

# TOURIST SPOTS AND TOURISM BUSINESSES IN SAN MIGUEL DE MAYUMO, BULACAN DURING PANDEMIC: STATUS, CHALLENGES, AND SUSTAINABILITY

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## Abstract

San Miguel is one of the well-known tourist destinations in Bulacan due to its historical events and environmental treasures and specialties, which tourists and locals frequently visit. When the Pandemic struck, however, the Municipality's tourism sector took a blow, as did the capacity of local business owners to earn a living near tourist sites. The focus of this research was to (1) identify the status or current situation of San Miguel De Mayumo in Bulacan during the Pandemic, (2) determine the challenges that businesses are experiencing, and (3) and to provide a sustainable plan of action for recovery. The researchers wanted to conduct a study that will benefit those other tourism businesses and establishments. A content and thematic analysis was conducted to answer the research objectives.

**Keywords:** Municipality's Tourism, Pandemic, Status, Challenges, Sustainable Plan.

## Introduction

Tourism is one of the world's most influential and fastest-growing sectors, with tourist arrivals surpassing one billion for the first time in 2012. It is one of the world's most important industries. Tourism plays a vital role in socio-economic progress. It employs many people in the world as it is one of the sectors that generate a lot of jobs. It helps countries prosper by boosting their economies. In 2019, seven percent of the global trade came from tourism; it is the third-largest export category in the world. However, the tourism industry has become one of the industries that have been hit severely by the COVID-19 outbreak. Due to the pandemic has impacted economies, employment, services, and opportunities across the globe. At a global level, the sector is seeing a sudden and severe decrease in demand and an increase in unemployment, which causes the risk to the small and medium-sized enterprises.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 virus' spread, travel and tourism have been the most affected sectors. With planes grounded, hotels were closed, travel restrictions and closing of many borders have been imposed. The travel restrictions were enforced

to control the spread of COVID-19 Results in the global demand declined. In 2020, there has been a decline in tourist arrivals by seventy-two percent from January to October. The reduced international visitor arrivals were a fraction of what they were a year ago in the first quarter of 2020.

In 2019, UNWTO stated that tourism employs one out of every ten people worldwide, or 330 million people. But due to the pandemic outbreak, all tourism businesses experienced a severe fall in the number of customers, revenue from tourism, services, and operation, and the downsizing of employees were all affected.

The residents are threatened with an extensive array of government limitations due to the COVID-19 pandemic; many people are currently suffering because tourist guiding and selling souvenirs are their only means of subsistence.

This study will give significant information about the situation and challenges of tourist attractions, destinations and tourism businesses amidst COVID-19 Pandemic. The researchers are interested to conduct this study which will be beneficial to the

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people in the locality and the municipality as a whole. The researchers wanted to conduct this study to know how tourist spots and tourism businesses can cope up in the midst of a pandemic as well as to know the methods they can use to sustain the demand of tourists that visit their tourist attractions.

## Research Locale

San Miguel de Mayumo is a first-class municipality in the province of Bulacan, Philippines. It is a well-known location in Bulacan and one of the most popular tourist attractions due to the historical events that occurred there, as well as its environmental treasures and specialties such as their colorful paper-wrapped desserts called pastillas and freshly prepared chicharron, which become frequently visited by tourists and locals.

Because of its significance in Philippine history, richness in cultural and artistic heritage, San Miguel de Mayumo has quickly become a well-known and favorite tourist destination. There are a lot of historical landmarks, nostalgic old buildings and churches, exquisite ecological attractions, religious attractions, colorful and engaging festivals, and a broad selection of stylish native crafts, sweets, and abundant foods are all popular attractions in the municipality. However, when the pandemic occurred, the province's tourism economy suffered a setback, as did the ability of business owners near tourist attractions to make a livelihood.

## Research Objectives

This study aimed to determine the current status, challenges and sustainability of San Miguel de Mayumo as a tourist destination during the pandemic.

Specifically, this study wanted to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the status of San Miguel de Mayumo in the new normal?
2. What challenges do the tourism businesses experience amid the pandemic?
3. What sustainable action plan can be recommended in order to help San Miguel de Mayumo to bounce back in the new normal?

## Background of the Study

According to Cruz (2007), a tourist destination is a geographical unit that tourists visit and stay. It may be a village, town, city, district, region, island, country, or continent. Cruz (2007) also cited that tourism is essentially a pleasure activity in which money earned in one's abode is spent in places visited. Lew (1986) defines attractions as "things to see, activities to do, and experiences to be remembered." He suggests that attractions are

elements and conditions that are not available at home that motivate tourists to venture temporarily outside of their residential areas.

