

TPB spotlight

A Quarterly e-Magazine of the Tourism Promotions Board Philippines

APRIL - JUNE 2021

TPB'S HABI, HILOT/HILOM AND HALAL PROGRAMS USHERING IN CULTURAL RENAISSANCE FOR THE PHILIPPINES

PHILIPPINES TAKES
CENTERSTAGE AT THE
**GREAT ASEAN
TRAVEL FEST
2021**

BENGUET:
A COLD PLACE TO
WARM OUR HEARTS

TPB LAUNCHES
**TRAVEL
BINGO**

DOT HOSTS
**HYBRID PATA
SUMMIT IN 2021**

spotlight

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ON THE SPOT

Tempus fugit! We welcome the second half of the year with renewed hope and gratitude. Our industry has triumphed the numerous trials of the last six months and we have been blessed with redefined knowledge, unity, and strength by working together. I am thankful for what we have achieved, and even more excited for our achievements ahead.

May 2021's good news about tourism front line worker's priority in our national government's inoculation program is a feat in itself. We at TPB have also started to vaccinate

our personnel and hopefully by the end of July we would achieve 80 % of full vaccination of our employees. This gives me hope that our strategic projects and programs will materialize smoothly and safely as we address our mandates and thrusts. May this inspire us all to work harder in the safest possible manner, that by the end of this year, our industry will be back on track, so that the millions of lives that draw the picture of Philippine tourism will beam back in a smile.

One of the projects I look forward to, and which you will read about in this issue, is the "Habi, Hilot / Hilom, Halal" initiative that highlights our weaving communities, our health and wellness programs, and the rich cultural heritage of our Muslim communities. The motivation behind this goes beyond tangible gains and is about ensuring a sustainable future anchored in collective development and peace. The reformulated National Tourism Development Plan outlined in this issue reinforces sustainability, along with safety, as vital components for tourism recovery.

As I always say, there is no perfect way or perfect road to success, but we need to continue to move forward with the noblest intentions and a sound plan. In excellence, commitment, and compassion, I am sure we will be able to accomplish greater things not only for the industry, but for those lives embraced by our services, and our people.

Please join us in stringing together the pearls of the orient seas, and let these adversities bring back the luster and shine of our Inang Bayan.

Maraming salamat for your continued support.


Atty. MARIA ANTHONETTE C. VELASCO-ALLONES, CESO I
Chief Operating Officer, Tourism Promotions Board - Philippines

TPB's Habi, Hilot/Hilom and Halal Programs

Ushering in Cultural Renaissance for the Philippines

Recreational traveling, which allows people to take a break and regain their physical, mental, and psychological equilibrium from the daily stressors of life, has been greatly hampered by the pandemic. However, as the world slowly acclimates to the new norms, various industries and sectors have been making sustainable improvements.

For the Tourism Promotions Board (TPB), it means going beyond its usual leisure and beach products by launching new banner programs under "Habi, Hilot/Hilom, Halal." These particularly highlight the Habi artistry of community weavers, the ingenuity of Hilot/Hilom as a wellness approach, and the Halal Tourism Roadmap in establishing Muslim-friendly tourism in the country.

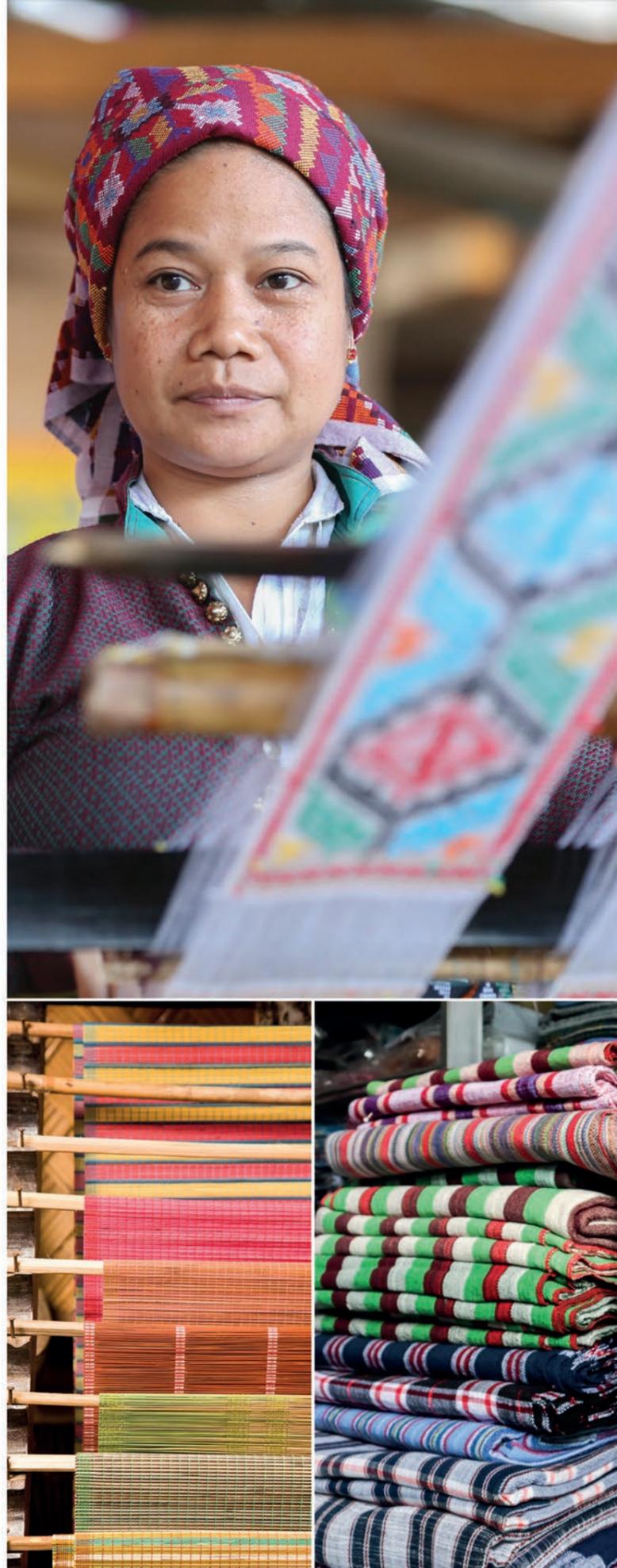
HABI – A Cultural Icon

Everything that makes a Habi or Philippine weave is significant to the indigenous groups. The materials used, the designs, and the colors symbolize their beliefs. Some items are considered as protective charms while others are used for socialization. Certain outfits may also signify significant life stages.

Apart from producing artisan textiles and goods, weaving reveals the history of a community and sparks conversation about native lands. In Mindanao, weaving has been a refuge for some women in times of conflict.

TPB's banner program for Habi will highlight the intricate nature of these traditional arts and crafts passed on from one generation to another to become valuable and sustainable heritage products. Continuous education, community investment, and holistic interventions are the identified key pillars of this program.

There are at least 151 loom weaver communities in the Philippines. In Luzon, Habi destinations are identified in the Ilocos region, the Home of Abel/Inabel and Pinilian weavers; in the Cordilleras, which is the home to the Ifugao and Mountain Province weavers of Bontoc and Kalinga; and in the Bicol Region, which specializes in Abaca woven textiles and goods. Other Habi destinations can also be found in the Southern Philippines, particularly in Davao, Lake Sebu, and Zamboanga with Mindanao weavers from the Yakan, T'Boli and Tausug groups.



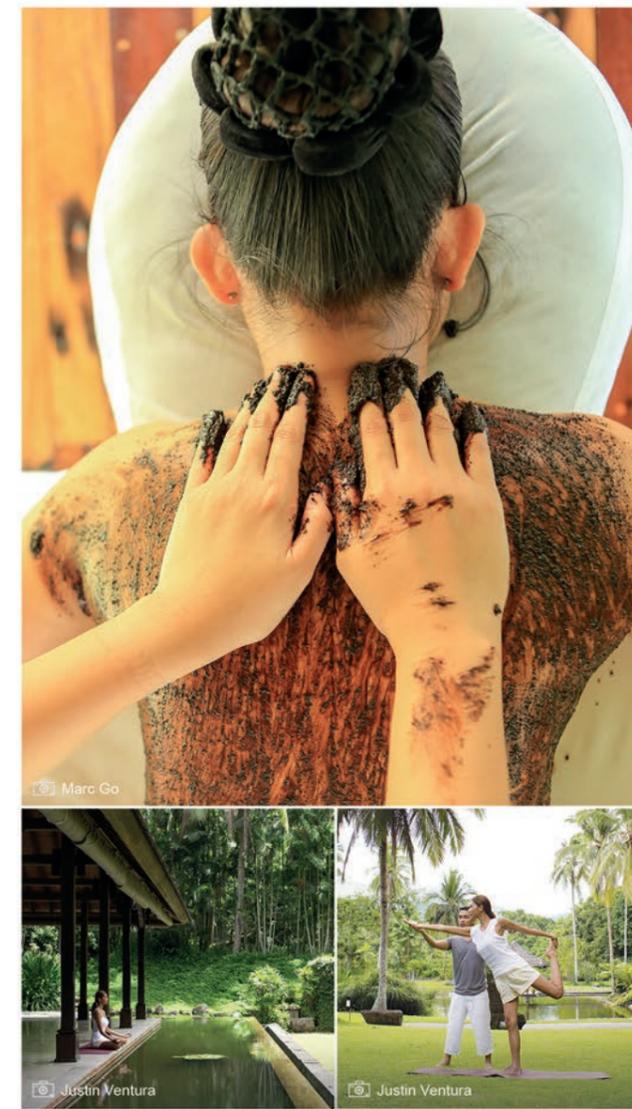
HILOT/HILOM – A Journey to Self-Care

Hilom is the Tagalog word for "Heal". The Philippines has its own art of healing and wellness through Hilot, an age-old indigenous Filipino art of healing practice that can be traced back to pre-colonial times. This traditional Filipino medicine practice uses touch with soothing strokes and coconut oil and banana leaves.

