity including driver and conductor</li> <li>2. UV (Utility Vehicle) express and taxis not to exceed two passengers per row, except for driver's row where one passenger is only allowed</li> <li>3. Tricycles (auto-rickshaw) to allow only one passenger in the sidecar, while back riding is still not allowed</li> </ol> </li> <li>● Commissioned shuttle services are allowed for employees of permitted offices or establishments</li> <li>● Point-to-point transport services provided by the government are allowed, prioritizing healthcare workers</li> <li>● Private transportation and vehicles utilized by persons authorized outside residences (APOR) are allowed, subject to guidelines of the Department of Trans-</li> </ul>

		<p>portation:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Only one passenger is allowed in the front passenger seat, and not exceed two passengers at the back rows</li> <li>2. Motorcycle back riding is not allowed</li> </ol> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A strict one-meter distance between passengers shall be observed in all modes of transportation</li> <li>• Bicycles and non-motorized vehicles strongly encouraged</li> </ul>
Modified General Community Quarantine (MGCQ)	Below 60%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public transportation allowed with restrictions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Public utility buses and Jeepneys not to exceed 50% capacity including driver and conductor</li> <li>2. UV (Utility Vehicle) express and taxis not to exceed two passengers per row, except for driver's row where one passenger is only allowed</li> <li>3. Tricycles (auto-rickshaw) to allow only one passenger in the sidecar, while back riding is still not allowed</li> </ol> </li> <li>• Commissioned shuttle services are allowed for employees of permitted offices or establishments</li> <li>• Point-to-point transport services provided by the government are allowed, prioritizing healthcare workers</li> <li>• Private transportation and vehicles utilized by persons authorized outside residences (APOR) are allowed, subject to guidelines of the Department of Transportation: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Only one passenger is allowed in the front passenger seat, and not exceed two passengers at the back rows</li> <li>2. Motorcycle back riding is not allowed</li> </ol> </li> <li>• A strict one-meter distance between passengers shall be observed in all modes of transportation</li> <li>• Bicycles and non-motorized vehicles</li> </ul>

		strongly encouraged
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*Sources: Quarantine protocols and their corresponding restrictions, particularly on public land transportation and travel as recommended by the Department of Transportation. (Mayo et al., 2021)*

Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) is the highest level of community quarantine, wherein it has the greatest number of restrictions of activities in a community. Modified Enhance Community Quarantine (MECQ) is a transitory phase of shifting from ECQ to GCQ, and its restrictions are lessened from ECQ, such as allowing private vehicles to ply on the roads. General Community Quarantine (GCQ) eases the restrictions further, such as allowing public transportation to operate but at 50% capacity. Modified General Community Quarantine (MGCQ) has the lowest level of community restrictions, wherein most socio-economic activities are permitted with minimal public health standards. (Mayo et al., 2021).

During the pandemic, there was a massive increase in the number of cases in various parts of the Philippines, particularly in the NCR. The establishment of lodging benefits the government as well as those who have been afflicted with the illness. The Bureau of Quarantine (BOQ) conducted an inspection and decided that it was acceptable for isolation facilities in the Accommodation Establishment. When quarantine facilities are overcrowded, several of the Philippines' most well-known hotels serve as detention centers for Covid patients and OFWs who have recently arrived in the country. A 14-day quarantine is one of the procedures, along with swab tests, before the LGU or its agency can release individuals.

In the period 2020 to 2021, the experiences of having different levels of lockdowns due to Covid-19 have been quite difficult. The report released by Pia Ranada (2021) regarding localized lockdown and alert level system states that the national government has approved the guidelines for a new Alert Level and Granular Lockdown System on Monday, September 13, Presidential Spokesman Harry Roque announced later that day. The new system was piloted in Metro Manila starting September 16, with Alert Level 4 imposed over the region, and has been extended to last until October 15, according to Presidential Spokesman Harry Roque on Thursday, September 30. The alert level scheme is designed to replace the current system of quarantine classification comprised of ECQ, MECQ, GCQ, and MGCQ. The new system is more relaxed with age mobility restrictions and provides some perks to fully-vaccinated people.

Updated as of October 18, 2021, Covid-19 Alert level systems in the Philippines.

<b>Activities / Establishments / Other provision</b>	<b>Alert Level 1</b>	<b>Alert Level 2</b>	<b>Alert Level 3</b>	<b>Alert Level 4</b>