The principal components of a tourism attraction are those that entice people from other areas to travel there to see or do something. Victor (1989) explained that "attractions are something which motivates tourists to visit." Pearce (1991) provides an operational definition of tourism attraction as being a "named site with a specific human or natural feature which is the focus of visitor and management attention." Prentice (1993) cites the definition of attraction as "a site, theme or area which attracts visitors." Gao (1995) defines attraction as "a destination with unique features in which visitors are interested."

People travel for different reasons. Some are interested in historical or cultural activities such as museums and monuments, while others prefer the sun, sea, and sand. As tourists become more sophisticated, their need to recapture the past has increased. Tourists have been visiting cultural/heritage sites more frequently, following Huh (2002) [1], cultural/heritage tourism of benefits, residents, and governments. First, cultural/heritage tourism protects historical, cultural, and natural resources in communities, towns, and cities. Second, it educates residents and tourists about local/regional history and Traditions. Through research about and development of heritage/ cultural destinations, residents will become better informed about local/regional history and practices which can share with tourists. Third, cultural/ heritage tourism builds closer and stronger

## Communities

Knowledge of heritage provides continuity and context for communities, instilling respect in their residents, strengthening citizenship values, building community pride, and improving quality of life. Fourth, it promotes the economic and civic vitality of the region. Economic benefits include creating new jobs in the travel industry, cultural attractions, and travel-related establishments; economic diversification in the service industry.

One of the most impactful occurrences of the twenty-first century is the pandemic outbreak. The impact on tourism is enormous, even at its early stage. Most countries have imposed temporary travel restrictions to prevent the spread of the virus, raising concerns about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism industry globally. Tourists desire an all-inclusive tourism package and protection and security when visiting well-known sites. They wish to avoid high-risk, crowded tourism areas. They may decide not to attend if their preferred destinations negatively impact their well-

being following the pandemic. The global tourism sector and niche market have already been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. According to the United Nations, the tourism sector's current situation has been much worse due to the pandemic.

San Migue de Mayumo, Bulacan, has not been included in the government's ecotourism effort as one of the country's tourist sites for the previous ten years. Tourists visiting a particular site may find the location appealing if a specific feature fulfills one specific need or desire. For the attraction to be a booming tourist destination, must prioritize tourists' attraction. Tourist satisfaction should prioritize tourists who do not believe their money will seek alternative tourist attractions. As a result, the facilities and services are in a location at all times should always consider tourist interests to ensure their contentment, as satisfied tourists are more likely to become loyal and return to the location, attracting additional potential tourists in the future.

This study will benefit them in determining which facilities or services should be developed or prioritized to strengthen their tourism business and which tourist-related locations should receive additional attention and maintenance. In this regard, there has only been a small study on the relationship between visitor satisfaction and tourist sites in San Miguel de Mayumo, Bulacan, making this valuable study in understanding tourist expectations and assisting tourism planners in further improving the tourism industry.

## Methodology

The researchers have used a qualitative type of research. The aim of any qualitative research project was to obtain a richly detailed understanding of a specific subject, problem, or significance based on first-hand experience. To understand ideas, thoughts, or perceptions, qualitative research included gathering and evaluating non-numerical data. It was used to gain in-depth understanding of an issue or to develop new research ideas (Bhandari, 2020). This was done by observing, gathering opinions and information from local tourism providers through an in-depth interview, with open-ended survey questions and through extensive research.

All data were gathered by conducting scheduled interviews, research and through observation by the researchers. Interviews for tourism establishments were primarily composed of open-ended questions to acquire data regarding the current situation of San Miguel de Mayumo's tourism providers and the industry itself. For the interview with the tourism officer, questions were regarding the effects of the pandemic on the province's tourism industry.

The reason behind the use of the qualitative approach was to encompass all needed information regarding the protocols applied by the local government unit and the tourism service providers, and the current status of San Miguel de Mayumo's tourism industry to secure a safe and effective re-opening of the province's tourism sector. The narrative data was utilized to provide possible protocols on the implementation of the new normal in the tourism industry.

The participants of the study are San Miguel de Mayumo's DOT-accredited tourism establishments and the province's provincial tourism office. These tourism service providers are responsible for the province's tourism sector together with its Provincial Tourism, Culture and the Arts Office on the success of its tourism sector. They were chosen to be the participants of the study because they are the reason why the tourism industry is functioning. Aside from this, they were the ones who were greatly affected when the tourism industry was put to a halt in at the start of the pandemic

In gathering data, the researchers conducted a scheduled structured interview with the provincial tourism officer, chosen DOT-accredited tourism establishments; hotel, travel agency, restaurants etc., and other tourism support services. The interview questions constructed answers the needed questions for the study that supported and added further information which is relevant for the study as well. Specific questions were asked and there were also follow-up questions made by the interview. The responses gathered from the interview were transcribed.