To this day, many Filipinos turn to Hilot to relieve discomfort and other aches and pains. But it's more than just a massage. It is also energy manipulation to restore harmony and balance within one's body. Western medicine calls this immunotherapy.

The Hilot/Hilom program under Wellness Tourism is a 'Transformative Journey'. It particularly focuses on travel that gives you a chance to de-stress and get away from the hustle and bustle of daily life.

Manila, Tagaytay, Batangas and Boracay have their share of luxurious spa resorts and wellness centers that highlight the Filipino traditional massages such as Hilot, Dagdagay (foot massage with sticks) and Aruga ("to care for"; body massage, soft strokes) Massages. Some resorts such as the Nurture Wellness Village and The Farm at San Benito also offer cleansing and detox packages for holistic healing.



HALAL – A Driver for Socio-economic Growth

In 2021, TPB will ramp up its support towards the establishment of a complete Halal Ecosystem through initiatives relative to its mandate in further developing and promoting Muslim-friendly tourist attractions and services in the country.

Halal choices are always considered by the Middle East or Gulf Coast market when visiting a destination. Through this banner program, the agency will collaborate with local government units and the private sector to increase Halal travel options in the Philippines to suit local and international Muslim travelers' needs - whether in terms of diet, dress or religious needs such as Halal food and beverages, accommodations, safety and security, Muslim-friendly services, and availability of prayer rooms, among others.

Optimizing Strategies for a Sustainable Future

Weaved textiles are becoming global trends. Seeking personal wellness has become a priority. The growing Muslim population worldwide also provides considerable advantage for many tourist destinations. This is just skimming the vast well of opportunities the Philippines is tapping into.

With the roll-out of a robust Habi, Hilot/Hilom, Halal program, the TPB will optimize strategies to create viable economic and social opportunities for the local communities through capacity-building, income generation, capital and technological investments so that these sectors can gain sustainable advantage in the years to come.

Priority Shifts to Tourism Recovery Under Reformulated NTDP

Not so long ago, the Philippines was recognized in the Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report of the World Economic Forum as a country that “showed impressive improvement on overall infrastructure and ICT readiness”. The country’s tourism sector also contributed 12.5% to the gross domestic product (GDP) and employed 5.7 million Filipinos by the end of 2019.

The Philippines seemed to be on its way to even bigger heights – that is until COVID-19 drastically altered the world’s plans and changed everything. Before COVID, the objective of the National Tourism Development Plan (NTDP) 2016-2022 was to “Develop a globally competitive, environmentally sustainable and socially responsible tourism industry that promotes inclusive growth through employment generation and equitable distribution of income thereby contributing to building a foundation for a high-trust society.” However, a few hurdles surfaced that did not only require the tourism sector to view the COVID-stricken world with a new lens but to also rethink its plans and goals.



The NTDP was thus reformulated to guide the Department of Tourism (DOT) and its attached agencies, including the Tourism Promotions Board (TPB), and the tourism stakeholders. This includes the creation of programs and plans to help mitigate the effects of COVID-19 while ensuring the resilient, inclusive, and sustainable recovery of the Philippine tourism industry by capitalizing on its assets - from the people to the diverse natural resources - in the next two years.

Promote Safe and Competitive Tourism

- A. Accelerate safe and green travel infrastructure and facilitation initiatives
- B. Diversify product and provide safe and high-quality experience
- C. Protect livelihood and enable innovative financing and investments
- D. Foster upskilling of human resources and improve service standards
- E. Design and implement innovative marketing and promotions programs
- F. Embrace tourism quality initiatives

Pursue resilient, inclusive, and sustainable tourism

- A. Upgrade MSMEs (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises) in the tourism value chain
- B. Ensure safe access to opportunities and tourism experience for all
- C. Build and strengthen capacities of destinations for conservation and climate smart investments
- D. Formulate measures to address tourism risks and crisis

Strengthen governance and destination management

- A. Upgrading of tourism information infrastructure
- B. Develop and strengthen capacities for local planning and implementation

With these new strategies in place and assuming that tourism demand returns to 2019 level in the next two years with the success of the vaccination program, the economic activity bouncing back, and travel confidence returning with proper health protocols in place and 70% of pre-COVID air capacity restored, the Philippine tourism industry is expected to register around 100 million domestic trips and employ 5.1 million of our residents by 2022.

And if the economies of our foreign markets rebound and international border restrictions ease by the 3rd quarter of 2021, it is also possible for the country to welcome back, once again, an estimated five million foreign tourists.

Let's all hope for the best.

STAKEHOLDERS SHOW CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM IN TOURISM RECOVERY



The pandemic is a catalyst for tremendous change and norms that challenged all aspects of human life, including movement, perspective, standards worldwide. While Tourism was directly hit by this massive disruption to the normal way people live and conduct businesses, it also enabled the industry to reset old practices and create a more resilient and sustainable travel and tourism sector in the country under the "new normal".

Now, after more than a year since the pandemic began, how is the Philippine tourism recovery going?

The Philippine Survey and Research Center, Inc. (PSRC) took an inside look at how local tourism stakeholders perceive the new normal. A study was conducted on 13 November 2020 to 18 January 2021 with 77 participants from both the government and businesses within the tourism sector in an attempt to identify the barriers to promotion, target market changes, stakeholder confidence and market expectations relative to the future of travel and tourism in the Philippines. The research findings indicate that cautious optimism currently defines the "new normal" of the industry.

During the conduct of the study, it was revealed that stakeholders were optimistic due to decreasing COVID-19 cases as 2020 winded down, resulting in the gradual reopening of the country's local tourism. However, this is dampened with cautiousness because of the same persisting issues such as the need to have clear, unified, and consistent protocols, how to boost travel confidence, and more tangible support and direction to the tourism industry as essential in transitioning to the new normal. Thus, while the positive signs at the start of 2021 sparked fresh optimism among stakeholders, a significant number remained uncertain.

The study also highlighted stakeholders' approval on the reopening of tourist destinations to local travelers under

MGCQ and later on to foreigners once tourism-related restrictions are lifted. Travel is also anticipated to be predominantly local in the first quarter of this year, followed by continued reopening to foreigners by the second quarter. Many also said that conventions can restart only when a vaccine is available. For the sake of reopening and restarting the tourism industry, many believe that applying minimum standards for health & safety is enough in catering to various subgroups.

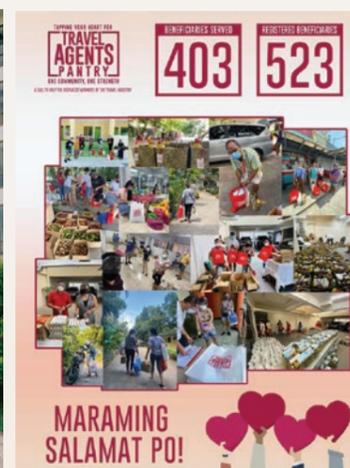
On the other hand, the implementation of health and safety protocols, such as designating isolation areas, providing options for online payments/transactions, and developing an integrated emergency preparedness action, is low although stakeholders recognize the effectiveness of these measures. Additionally, practical constraints such as the lack of budget, space, and poor internet connection prevent stakeholders from implementing all health and safety protocols without government support. The above concerns underscored the need for government support and direction to assist stakeholders in transitioning to the new normal.

Meanwhile, as the second quarter of 2021 approached, the country experienced a spike in COVID-19 cases which soared past 1 million recorded infections in late April and a death toll surpassing twenty thousand by late May. The steep rise in cases was attributed to the presence of new and transmissible variants as well as reported dwindling compliance with health protocols. In a bid to reverse this alarming upward trend, strict community quarantine measures in NCR Plus were imposed and reviewed every two weeks beginning March 15.

