

Alaminos City Government Intervention Program to Business Owners during Covid-19 Pandemic in the Tourism Industry

Rhea R. Abellera
Diezel B. Mararac
Anna Flor C. Limon
Camille O. Oquin

Alaminos City is an urban area in western part of the Province of Pangasinan. During the pandemic, this city was not exempt from its effects. This study was conducted to understand the city's condition, especially the support provided by the local government of Alaminos to private businesses. It utilized the descriptive survey method to gather data through a survey questionnaire.

The respondents of this study were business owners of resorts, restaurants, and travel agencies located in Alaminos City, Pangasinan. A total of 50 respondents were identified and selected using the Total Enumeration Sampling Method, based on official records obtained from the Business Permit and Licensing Office (BPLO) of the Local Government Unit (LGU) of Alaminos City. This approach ensured that all qualified business establishments within the tourism sector were represented in the study, thereby providing accurate and comprehensive data for analysis.

The Business Permit and Licensing Office (BPLO), along with the Business One-Stop Shop (BOSS) of the LGU Alaminos City, played an essential role in facilitating the initial phase of this research. These offices provided the official list of newly registered and renewed business establishments, which served as the sampling frame for the study. Prior to the distribution of survey questionnaires, a formal written request was submitted to the City Mayor of Alaminos to obtain permission to conduct the study. Upon approval, the researcher distributed the survey questionnaires to the identified respondents. The questionnaire served as the primary data-gathering instrument and was designed to obtain information regarding the business profile, level of responsiveness, and challenges encountered by tourism-related business owners during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The results of the survey revealed that the majority of businesses in Alaminos City's tourism sector were sole proprietorships, indicating that they were owned and managed by individual entrepreneurs rather than corporations or partnerships. Most of these businesses reported a starting capital ranging from ₱501,000 to ₱650,000, with annual earnings between ₱251,000 and ₱400,000. These figures suggest that many of the enterprises fall under the small business category, playing a vital role in sustaining local employment and contributing to the city's tourism-driven economy.

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Local Government Unit (LGU) of Alaminos City implemented several programs and initiatives to support local business owners, particularly those in the tourism industry. Among these government interventions were: (1) The Responsiveness of the Filipino Brand of Excellence Program, aimed at improving service quality and business resilience; (2) A 25% discount on business tax payments to provide financial relief to struggling enterprises; (3) Extension of business permit deadlines and renewal without penalties or interest to accommodate operational disruptions; (4) Orientations for accommodation establishments operating under General Community Quarantine (GCQ) guidelines to ensure compliance with health and safety standards; (5) Suspension of penalties for delayed payments during the crisis; (6) Capacity-building seminars and training programs for tourism stakeholders to enhance their knowledge and adaptability in crisis situations; and (7) Temporary suspension of the 25% penalty and 2% interest on overdue taxes and fees.

The findings of the study showed that the level of responsiveness of the local government was rated as highly satisfactory. This positive rating was largely attributed to the LGU's proactive efforts in providing orientations, implementing safety measures, and extending assistance programs to help business owners continue their operations amidst the challenges of the pandemic. The collaboration between government offices and private business owners demonstrated a shared commitment to economic recovery and the protection of public health.

However, despite these commendable initiatives, the study also revealed that business owners in Alaminos City's tourism industry encountered several significant challenges in accessing government support and intervention programs. These challenges included: (1) Limited mobility and travel restrictions brought about by lockdowns, which prevented business owners from processing documents and accessing government offices; (2) Strict health and safety requirements, such as the mandatory presentation of vaccination cards, which delayed the renewal of business permits; (3) Inadequate information dissemination due to limited resources and communication barriers, leaving many entrepreneurs unaware of available assistance programs; (4) Numerous documentary requirements and bureaucratic procedures that were difficult to complete within the given timeframe; (5) Complex guidelines and unclear instructions on how to avail of certain government aid; (6) Personal circumstances, including illness, family emergencies, or accidents, that affected the ability of business owners to comply with requirements; and (7) Instances of social discrimination or stigma that discouraged some individuals from participating in public programs during the pandemic.

These barriers significantly hindered the full participation and benefit of many business owners in the government's intervention efforts. Consequently, while the LGU's programs were generally effective, the study emphasized the need for improved communication strategies, simplified procedures, and greater inclusivity in policy implementation.

In conclusion, the study highlights that the tourism-related business owners in Alaminos City, Pangasinan, exhibited resilience and determination in coping with the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Local Government Unit's responsive measures greatly contributed to sustaining their operations and restoring confidence in the local tourism industry. However, continued efforts are still necessary to enhance accessibility, reduce bureaucratic challenges, and strengthen coordination between government agencies and the private sector. By addressing these gaps, Alaminos City can further promote sustainable economic recovery and fortify its reputation as one of Pangasinan's leading tourism destinations.

Based on these findings, the researchers recommend: strengthening communication and coordination among barangay officials, community members, business owners, and the city government to ensure smoother access to local government programs; simplifying processes and reducing documentary requirements to facilitate timely compliance; allocating additional financial support to the tourism sector; and ensuring that assistance is granted to the most deserving beneficiaries.