Upon finalizing the interview questionnaire, the said research instrument was validated by the research adviser. The face validity of the interview questions is necessary to evaluate and assess its content and structure. Another research instrument that was used was observation; it is a type or correlational method where the researcher observes ongoing behavior, phenomenon or activities in the surroundings.

An intensive reading and research were made through various journals and articles about the pandemic, the status of the tourism industry before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, the new normal protocols and the future of the tourism industry after the pandemic. These topics are from authors who have done more extensive research on the afore mentioned issues to obtain knowledge and understanding about the topic. The researchers started data gathering in December 2021 for a maximum of two weeks to gather enough data and information needed. A semi- standardized or semi structured classification of interview was scheduled which involved the participation of the provincial

government unit, tourism officer, tourism service providers and tourism support services. To corroborate with the gathered data from the interviews, the researcher also observed and conducted environmental scanning for further first-hand details and additional understanding which added to the study.

The data gathered for this study was analyzed by content analysis; it is used to examine documents in the form of texts, media, or even physical objects. This is usually used to analyze responses from interviewees. Another method that was used to analyze data is narrative analysis; this approach is used to evaluate content from a variety of sources, including respondent interviews, field observations, and surveys (Bhatia, 2018). And last is grounded theory, this relates to the use of qualitative evidence to describe why a particular event occurred. It accomplishes this by examining a number of related cases in various settings and deducing causal explanations from the results. As more cases are studied, researchers can change or create new theories until they find one that suits all of them.

The result from the gathered interview served as basis to determine what was needed to be done for the province's tourism industry to successfully reopen. With the coordinated results from the interviewees, the researchers came up with a final conclusion and recommendation. The themes for the analysis were based from the research's objectives. In line with this, a matrix table was used on the analyzation of the data gathered to easily see the common denominator for each theme or questions from the interviews.

## Results and Discussions

### San Miguel's Tourism Businesses and Tourist Spots during the COVID-19 Pandemic

COVID-19 is not only a global pandemic and public health crisis; it has also severely affected the global economy and financial markets. Significant reductions in income, a rise in unemployment, and disruptions in the transportation, service, and manufacturing industries are among the consequences of the disease mitigation measures that have in many countries. It has become clear that most governments underestimated the risks of rapid COVID-19 spread and mainly were reactive in their crisis response. As disease outbreaks are not likely to disappear soon, proactive international actions are required to save lives and protect economic prosperity (Pak, 2020).

According to Participant A, owner of a souvenir shop, it's tough for them, and they can't start their business operations because some tourist attractions

are still closed. However, some attractions are open, but here in their place, it's still prohibited because of government restrictions. They cannot conduct tour guiding, selling of souvenirs. It's tough because those small things like selling souvenirs are a big help for them as a source of income. There were strict protocols during the first pandemic wave, but now there's little progress. Kids are not allowed to go outside, but now the situation is getting better. However, protocols still need to be followed, such as wearing face masks". From Participant B, owner of a restaurant in San Miguel de Mayumo, "During a lockdown, all establishments are closed. It is tough for the owners like us to close, especially the newly opened ones like us. When it loosened up, many were still afraid to go outside, which led to fewer customers coming outside to eat, so we lost money". After some lockdowns "everything is slowly returning to normal since the cases dropped in San Miguel. Many attractions have already opened, and everyone, including children and adults, has been allowed to go out." This is according to Participant C, owner of a chicharron store.

"Since the pandemic outbreak, there has been a decrease in their sales, unlike before the pandemic. When the pandemic came, there weren't many buyers. The people seemed to be afraid to go out because of the virus that led to a decrease in the sales of the product they offer to the people and tourists of San Miguel Bulacan. "The challenges that they face when establishing a business are the difficulty of advertising and the protocols that have implemented that only 20%-50% of people can eat. It's difficult because expenses consume what should have been earned. For example, during the pandemic, they lost a lot of money because they had protocols to follow. While the status of San Miguel de Mayumo in the new normal is hard for them because there's a limited job for everyone". These are all according to Participant D, owner of another restaurant.

"One of the challenges they face is that some businesses are still closed and their job is to sell souvenirs and be a tour guide. They don't have a job right now so it's also difficult. However, the status of San Miguel de Mayumo in the new normal according to Participant A is that here in San Miguel; some of the parks are still closed".