On the bright side, the Philippines has reached a milestone in its pandemic response with 11.7 million doses of vaccine administered nationwide as of writing, bringing the country closer to its goal of achieving herd immunity before year end.



TOURISM SECTOR SET UP COMMUNITY PANTRIES FOR INDIGENT FAMILIES AND DISPLACED TRAVEL WORKERS



If there is one good thing that the pandemic brought to our country, it is the rekindling of the Filipino Bayanihan spirit. Despite the shrunken economy, many Filipinos went out of their way to extend their hand and provide help to those who could barely make ends meet, through various initiatives, and lately the community pantry initiatives.

The Tourism Sector is among those who installed community pantries in many parts of the country. Notable among the projects are the 'Jeep of Hope', the 'Intramuros Administration Community Pantry', and the 'Travel Agents Pantry'.

The Bellevue Resort once again proved its committed hospitality service by transcending to the community through its 'Jeep of Hope' project. On March 14, 2021, this five-star hotel in Bohol organized its own mobile community pantry and distributed food, health and hygiene kits, and other necessities to 100 indigent families of Barangay Doljo with Resort Manager Mr. Doer Escoto, Miss Universe Philippines 2020 3rd Runner Up Ms. Pauline Amelinckx leading the event.



The Intramuros Administration also set up its community pantry at Plaza Roman in Manila on April 18, where Vegetables, eggs, instant food, and other basic needs were offered for free to support people who are in dire need.

A 'Travel Agents Pantry' to aid travel industry employees drastically affected by the pandemic was also organized by a group of travel agents. This travelling pantry follows an organized system which first identifies and registers a maximum of eight employee-beneficiaries per travel agency. Each receives a package, and cash to defray the travel expenses to pick up the goods. The first round of operations started in Metro Manila and is aimed to further expand to neighboring cities and provinces. This project was made possible by donations from good samaritans which reached PHP501,000.00 as of 06 June.



In these challenging times, community pantry initiatives just prove that now, more than ever, help is never too small and that lives will be a bit easier if people support each other. The energy that negates the adversities is truly alive in the Filipino.



TRAVEL BINGO

PLAY WIN TRAVEL

TPB launches Travel Bingo – an interactive way to further promote Philippine tourism

The digital revolution has led to the emergence of the concept of “smart destination” and plays a pivotal role in reshaping the entire marketing mix. For instance, gamification, also known as virtual experiential marketing, is becoming a major trend in the field of tourism as it appeals to consumers across all age demographics.

In line with this, the Tourism Promotions Board (TPB) launched the “Travel Bingo” on April 21 as an interactive game-based tourism marketing tool, which was conceptualized to increase tourism awareness and encourage people to rebuild the confidence to travel.

Introduced to TPB Members on June 23 and later on to the public for actual play from June 24 to July 12, Travel Bingo enabled players to gain practical information about the existing and potential destinations of the Philippines in an informative yet fun and immersive way.

MECHANICS

Upon registration, an email confirmation will be received containing the instructions, player number, and the link to the storage folder of the assigned bingo cards. Only download the bingo cards from the folder that corresponds to the player number as the team can cross-check cards using the database during card verification. The Organizer has the right to disqualify the player who does not use their assigned bingo cards. After downloading, send the reference number

of the bingo cards to travelbingo.secretariat@gmail.com with the subject name: Player [Insert Number] _Reference Numbers. Feel free to print the cards and wait for the game schedule.

Each bingo card design is regionally-themed, that is – one card, one region. There will be two chances to participate: regular and blackout rounds. Prepare a chip or digital marker to mark or cover the numbers on the card as they are called by the host during the game. Comment “BINGO” in the Zoom chat box once the pattern of the day is met. Should two or more participants tie for the third prize, a tie-breaker trivia game shall be held. Once the winning card is verified by the organizers, the winner/s will be declared.

The Travel Bingo Challenge Organizing Committee will coordinate with the winners in claiming the travel voucher inclusions. Winners may claim their travel voucher at the Tourism Promotions Board Philippines Office located at the 4th floor, Legaspi Towers 300, 4th floor, Roxas Blvd., cor. P. Ocampo, Malate, Manila and look for Mr. Gadia Alberto or Ms. Rona Olaivar. All travel vouchers are valid until December 2021.

For any questions, feel free to send an email at travelbingo.secretariat@gmail.com or thru the FB page at www.facebook.com/tpbphl.

THE GREAT 2021 ASEAN TRAVEL FEST

PHILIPPINES TAKES CENTERSTAGE AT THE GREAT ASEAN TRAVEL FEST 2021



“Together with our stakeholders and private sectors’ support, we endeavored to steer the recovery and response of the tourism sector as we move and shift to the new, the next and the better normal. Top of the initiatives will be the formulation and roll out of the tourism response and recovery plan, spearheaded by the Department of Tourism.”

This was the statement of Tourism Promotions Board (TPB) Philippines COO Atty. Anthonette C. Velasco-Allones as the agency participated with the Department of Tourism (DOT) and took Philippine tourism offerings to center stage during The Great 2021 ASEAN Travel Fest (TGATF) held virtually on 03 to 06 May 2021.

TGATF is a year-long business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-consumer (B2C) event organized by TTG ASIA Media to spur business travel conversations between ASEAN suppliers and travel trade buyers from around the world.



TPB participated in a 2-day networking session with virtual exhibitor booths represented by DOT regional offices from Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao followed by mini-themed roadshows showcasing tourism products and offerings of the participating regions. COO Allones provided updates on the country’s recovery plans, programs and activities, and measures being undertaken by the Philippine tourism industry to ensure the safety of all tourists.

TPB and DOT’s participation in TAGTF has reinforced the Philippines’ presence in the Asia Pacific map of preferred tourist destinations for safe, uniquely diverse, and fun travel and highlighted our readiness to accept tourists once our borders reopen.

The Great 2021 ASEAN Travel Fest was indeed an innovation on tourism promotions and marketing as we go through the challenges of covid-19 pandemic. It helped us to once again position the many wonderful and breathtaking destinations of the various regions of the Philippines to the ASEAN countries and the world that await our foreign tourists once travel restrictions will be lifted.

– Romeo Caranguian, Jr., Senior Tourism Operations Officer DOT Region II

This is my first participation in an online business-to-business event and I was able to establish new contacts. I shared these with our tourism stakeholders, partners, most especially to our tour operators, as they are in need of our support.

– Marilou Pangilinan, Senior Tourism Operations Officer DOT Region III

It’s a great learning experience and we are grateful that regional marketing officers are given the opportunity to take the lead in promoting Philippine destinations, products and services. We are hoping that this can be replicated in other travel trade events, together with our respective private sectors.

– Rizza Marie Macaibay, Senior Tourism Officer DOT Region VII





TPB THROUGH PDOT BEIJING PARTNERS WITH OISHI TO BRING "WAKE UP IN THE PHILIPPINES" TOURISM AND CULTURE SHOW IN CHENGDU



The Tourism Promotions Board (TPB) Philippines through the Philippine Department of Tourism (PDOT) Beijing China partnered with Oishi Food Corporation, and successfully held Philippine-themed tourism and cultural festival dubbed as "Wake Up in the Philippines" at the Hongxing Road Square in Chengdu's golden business district, Chunxi Road last April 3-4, 2021.

The event featured the Philippines' well-known white sand beach and crystal blue ocean theme which aimed to "wake up" the desire for travel in the Chinese market.

Chengdu is one of the most important markets of the Philippines in China before the pandemic due to the improved air access direct to world-class tourist destinations in the Philippines such as Boracay, Bohol, and Cebu.

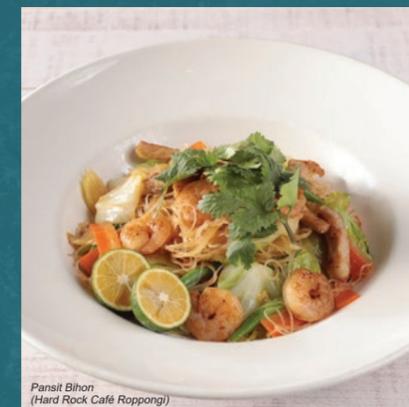
The highlight of the event was the "mini beach" modeled after the island scenery of Boracay, the most famous tourist destination in the Philippines, including a sampling of authentic Philippine ice cream and photo ops at the "beach". The PDOT also provided the visiting guests with a variety of customized gifts that

were available for grab on site.

Famous Philippine company Oishi also surprised visitors with a giant version of Philippine Bangka or "boat" filled with delicious snacks through fun games prepared for the event.