Mobility and age restrictions	Movement of persons shall be allowed except for reasonable restrictions identified by the LGUs	Movement of persons shall be allowed except for reasonable restrictions based on ages and comorbidities determined by the LGUs		Movement of persons below 18 and over 65 years old, with immunodeficiency or comorbidities, and pregnant shall not be allowed*
Dining in Restaurants	Full on-site capacity	Max of 50% indoor venue capacity** and 70% outdoor venue capacity	Max of 30% indoor venue capacity** and 50% outdoor venue capacity	Max of 10% indoor venue capacity** and 30% outdoor venue capacity
Visitor or tourist attractions libraries, archives, museums, galleries, and cultural shows and exhibits		Max of 50% indoor venue capacity (except for unvaccinated individuals over 65 years old) and 70% outdoor venue capacity	Max of 30% indoor venue capacity** and 50% outdoor capacity	Max of 10% indoor venue capacity** and 30% outdoor venue capacity
Venues for Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, and Exhibitions				Max of 10% venue capacity** and 30% outdoor venue capacity
Entertainment venues (cinemas and movie houses)				Not allowed to operate
Recreational venues (internet cafes, billiard and archery halls, amusement arcades, bowling alleys, skating rinks, swimming pools, and similar venues)				Max of 10% indoor venue capacity** and 30% outdoor venue capacity
Amusement parks or theme parks (Fairs, kiddie rides, and playground)				

Funfairs/peryas and kid amusement industries such as playgrounds, playroom, and kiddie rides			Not allowed to operate
Theaters, concert halls, karaoke bars, and clubs			
DOT-accredited accommodation establishments for staycations	Full on-site capacity		Not allowed to operate

Sources: *It's more fun in the Philippines. (n.d.). Important IATF Updates.*

Some non-isolation establishments, such as quarantine hotels, may accept customers for vacations and leisure time in areas covered by the GCQ with Heightened Restrictions, GCQ and MGCQ, or Alert levels 3,2 and 1.

In the published report of Azer Parrocha (2021) states that Metro Manila will be under a more relaxed Alert Level 2 quarantine classification starting Nov. 5 until Nov. 21, Malacañang announced on Thursday night. “The Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) on Thursday, November 4, 2021, approved the de-escalation of the National Capital Region to Alert Level 2. This shall take effect beginning tomorrow, November 5, 2021, until November 21, 2021,” Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque said in a press statement. The IATF also approved the recommendation of the sub-Technical Working Group on Data Analytics to base the alert level assignments on data that is nearest to the implementation date.

These guidelines and protocols were established to prevent the virus from spreading. The warning levels alter based on reports of positive Covid 19 cases in cities or regions. When these standards were implemented in their cities, the impact on the staycation industry was also adjustments in the rules for new customers who would stay in their premises.

### Implementation of vaccine

Transmission of the virus is very fast and easy. The virus can spread from an infected person’s mouth or nose in small liquid particles when they cough, sneeze, speak, sing or breathe. These particles range from larger respiratory droplets to smaller aerosols and people may also become infected by touching surfaces that have been contaminated by the virus when touching their eyes, nose, or mouth without cleaning their hands (World Health Organization, 2020).

Philippines’ recent House Bill 9252 or ‘Mandatory COVID-19 Immunization Act of 2021’ alarmed the public as it sought to require all Filipinos to receive the vaccine for free at any government hospital or health center, except for those persons unfit due to medical conditions (Cardenas, N. C., 2021).



The Corona Virus Vaccine was created to help people become immune to the virus, allowing the pandemic to cease and people to resume their normal lives. In the Philippines, the FDA EUA has approved eight (8) vaccines that can be administered to Filipinos who wish to have their own vaccine. Individual Filipinos have the option of taking the vaccine or not, as not all Filipinos have made up their mind.

Eight Covis-19 Vaccines with Philippines FDA EUA approvals.

Vaccine	Dose & Frequency
Pfizer BioNTech	2 doses, 21days apart
Oxford AstraZeneca	2 doses, 4-12 weeks apart
Sinovac CoronaVac	2 doses, 28days apart
Gamaleya Sputnik V	2 doses, 21 days apart
Baharat BioTech	2 doses, 14 days apart
Moderna	2 doses, 28 days apart
Novavax	2 doses, 21 days apart
Janssen	1 dose

*Sources: Department of Health Cordillera Center for Health Development (2021) Know your covid-19 vaccine!*

According to the Department of Health, the total number of doses provided as of November 10, 2021, was 65,764,376 with the first dose accounting for 35,656,279 and the second dose accounting for 30,108,097. We can see from this rate that the vaccination program in the Philippines was well-received and followed by all. Having a vaccination is also essential for halting the spread of the virus and providing protection.

Being fully vaccinated is currently one of the most important requirements of the government or establishment. If they have confirmed their booking and registration in the event, hotel staycation guests must meet the individual's requirements or standards, such as having a fully vaccinated vaccination card or performing a Swab or saliva-based RT-PCR test within 48 hours of check-in.

## CONCLUSION

Changing travel restrictions are a major complication for both staycation businesses and customers. Changes in travel requirements and guidelines can have an impact on client bookings and plans, necessitating a significant adjustment for them to rebook the date of stay. Because of the frequency with which covid-19 cases are re-

ported, it is impossible to predict where and when it will be implemented and announced by the government. Furthermore, despite the significant changes and challenges posed by the pandemic, tourism and lodging establishments continue to exist and thrive in these circumstances. Many people are still taking advantage of their offers and services in order to relax and recharge their spirits, since the immediate quarantine that we have been experiencing since last year and continues to be stressful for everyone. The new regular leisure and escape to explore a familiar place only to refresh and feel a different ambiance will be highly helpful to those who will benefit from it.

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