Due to the pandemic, travel suspensions and temporary closure of tourism businesses had been imposed, which extremely affected the industry (The Star, 2020). However, the reopening process has begun gradually, and authorities have begun to relax restrictions, such as allowing dine-in restaurants to reopen at a reduced capacity while adhering to strict social distancing norms, and

progressively easing internal and foreign travel restrictions. (Chi & Gursoy. 2020).

### San Miguel as a Tourist Destination during the Pandemic

San Miguel Bulacan can provide tourists with rich and delicious pasalubong products from other destinations. Visitors would experience such outstanding hospitality as individuals did in San Miguel. However, the warmth of its people was immense. The town was renamed San Miguel de Mayumo in honor of San Miguel de Arkanghel (St. Michael the Archangel), the town's patron saint, and thanks to the influence of the Catholic Church and Augustinian missionaries. Some of our country's national heroes, artists, and notable political leaders call this townhome. (Ramos, 2018).

According to Participant E, owner of a bakery and coffee shop, “the best thing that San Miguel de Mayumo can offer to tourists is the rich and delicious delicacies that other destinations cannot offer. Pastillas, the number one product of the town. When it comes to sweets, pastillas will surely mention them when exploring the town of San Miguel. This is the town where pastillas wrappers can be considered works of art. Yes, they create intricate designs on the colorful Japanese papers that serve as wrappers for the locally made pastillas. And you'd be surprised at how well cut those colored art papers. It was a delightful surprise to discover that, in addition, a variety of flavors. Pastillas de leche in addition to the traditional taste, Ube (purple yam) and Langka (jackfruit) are all available. As if those flavors weren't enough, they've also elevated their pastillas with unique twists on Dayap, Keso,

Chocnut, Green Tea, Toasted Ones, and Macapuno flavors.

According to Participant F, tourism officer of the area, “more people are reached through social media. The impact of technology and modern art on photographing, videotaping, and providing customer service has caused the tourism business to become a major worry for the local government.” Whether you offer experiences, lodging, or tours, social media plays a vital role the tourism. You can promote San Miguel de Mayumo as a tourist destination by social media. People increasingly use social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube as search engines to determine where and when they should go next. After reading reviews, tourists are more likely to book an experience or a location.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

According to the research participants some places in San Miguel de Mayumo are still not fully operational because of the safety protocols that are needed to be followed. Jobs are limited. After several lockdowns and the gradual easing of restrictions, businesses are starting to bounce back since several businesses are opening up.

In terms of challenges, the main concern of many businesses is to how to continue their operations after suffering so much in terms financial aspects. The government must give them financial support in order for these businesses to start again.

This Sustainable Action Plan is made by the researchers for the gradual recovery of San Miguel de Mayumo's tourism businesses and tourist spots.

| Specific Objective                                                   | Activity                                                                                                                                                         | Implementing Bodies                                               | Time Frame                                         | Budget Plan                       | Desired Results                                                                                     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Assembly with government officials in San Miguel de Mayuyo           | To hold a discussion about how locals and business owners can promote and assists locals and business owners in growing their businesses in San Miguel de Mayuyo | Officials, business owners, and residents of San Miguel de Mayuyo | A conference meeting lasting a week [January 2022] | There is no financial requirement | To share a common goal in the community and to promote the tourism business of San Miguel de Mayuyo |
| Meeting with tourism related business owners in San Miguel de Mayuyo | To talk about the difficulties they are experiencing as a result of pandemic                                                                                     | Tourism related business owners in San Miguel de Mayuyo           | A conference meeting lasting a week [January 2022] | There is no financial requirement | Communicate the challenges faced by business owners and to seek                                     |

|                                                        |                                                                                                   |                                                                 |                                                           |                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|--------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                        |                                                                                                   |                                                                 |                                                           |                                   | government assistance.                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Promote tourism business                               | Make use of media relations, social media, digital advertising, press advertising and direct mail | Officials, business owners, and residents of San Miguel de Mayo | Three day conference meeting [January-February 2022]      | Php 20,000.00                     | To increase sales by making potential customers aware of the business                                                                                                                            |
| Restore and build a more resilient, long-term business | To provide a much needed boost in order to help many tourist spots and businesses survive.        | Officials, business owners, and residents of San Miguel de Mayo | A conference meeting lasting a week [February-March 2022] | There is no financial requirement | To consider the crisis' long term implications, to support businesses and to promote the structural transformation required to build a stronger, more sustainable and resilient tourism economy. |

### Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest between the authors in this manuscript.

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