The event was warmly welcomed by the audience in Chengdu. It attracted a huge number of visitors throughout the weekend of the Qingming Festival in the bustling Chunxi Road business area, which usually has average foot traffic of 800,000 per day. Feedback and inquiries from the visitors showed the increasing interest in international travels and the Philippines as a preferred destination for island holidays.

This marks the first on-site event by the PDOT in Chengdu since the beginning of the pandemic. With China already achieving remarkable success in its vaccination program, such events aim to encourage nationals to travel overseas. And PDOT-Beijing office intends to conduct more on-site events in the future to maintain its presence and prepare the market for the soon-to-come reopening of borders.



Pancit Bihon (Hard Rock Café Roppongi)



Inasal Chicken Sandwich (with original lime coleslaw) (Hard Rock Café Roppongi)



Turon (Hard Rock Café Roppongi and Tony Roma's Roppongi)

EATS MORE FUN: Philippine Culinary Celebrated in Japan



The Philippine Department of Tourism Tokyo Office and the Tourism Promotions Board (TPB) Philippines, in cooperation with the Philippine Embassy and Cebu Pacific Airlines, celebrated the Filipino Food Month by offering popular Filipino dishes to the Japanese market for the whole month of April.

Hard Rock Cafe Tokyo and Tony Roma's Roppongi developed a menu based on the Filipino palate, still, with their own signature such as chicken inasal burger, pancit bihon, sisig, and turon served with vanilla ice cream, whipped cream and mango sauce.

A media and project launching, graced by Philippine Ambassador to Japan H.E. Jose C. Laurel V and other distinguished guests, was held to formally announce this special endeavor.

"Food and travel are inevitably linked and intertwined. Simply stated, when we think of travel, we think of food. It is my hope that the inspiration and excitement we offer through food will result in welcoming Japanese friends and tourists in the Philippines this year and the years to come," the Ambassador Laurel V said during the dinner launch at the Hard Rock Cafe Tokyo.

This initiative is part of the efforts of the Philippine tourism industry to keep the Philippines "top of mind" in the travel plans of the Japanese public when international borders open and tourism travel returns to normal.



Special guests during the project launch. From the left: Ms. Yuki Sonoda (Miss Universe-Japan 2020 second runner-up), Ms. Natsuki Takahashi (Miss Universe-Japan 2017), Mr. Fumio Sankai (PBB Alumni), Ms. Maria Theresa Gow (Singapore DJ), Ms. Hiro Nishizuchi (Miss Universe-Japan 2014 first runner-up), Shiori (Miss Universe-Japan 2017 first runner-up), Mr. Kohel Sato (Mr. World-Japan 2015 first runner-up)



From the left: DOT Tokyo Tourism Attaché Niel Ballesteros, WDI CCO Naoya Fukuda, Ambassador H.E. Jose C. Laurel V, Cebu Pacific country manager Tomohiko Matsumoto and DCM Robespierre Bolivar



Eats More Fun was a resounding success



Minister Dinno M. Oblena (8th from left) and Tourism Attaché Dr. Erwin Balane (9th from left) with the representatives of Chinese media based in Beijing during the Wake Up to the Flavors of the Philippines held on 30 June 2021 at the Embassy.



Chef Aristotle Mendoza of El Mercadito demonstrating the preparation of Sisig to the guests.



Representatives of Chinese media based in Beijing during the Wake Up to the Flavors of the Philippines held on 30 June 2021 at the Embassy.

WAKE UP TO THE FLAVORS OF THE PHILIPPINES' COOKS IN BEIJING

The Philippine Department of Tourism (PDOT) has once again organized an activity dubbed as “Wake Up to the Flavors of the Philippines”, an authentic showcase of Filipino cuisine, at the open grounds of the Embassy of the Republic of the Philippines.

Consul General Dinno Oblena, representing H.E. Jose Santiago L. Sta. Romana, welcomed the guests and visitors who witnessed the event. CG Oblena expressed that “the Philippine tourism industry is similarly situated with other travel and leisure industries globally in witnessing a marked scaling down of activities. However, the Philippine Department of Tourism pursues a proactive strategy, which, among others, seeks to sustain awareness, and even grow demand, in both the domestic and foreign tourism markets. This is part of the DOT’s efforts to “emerge bigger, better and more resilient”, as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

“DOT-Beijing’s focus on food tourism also has a good reason. Food tourism is becoming a staple in the travel and leisure industry. A growing segment of leisure travelers worldwide do so with food as first on their minds. The United Nations World Tourism Organization, or UNWTO, estimates that up to 33%, or a third of global tourism expenditures are spent on food”, CG Oblena further explained.

The event featured authentic Filipino cuisine which was demonstrated by Chef Aristotle Mendoza, a well-known Filipino chef with more than two (2) decades of experience based in Beijing. Chef Mendoza of El Mercadito Restaurant showcased a popular dish called “Sisig” and other Filipino favorites which were shared to guests composed of media from Beijing, China. Other regional taste from the Philippines includes “Lumpiang Sariwa”, “Seafood Sinigang (shrimp and fish)”, “Bicol Express”, “Bistek Tagalog”, “Pinakbet”, “Halo Halo”, and “Ginataang Bilo Bilo”.

The event was aimed to promote the Philippine cuisine to the media guests while outbound and inbound travels are still restricted both in China and the Philippines, respectively, due to the pandemic.

China is considered as one of the most important pre-pandemic markets in the Philippines. In 2019, about 1.75 million Chinese traveled to the Philippines making it the second largest tourism market, a hefty growth of 38.58% over the previous year. Chinese travelers also contributed to the Philippine economy an estimated USD2.23 billion for spending an average of USD140.57 per night for 9.57 nights of stay in the Philippines.

Remembering HSMA's President CUI



Christine Ann Ibarreta

April 24, 1967 - July 2, 2021

The Philippine tourism industry mourns the passing of Hotel Sales and Marketing Association President Christine Anne U. Ibarreta. Elected for two consecutive terms since 2017, Tin Anne, also fondly called as CUI, was known for her dedication, drive and passion as one of the local tourism’s frontrunners in leading the pandemic-scarred hotel industry in the last 16 months.

Thank you, Tin Anne. You will be greatly missed.



Members of the Philippine delegation during the Marine Diving Fair 2021

Philippines ranks 1st as the Best Diving Area Overseas in the Marine Diving Awards 2021

The Philippines was awarded second time in a row as the Best Diving Area Overseas during Japan's largest consumer event for diving enthusiasts and beach lovers Marine Diving Fair 2021 on 04 April.

Winners of the Marine Diving Awards were identified based on votes by subscribers of Marine Diving Magazine, one of Japan's largest diving magazines, published by Marine Arts Center Ltd.

"I am delighted that the Philippines has once again been selected as No. 1 in the overseas diving category at the Marine Diving Fair. Also, the organizer has provided a place for effective marketing and promotion activities in Japan. We would like to thank everyone. This award will be a great encouragement for the recovery of the tourism industry until the trip between Japan and the Philippines is resumed", said Philippine Department of Tourism Tokyo Attaché Niel Ballesteros.



PDOT Tourism Attaché Niel Ballesteros receives the award as the Best Diving Area Overseas from Marine Arts Center President Tateishi

Philippine participation in the Marine Diving Fair 2021 was spearheaded by the Philippine Department of Tourism and the Tourism Promotions Board (TPB) Philippines together with Bohol Beach Club, Ticao Island Resort, Gustoaventura Travel and Tours, Atlantis Dive Resorts and Liveboards, Merck-MLI Travel and Tours, Emerald Green Diving Center and Blue Coral Diving Tours.



Hybrid participation at the Philippine booth during the Marine Diving Fair 2021

With its 7640 islands, the Philippines offers bodies of water with a highly diverse marine ecosystem and seascape for all kinds of divers and dive enthusiasts to explore, making the country a popular major diving hub in Asia.

The country has countless diving spots suitable for divers of different skills – from beginners who are simply looking for fun recreational activities, to intermediate divers seeking new underwater challenges to hone their skills, and experts in search of new adventures.

Choose Your Aqua Adventure in the Philippines

Philippines' diverse natural wonders as an archipelago of more than 7600 islands await adrenaline-junkies to adventure seekers just out exploring the world, to discover the multitude of water activities that make the country a sought-after destination for all types of travelers. Choose your paradise.



Surfing

Siargao, Baler, La Union

Photo credits: Gaps Subuero

Surfers of all levels flock to Siargao Island for its world-famous Cloud 9, ride plenty of lefts and rights in Baler, or go for consistent quality surf with swells that can reach up to 3 meters in San Juan, La Union.

Diving

Palawan, Cebu, Batangas

Anticipate the best memories of your entire dive life by exploring the breathtaking underwater scenes of the Philippines. For Marine biodiversity, head to Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park in Cagayancillo, Palawan. Or go to Coron, also in Palawan for Wreck Diving. Are you into Muck diving or blackwater diving? Drive to Anilao, Batangas. Are you a Shark enthusiast? Go see thresher sharks at the Monad Shoal in Malapascua Island or the whale sharks in Donsol, Sorsogon. Or, you can also just free dive or snorkel to witness the world-renowned Sardine Run in Moalboal, Cebu.



White Water Rafting

Cagayan De Oro

Feel the rush of adrenaline with a wet and wild whitewater rafting adventure in Cagayan De Oro. Take on a thrilling three-hour course of rapids with varying grades to suit beginners and experts. Definitely a must-try Philippine adventure with your family and friends.



Canyoneering

Kawasan Falls in Badian Cebu

Photo credits: Erwin Lim

Experience the adventure of a lifetime with canyoneering in Cebu. Take a leap off cliffs as high as 30 feet, swim the rapids or enjoy the lush scenery as you float through the canyon. Whether it's your first time canyoneering or not, extreme fun is definitely guaranteed!



Island Hopping

Caramoan Islands

Discover the Philippines' Secret Paradise in Caramoan Islands, which remains beautifully unspoiled and unexploited. Get loads of your vitamin sea supplement while hopping to each island which boasts of white sand, lagoons, caves and rugged limestone cliffs.

DOT HOSTS HYBRID PATA SUMMIT IN 2021

The Department of Tourism (DOT) has successfully hosted the country's second international MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions) event this year amidst the challenges and limitations posed by the pandemic last 26-27 May 2021.

"We are thankful for the opportunity to partner with PATA in organizing this travel mart and conference in a hybrid format, as we continue to pursue a safe reopening of the Philippines' tourism destinations. This event is a testament that the Philippines is a trailblazer in hybrid events and that we can show the world that M.I.C.E. can be done safely."

Tourism Secretary Bernadette Romulo-Puyat expressed her satisfaction during the opening ceremonies of the Pacific Asia Travel Association virtual Adventure Travel Conference and Mart (PATA-vATCM) annual summit, saying it mirrors the confidence that the industry will be able to recover from the pandemic.

Staged in a hybrid setup, the PATA summit took place at the Hilton Clark Sun Valley Resort at the Clark Freeport, Pampanga. It was attended by some 300 participants, of whom only 61 were allowed on-site in accordance with the government's minimum health standards and social distancing requirements. A total of 35 Philippine sellers participated in the business-to-business and networking activities.

This year's summit was mounted in collaboration with the Tourism Promotions Board (TPB) and focused on the creation of opportunities for adventure and responsible tourism.

Puyat stressed that the country's enhanced product and market development will pave the way for this particular tourism product.



"Presently, the Philippines retains its proactive stance in exploring new innovative tourism products, including adventure tourism that will contribute to fast track the recovery of the sector within the Asia-Pacific region. Being primarily an outdoor activity, and with obvious resemblance to the baseline requirement for a healthy and safe travel, it presents an opportunity for a strong reversal and onward growth," enthused the tourism chief.

"While Adventure Tourism has been recognized as a global tourism trend and tourists shift their interest to new destinations and experiences, the Philippines' unique 7,641 islands have a lot to offer," added Puyat.

Puyat also cited the DOT's Tourism Response and Recovery Plan (TRRP), as a helpful guide to the industry towards recovery and sustainability.

She said the TRRP aims to protect and ensure the employment and business survival of industry stakeholders during and post lockdown measures, as well as provide policies and guidelines for the New Normal. Still, Puyat noted that the recovery plan will enable both the public and the private sector to work cohesively towards a sustainable and resilient tourism industry.

The Bangkok-based PATA is the association of government and private travel organizations that aims to promote and develop travel and tourism in the Pacific region.

The PATA Adventure Travel Conference and Mart is a niche event consisting of both conference and travel mart components. The event brings together tourism professionals from the public and the private sector to discuss the creation of new opportunities in promoting environmental protection and social sustainability, and address the issues faced by adventure travel, responsible, and sustainable tourism industries

In line with the objective of a safe and responsible tourism reopening, Puyat awarded the Hilton Clark Sun Valley Resort with the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) Safe Travels Stamp, the world's first safety and hygiene stamp for travelers to recognize governments and businesses that have adopted global health standardized protocols.



PHILIPPINE TOURISM AND MICE INDUSTRY TO BOUNCE BACK WITH THE HOSTING OF WTTC GLOBAL SUMMIT



The Department of Tourism (DOT) and the Tourism Promotions Board (TPB) Philippines welcome the announcement by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) that the Philippines has been selected as the next host country to the WTTC Global Summit in December 2021.

The announcement was made by WTTC President and CEO Gloria Guevara during the closing ceremony of the WTTC Global Summit in Cancun, Mexico.

"I would like to formally announce our next host, the Philippines, and I am inviting you all to continue with the recovery of our sector in Manila. We are very dedicated to ensure safety, and we will continue to monitor the situation carefully. I look forward to seeing you all," Guevara announced.

Tourism Secretary Bernadette Romulo-Puyat extended a warm invitation to all partners as the Philippines looks forward to hosting the next summit which will help restart the tourism industry and will further boost the continuing strategies to position the country as the MICE hub in Asia.

"We, your Philippine partners in tourism, are eager to share our hopes, dreams and plans for our industry, [and are] ready to do our share in the global effort to overcome and break down barriers in this new dynamic, and unpredictable tourism landscape," said Tourism Secretary Puyat.

DOT, through TPB, has identified the MICE industry as a sector that can help hasten the country's economic recovery through visitor expenditure and its contribution to employment. The Philippines' hosting of WTTC

Global Summit will create an avenue for the private sector and local tourism industry stakeholders to consider bigger markets and present an immense opportunity to network and link up with international partners.

Moreover, it will allow the Philippines to demonstrate its commitment in the midst of current global concerns on health and safety, environmental sustainability, and local community engagement in tourist destinations.

"Through our determination and dedication to this sector, tourism will once again be the driver of socio-economic growth, and improve the lives of millions of people around the world while championing sustainability. We will recover as one, and we will travel once again," Secretary Puyat added.

The WTTC Global Summit is an annual event that gathers over 800 delegates composed of Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), Presidents, and Chairpersons of the largest and most prominent international travel and tourism companies from airlines, hotels and resorts, travel agencies, tour companies, global distribution system, transportation, and allied enterprises; as well as Tourism Ministers and officials from international organizations, such as the UNWTO.

The 3-day Summit allows delegates to discuss opportunities, challenges and issues facing the industry and draw up concrete solutions pursued across countries and regions through private and public sector collaboration. The Summit deliberations also contribute to the formulation of global tourism policies and agenda, as well as shaping the future of travel and tourism in regions and destinations.



DOT turns food tourism to high heat with 2021 KAIN NA!

KAIN NA!

The Department of Tourism (DOT) has heated up its efforts to stir the local food tourism scene with the 2021 edition of the KAIN NA! Food and Travel Festival in partnership with Ayala Malls.



“Each year, the Kain Na Food and Travel Festival continues to evolve in response to the needs of our valued tourism stakeholders,” Tourism Secretary Berna Romulo-Puyat said during the opening ceremony.

KAIN NA! with the theme “Food Tourism Reboot” continued to serve its signature line-up of digital events, including the Global PROSPECTives in Food and Gastronomy Tourism, Food Tourism Exchange, and Food Tourism 101 from June 10 to 13, while on-ground festivities were held at Ayala MarQuee Mall in Angeles City from June 11 to 13.

Puyat said 20 physical booths were put up for the festival, each promoting products and services of food and farm tourism stakeholders across the country, in cooperation with different DOT regional offices and the Department of Agriculture (DA).

Among the participating booths from Central Luzon are: Aleli’s Pastries; Apag Marangle/Cusina Manuela; Tollhouse; Sasmuan Local Products; Wil-Fel’s delicacies; Farmers Joy; Yamang Bukid Healthy Products; Grann Garden Shop; RV De Dios Food Manufacturing; Kaka Association Incorporation; My Lola Nor’s Meryendahan; and Florida-Lubao Organic Farmers Association.

Puyat added that this leg of KAIN NA! proved to be special with the unveiling of culinary tours, food trips, and excursion packages developed by members of the Philippine Tour Operators Association Inc. (PHILTOA) and the food tourism consortium.

“With the help of the PHILTOA Food Tourism Consortium, let’s see what real places, stories, food and people we can find as they offer slow food travel experiences amidst the picturesque mountains of Benguet and the culture and history-laden lowlands of Ilocos, La Union, Pampanga and Bulacan,” Puyat remarked.

Earlier this year, the DOT led food tourism validation caravans that enabled representatives of PHILTOA to visit the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR), Ilocos Region, and Central Luzon to experience new culinary activities and tourist attractions that they can incorporate into their tour



packages. The packages include day tours, overnight stays, and 3-day/2-night promos to culinary tourism destinations like Pampanga, Bulacan, CALABARZON, Baguio, Subic, Benguet, Mountain Province, La Union, Ilocos Norte, and Ilocos Sur.

Meanwhile, the TED talks-inspired Food Tourism 101 featured learning sessions to help viewers maximize their online presence through Viber and Instagram. New culinary business models like cloud kitchens were likewise introduced through the sessions.

The online store of KAIN NA! featuring various iconic food items and local delicacies, continues to be accessible at www.kainnastore.com. Online shoppers are treated to hundreds of food products from coffee, tea, and chocolate specialty stores, Ayala partner merchants, slow food and food trip merchants from Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao.



DOT-Accredited establishment StaySafe.ph-users, eligible for Safety Seal Certification

The Joint Memorandum Circular (JMC) on the Safety Seal Certification Program was signed on 23 April led by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), the Department of Tourism (DOT), Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), Department of Health (DOH) and the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG). The JMC contains the requirements and procedures in securing a Safety Seal and institutionalizes the certification program.

The circular also covers the eligibility and certification process as well as complaints handling and renewal/ revocation/ reinstatement guidelines.

The Safety Seal Certification Program is a program created to ensure compliance with the Minimum Public Health Standards (MPHS), including the adoption and use of the StaySafe.ph application in covered establishments.

“The DOT is among the implementing and issuing agencies, and its focus are the primary tourism enterprises (TEs) which are DOT-accredited, are compliant with the minimum public health standards set by the government and have adopted or integrated the StaySafe.ph in contact tracing application,” said DOT Secretary Bernadette Romulo-Puyat.

The Primary Tourism Enterprises include Accommodation Establishments (Hotels, Resorts, Apartment Hotels, and other Accredited Accommodation Establishments), Travel and Tour Services, Meetings, Incentives, Conferences & Events (MICE) Venues/Facilities and Restaurants inside Hotels/Resorts.

“While the certification is not mandatory, we appeal to the DOT-accredited TEs to participate in this certification program to strengthen the contact-tracing system of the government. More importantly, safety-conscious travelers will always be drawn to products that are certified safe by government bodies,” the tourism chief urged.

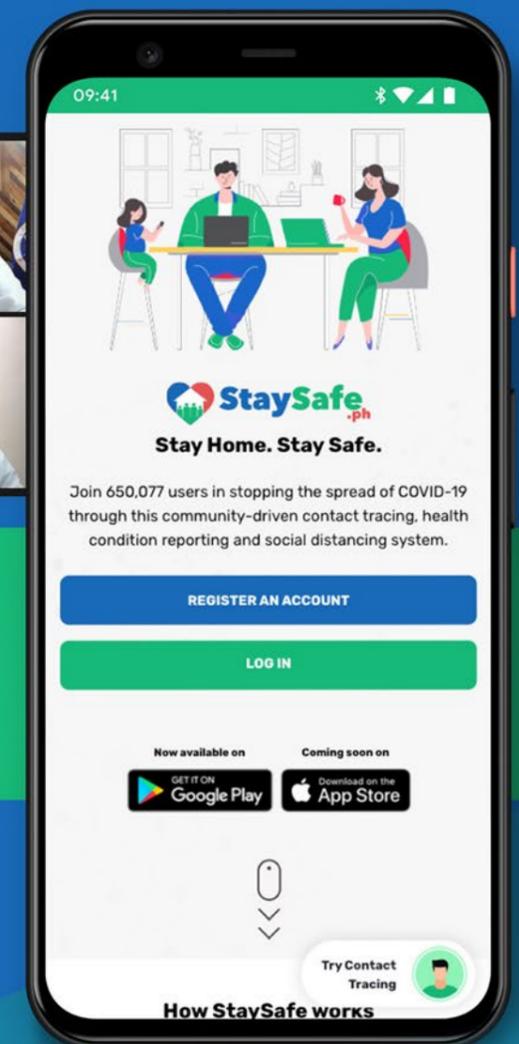
For TE applicants, the DOT will create a microsite that will carry the following information:

Implementing Guidelines of the Safety Seal Certification Program

- Checklist for the Type of Establishments Covered by the Issuing Authority
- Contact Details of Inspection Units
- Downloadable Safety Seal Toolkit
- List of All Establishments Issued with Safety Seal, including status (Active, Revoked, Reinstated)
- Complaint Hotlines
- Request Form for Reassessment or Reinstatement of Safety Seal

The validity of the Certificate is one year and could be revoked if the establishment is found non-compliant.

If the violation refers to any of the minimum public health standards, the business establishment shall be given another forty-eight (48) hours from the time the Safety Seal is revoked to implement corrective actions. Failure to correct the deficiency may result to the suspension of operations, as ordered by the City/Municipality, until corrective actions are taken.



DOT hails expansion of priority vaccination to A4 cluster, including tourism frontliners

The Department of Tourism (DOT) hailed the decision of the government to expand the vaccination rollout to the next priority group, the A4 cluster, which now includes workers of the tourism industry and other economic and national government frontliners.

Tourism Secretary Bernadette Romulo-Puyat expressed her elation over the announcement, citing the importance of inoculating every stakeholder in the tourism sector. She noted that the vaccination of the A4 cluster may begin next month or when the vaccine supply stabilizes.

Vaccine czar Carlito Galvez Jr. announced last May 18 the approval by the Cabinet of the recommendation of the National Task Force Against COVID-19 (NTF) to start the vaccination of the A4 cluster "after May or when we will have a steady supply" of the vaccine.

"We at the DOT welcome this decision to include the A4 cluster among those prioritized for vaccination. There is no other way to ensure the sector's survival and recovery but to vaccinate every tourism frontliner," Puyat stressed.



Photo from: Region 8

The A4 cluster, which is fourth on the priority list of the government's national vaccination program, consists of workers of essential sectors including tourism frontliners. The first three groups cover medical frontliners, seniors, and persons with comorbidities.

Among the A4 cluster, commuter transport workers, employees of hotels and other accommodation establishments, and restaurant workers are particularly relevant to the Department, Puyat said. The DOT is still awaiting decision on its proposal in March to widen the group of prioritized tourism workers to include tour guides,

tour operators, and other accredited workers and service providers.

She said frontline nature of the jobs of these workers requires face-to-face interaction with individuals and groups. The lifting of travel restrictions and the quick recovery of the tourism industry – and the national economy as a whole – hinge heavily on the health and safety of our tourism workers.



Photo from: Region 11

Last May 1, some 150 frontline employees of quarantine and non-quarantine accommodation establishments were inoculated during the symbolic vaccination of laborers. To date, a total of 1,612 employees of quarantine hotels have been vaccinated. They expressed confidence and gratitude after receiving their vaccine shots.

Leo Angelo Asiado, a member of the Hotel and Restaurant Association of the Philippines said that he has peace of mind now that he has received a protection against COVID-19.

Edison Rosales, sales director at Microtel by Wyndham and Tryp by Wyndham, shared the same sentiment as he noted on the vaccine's importance for every stakeholder in the tourism industry.

"It gives us confidence that we are protected from the virus as we continue to keep our badly hit industry rolling. As we engage with customer assistance and services, this also instills assurance as well to our clients," Rosales stressed.

"We are grateful that the DOT has ensured that we in the tourism industry were placed at the higher priority as we move along with the vaccination program of the government," he added.



DOT, MANILA LGU INK MOBILE HOSPITAL DEAL

The Department of Tourism (DOT), through the National Parks Development Committee (NPDC) and the City of Manila, inked the deal on the construction of a mobile field hospital and drive-thru vaccination site at the Burnham Green, Rizal Park last 28 April 2021.

Representing the DOT were Tourism Secretary Bernadette Romulo-Puyat and NPDC Executive Director Cecille Lorenzana-Romero, and Mayor Francisco "Isko Moreno" Domagoso for the City of Manila.

The tourism chief noted the need to repurpose tourism sites to support the current efforts of the government to protect the public's health and safety.

"We welcome the repurposing of more tourism sites into medical facilities that will help us get through this public health crisis. I hope that this collaboration between different national agencies and the Manila LGU will inspire other LGUs around the country to work with the national government in developing innovative solutions that will bring about a swift end of [sic] this pandemic and allow us to embark on the road to recovery," said Puyat during the virtual signing of the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA).

According to Puyat, the Manila Mega Field Hospital will be constructed at the 16,327 square meter area of the Burnham Green located at the western section of Rizal Park. This mobile field hospital will augment the bed capacity of hospitals for moderate and severe cases of COVID-19 with 336 beds "and the capacity to expand should the need arise."

The recently signed MOA likewise includes the construction of a Drive-thru Vaccination Site at the Independence Road, commonly known as the Parade Grounds of the Quirino Grandstand, also under the management of the NPDC. This move is seen to optimize the Manila LGU's vaccination program with its capacity to inoculate up to 450 people per day.

"Both the mobile field hospital and drive-thru vaccination site will be open to all, regardless of whether you are a resident and non-resident of Manila. These two endeavors will contribute significantly to scaling up the nation's COVID-19 response in light of the current surge in cases and the anticipated arrival of more vaccines," added the tourism chief.

Expected to be completed in two months, the construction, development, and operation of the temporary facilities will be at the expense of the City Government of Manila.



Benguet:

A cold place to warm our hearts

The Covid-19 pandemic has jeopardized almost everything in our lives, it has brought out the best and worst in us. This pandemic is also teaching us all about things that we don't often see or value and the possibilities beyond the disruption.

Here are two different stories of how the pandemic has affected lives in Atok, Benguet, hopefully we may learn from them.

Haight's Place: Embracing Tourism and looking forward to more developments in Atok

Edward Haight belongs to the 3rd generation of the Haight clan, which is now composed of 82 family members. Edward is one of the grandsons of Guy Haight who first came to Atok in the early 1900s after being diagnosed with respiratory disease. He was advised to look for a place with almost the same

temperature as his hometown in Pennsylvania, USA. With his desire to get well, he found Atok and settled there.

Guy fell in love with the place and even found a lovely Igorot lady from the Kankana-ey Tribe whom he married. They both settled in what is now Paoay. With the help of his wife and the locals, Guy started planting and growing vegetable seeds, which all came from his hometown, like cabbage, lettuce, sugar beet, turnip, potato, celery, parsley, rhubarb carrot, oats and rye, whose stalks and leaves were fed to cows, horses, pigs, carabaos and other livestock. From this, Benguet was turned into a 'vegetable salad' plantation.

Guy passed on in 1926, leaving his wife and four children a legacy that is now known as Haight's Place – an 85-hectare land blossoming with different flowers, vegetables, Sakura trees, and an Oak forest.

The Haight's Place showcases a small cabin house with three rooms and a small hallway. Though very small, it became a sensation when pictures of flower fields and Sakura trees blooming with flowers flooded the internet.

Tourism was flourishing until Covid-19 happened when everything stopped. Edward, however, remains optimistic that with the help of the local government unit, the Department of Tourism and even the private sector, tourism will open again.

Northern Blossom Blooms Amid Pandemic

Northern Blossom is a three-hectare flower farm in Atok facing the three highest peaks of Luzon. It is commonly tagged as "Korea in the Philippines" because of its fields of both local and imported flowers. The farm is also famous for its cabbage roses that bloom in solid white, pink, and purple colors from October to January.

Northern Blossom owner Melany "Lany" Ganayan confessed she never dreamt of being in the tourism industry until that one picture of her flower farm went viral in 2018.

She said the overwhelming influx of tourists was at first exciting, but it came to a point when everything seemed to drain everyone's energy. This made her ask herself if this should continue as part of her future plans or if she should just stop accepting visitors because, according to her, tourism is not just about picturesque scenery.

When she was about to quit, the pandemic happened and everything that drained her energy suddenly stopped. It was a blessing in disguise for her as the lockdown gave her the time to plan and set the necessary arrangements and preparations so when her province reopens for tourism, a system will be in place.

Safe Solo Travel **FOR ALL**



Want to go solo travel but worried about your safety and convenience as gay, lesbian, non-binary, pansexual, bisexual, gender-fluid and the like? Let this #travelsafeforall bit guide you.

Solo travel preferences have been improving the past decade in the Philippines. What used to be taboo is now gaining not only traction but has evolved into a community on its own. Here are a few things I have picked up on this journey.

#CheckSafeSpaces

Join groups that advocate your vibe. Women come together to share stories and give unfiltered responses to questions. Recommendations are more efficient in these groups too.

Follow travelers who create content based on your biases too. Solo travelers in the Philippines have a niche. Up until today, I love women content creators like The Pinay Solo Backpacker, Hannah Reyes, Mary Jane Cinco. Recently, prepping for bike packing and hunting down a Vespa so I am binge watching Xzar Lim and Vespacute.



#TravelDuringOff PeakSeason

This might be unpopular but I truly love places that are not busy. Since off peak seasons mean more chances of interacting with locals, expect to get more help and travel hacks to "off the 'gram" destinations and activities.

My most adventurous travel memory was my first ever freediving experience. Since I already had a few scuba diving stints, I was pretty much hyped about trying out freediving. I was assisted by my tour guide in Coron and was able to reach a decent depth in no less than Barracuda Lake. The best part? There was no one but me during that "downtime".



#PackLight

This is my eternal struggle but through the years, I realized that I can pack a month's #workandplay essentials in a small luggage, a tiny duffel bag and my water-resistant, slash-proof gadget backpack. Don't forget to include your medicine and sanitation kit, too!

My first visit to Siargao taught me how to pack light so that I can transfer from one hostel to another much easier. You see, luggage, steep roads and sand do not go well together.

#CheckOutCoWorkingHubs

Internet connection is a major challenge but co-working hubs are addressing this. With decent prices and favorable locations, this is a good way to get your "work from anywhere" goal going.

I spent a week in La Union. Thanks to Louis and the other all-girls co-owners of The Attic Room, a co-working hub birthed out of being stuck in EIU last year. I instantly booked the moment because I truly support #supportlocal #womenempowerment.

#SaveEmergencyNumbers

and update your friends and family about your itinerary. You may also request a trusted friend to track you especially if you're going off the grid.

I usually inform three friends who are always online that I am out and about. They also have different sleeping times so that I would most likely get a prompt response when needed most.



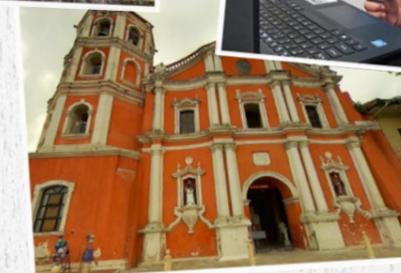
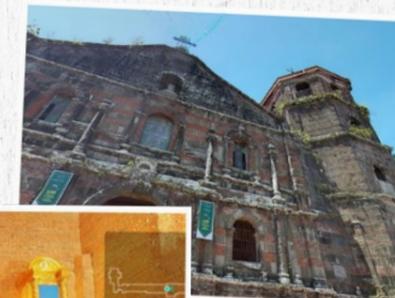
#LearnBasicSelfDefense

Remember that no matter how safe a place is, the truth is that it's always better to be prepared. Learning women-focused self defense allows you to be more confident, too.

****Bene is a Content Strategist, mother of two dogs, ambidextrous, ambivert – currently embarking on her #Project81andBeyond, exploring Philippines one destination at a time*



Journey to Faith: A MONTHLY E-PILGRIMAGE TOUR IN LAGUNA CHURCHES



The COVID-19 pandemic came crashing like big waves. The upsurge had some of us experiencing its effects, which almost felt as if we were drowning in its immeasurable impact on our lives. When the government decided to shut down the national economy and placed provincial borders to contain the spread of the virus, many industries were trapped in quicksand.

Apart from the threat to our health, many of us had to deal with confronting our fears and anxieties of the unknown future. Employees had to work from home, students had to attend online classes, entrepreneurs had to explore transforming their businesses digitally. These sudden changes, along with being isolated for long periods of time, has taken its toll on us.

When we speak of healing, we immediately think of recovering from physical pain and illness. But sometimes, healing is beyond the physical. It transcends through one's soul and spirit.

Hijos Tours is a community-based tour operator based in San Pablo, Laguna. Pre-pandemic, we designed tours focusing on local history while supporting the livelihood of communities all over the Philippines. When the community quarantines were announced in March 2020, our team gathered virtually and we played with the idea of converting our physical tours into virtual tours. Maximizing technology and innovation, we were able to continuously operate providing virtual tours and online history classes, among others.

But then it hit us. We realized that our community, even

when we are physically apart, is still intact. We went back to the very reason of our existence, which is creating an ecosystem of community-based tourism. So, we began asking our community of travelers on how a tour operator like us can help them cope amidst the on-going health crisis.

Their answer was astonishing; they wanted a journey to faith.

During the Lenten Season in April this year, Hijos Tours launched its e-Pilgrimage Tour. Through this virtual journey, e-pilgrims visited four historical churches in Laguna. This also gave them an opportunity to find spiritual healing together as a community with the teachings of our religious forefathers. It allowed them to reflect and to realize that the pandemic may have limited our actions but never shook our faith. With positive feedback from the first batch of e-pilgrims, we decided to offer the "Journey to Faith" virtual pilgrimage monthly.

Hijos Tours has learned a valuable lesson in this pandemic. Tourism may be one of the most affected industries because of the impact of COVID-19—we had to deal with limited mobility and strict travel restrictions—but our role in our travelers' lives and the communities we serve will always be significant. Together, we will find healing and walk towards the path of recovery.

*Written by Ms. Marilyn M. Manila, President and Chair, CARD MRI Hijos Tours
CARD MRI Hijos Tours is a travel and tours institution that is anchored in social enterprise and community development that celebrates local culture all while giving its travelers a meaningful and unforgettable experience. To learn more about Hijos Tours and its products and services, its official Facebook page is www.facebook.com/HijosToursOfficial*

TOP WATER ACTIVITIES YOU SHOULD EXPERIENCE IN THE PHILIPPINES

Thanks to its archipelagic nature, the Philippines is surrounded by water, not to mention that it is made up of 7,641 islands, making it an ideal destination not only for the summer but also for the rainy season.

Aside from its world renowned beaches, the country offers various water activities fit for the thrill seeker or the chill head in you.

Here are some that you should try:



SURFING

With more than 7,000 islands, it's no wonder that surfing is one of the most popular water activities in the Philippines. The go-to spot is Cloud 9 in Siargao, which was listed among the top surfing spots in the world and has hosted international surfing competitions.

Best places to go: Siargao, La Union, Baler, and Zambales

DIVING

The Philippines is blessed with an abundant marine life as part of the Coral Triangle. From showcasing outstanding aquatic creatures to World War II shipwrecks, the country is indeed a haven for divers.

Best places to go: Tubbataha Reef, Batangas (Anilao), Cebu (Malapascua), and Palawan (Coron)



CANYONEERING

Also known as canyoning, the activity allows you to navigate through the canyons by climbing, jumping, hiking, swimming, and rappelling. Absolutely recommended for those adrenaline junkies!

Best place to go: Cebu



PARAW SAILING

Imagine sitting on the edge of the boat while watching the world's famous Boracay sunset. Perfect way to cap off a tiring day on the island.

Best place to go: Boracay



RIVER TUBING

Experience strong currents, rocky boulders, and raging rapids in a fun way by riding on a tube, which is a durable "salbabida" (floater) made of an old rubber tire.

Best places to go: Laguna, Quezon, Quirino, Saranggani, Antique (Tabiao)



Let's Paws and Travel!

Science has proven that owning a pet, especially dogs and cats, has a lot of benefits. It can relieve stress and reduce anxiety, loneliness and depression. Taking care of a pet also boosts "feel good" hormones, making its owner calmer and a lot happier.

Since we are in a pandemic that seems to oscillate our positive and negative energies, our four-legged loves are surely doing their best in keeping our sanity in check and contributing big time to help us cope.

For this issue, we pay tribute to the pets of some of our TPB employees. We also asked the pet parents to look back and share some of their favorite travel memories with their babies. Here are the responses:



Chief Amigo was diagnosed with Stage 2 Heartworm Disease a day after his birthday. I rigorously followed his 1-year treatment plan which included numerous medications and monthly visits to the veterinary clinic. Since Migo got stressed riding in our car, I did what any province-raised gal would do - I hired a tricycle.

It was a joy to ride the tricycle as Amigo would want me to cuddle him so he could have a better view behind us during our ride. This 15-minute hug fest was a gift especially from a dog who would escape any attempts to be hugged outside his cage. He would rather run and play than be hugged ... Thank you very much, hoomans.

- Ryvet P. Cruz, Executive Assistant III

Charlie is a home buddy so we haven't had much experience traveling - except when there's a much needed visit to the vet. The last time we did, he was 7.7kgs pre-pandemic. This year, he's now at 11kgs because the only trips he does now is from the bedroom to the kitchen. No weight shaming in this house though. You know what they say about pets and owners mirroring some aspects haha

Cat's Hobby: Shamelessly begging for more treats

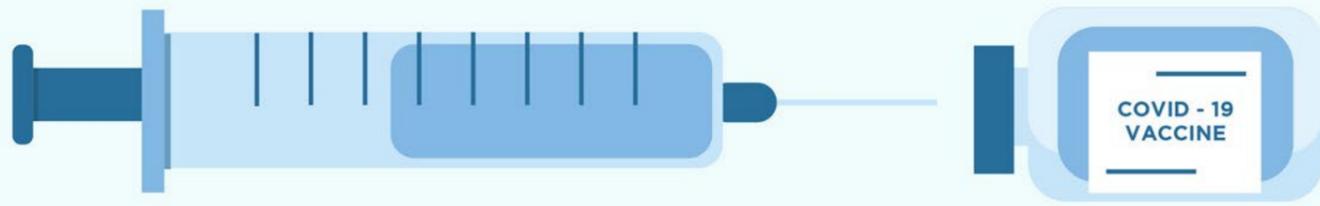
Human's Hobby: Ordering food delivery when stressed

- April Rose Enerio, Public Relations Officer III



He is Miggy, my cheerful furry pal. When he goes on new adventures, he wags his tail and smiles a lot! Visiting parks, strolling in the mall, driving around the city, celebrating parties and going glamping with human friends, occasionally joining me at work, feasting on Jack's Lasagna, and relaxing and playing under the sun are his favorite adventures. Actually, Miggy is more outgoing than I am. He is always up for anything exciting and fun! But now, this extroverted dog loves to stay in bed, be snuggled up, and be fed with delicious pancakes and french fries - are his new favorite kind of adventure.

-Tasha Blanquisco, Convention Services Officer III



TPB GEARS UP VACCINATION PROGRAMS FOR EMPLOYEES



In pursuit of wellness and protection from a number of diseases, the Tourism Promotions Board (TPB) organized several vaccination programs against pneumonia, flu and the COVID-19 virus for its personnel. These preventive measures are part of the Health and Wellness Program of the TPB which aims to provide a safer work environment for TPB employees.



TPB employees were also given the opportunity to directly procure their preferred brand of vaccine and avail reimbursements from TPB until the end of 2021. Employees who intend to procure their own vaccines should present TPB with proper supporting documents such as copies of official receipts under the name of the personnel and their vaccination card.

To date, a total of 140 TPB personnel were already inoculated, 98 of which were part of the first batch to get the first dose of the vaccine last 15 June 2021 and are scheduled to receive the second dose by 15 July 2021. Currently, only 28 of TPB's workforce is yet to take the vaccine against COVID-19.

The TPB Health and Wellness Program aims to create a dynamic and healthy work environment among employees, promoting long-lasting positive attitudes and behaviors resulting in a more effective and efficient working culture and environment.



The pneumonia and flu vaccine program is targeted to be implemented this July 2021 in pre-arranged batches of five (5) to limit crowding and observe physical distancing during the vaccine administration. These vaccines will be available to all TPB regular and job order employees who are part of the agency as of 31 March 2021.

Meanwhile, TPB's COVID-19 vaccination program was coordinated by the Office of the Deputy Chief Operating Office for Corporate Affairs with the local government of Manila as part of the Manila COVID Vaccination Program. This arrangement covers TPB Board members, all regular and job order employees as well as the security and janitorial service personnel who are part of the agency as of 30 April 2021. Those who wished to join this arrangement were instructed to register through the City of Manila website for the COVID-19 vaccine.



TPB CONDUCTS CSR DONATION DRIVE AT UP-PGH

In the spirit of community service and camaraderie, the Tourism Promotions Board (TPB) extended assistance at UP Philippine General Hospital (PGH), the country's largest COVID-19 referral center.

The government-run PGH suffered from a devastating fire incident in the morning of 16 May 2021. The fire started at the Operating Room Sterilization Area on the third floor of the hospital's central block building and reached a second alarm before it was declared extinguished.

With community service at the core of TPB's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), TPB donated medical supplies and other essentials to PGH for its daily operations. On 28 May 2021, a number of TPB volunteers led by Deputy Chief Operating Officer for Corporate Affairs Ms. Jocelyn Patrice Deco and TPB Planning Officer Wilson Suba turned over health sanitation packages and medical supplies to PGH Director Gerardo Legaspi, PGH Deputy Director for Administration Dr. Maria Teresa Julieta Benedicto, and PGH Property and Supply Division Head, Ms. Adette Idjao.

The health sanitation packages, medical supplies, and other essentials TPB donated to UP PGH included:

- 10 gallons of Alcohol
- 350 pieces of Surgical Gowns (impermeable)
- 30 boxes of KN95 medical grade
- 25 boxes of N95 3M8210
- 12 packs of Newborn Diapers
- 10 packs of Baby Diapers (Small)
- 10 packs of Adult Diapers (Medium)
- 10 packs of Adult Diapers (Large)
- 50 pcs. of Alcohol 500 ml
- 50 packs of paper towels
- 50 packs of 150's cotton balls
- 50 packs of baby wipes



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August 5-8, 2021
Eastern Visayas



2021 PHITEX

PHILIPPINE TRAVEL EXCHANGE
Beyond Business: Co-Creating Safe, Smart, and Sustainable Tourism

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