



MEMORANDUM CIRCULAR NO. 2023-0009

RELAXATION OF HEALTH AND SAFETY PROTOCOLS FOR THE OPERATION OF TOURISM ENTERPRISES

WHEREAS, pursuant to RA 9593 or the Tourism Act of 2009, the Department of Tourism (DOT) is mandated to promulgate rules and regulations governing the operation and activities of all tourism enterprises, including the development and enforcement of a comprehensive system of accreditation;

WHEREAS, pursuant to Republic Act (RA) No. 11469 or the *Bayanihan to Heal as One Act*, and under the Memorandum of the Executive Secretary dated 28 March 2020, the DOT has issued health and safety guidelines on the operation of tourism establishments to carry out the declared national policy of mitigating the transmission of COVID-19;

WHEREAS, to recognize compliance with the health and safety guidelines, the DOT issued the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) Safe Travels Stamp (STS) to compliant enterprises and destinations in accordance with DOT Memorandum Circular No. 2022-003¹; and issued Safety Seals to compliant tourism enterprises as part of the Safety Seal Certification Program in accordance with DOLE-DOH-DILG-DOT-DTI Joint Memorandum Circular No. 21-01 (s.2021)².

WHEREAS, to reopen the economy through the safe resumption of economic and social activities and in line with the liberalized mask mandates in ASEAN countries and across the world without a significant increase in the number of COVID-19 cases, Executive Order No. 03 (s.2022) was issued to allow the voluntary wearing of face mask in outdoor settings or in open spaces and non-crowded outdoor areas with good ventilation;

WHEREAS, the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF) issued Resolution No. 02 (s.2022) dated 04 October 2022, which recommended measures to ease travel restrictions for inbound travelers to the Philippines, allowing the entry of unvaccinated, partially vaccinated or those whose vaccination status cannot be independently validated after presentation of a negative pre-departure testing result of a remotely-supervised or laboratory-based rapid antigen;

WHEREAS, in view of the country's continued immunization, institution of measures to reopen borders, and relaxation of health and safety protocols and requirements, resulting to positive economic impacts, Executive Order No. 07 (s.2022) was issued, further liberalizing the wearing of face masks to be voluntary in both indoor and outdoor settings, except in healthcare facilities, medical transport, public transportation by land, air, or sea; and directing the Department of Health (DOH) to continuously update the MPHS for compliance of the general public;

WHEREAS, in response to EO No. 07 (s.2022), the DOT, through the Office of Tourism Standards and Regulation (OTSR,) issued Memorandum 2022-509 dated 22 November 2022 to the DOT Regional Offices, to reiterate the voluntary wearing of face masks and the waning requirement on the presentation of proof of full vaccination in tourism enterprises;

WHEREAS, with the easing of health protocols in the country, there is a need to relax and align DOT's guidelines on the operation of tourism enterprises and issuance of Safety Seal and WTTC STS, with the government policy to herald normalization and to welcome development that would encourage activities and boost efforts toward the full reopening of the economy;

¹ "Guidelines on the Issuance of the WTTC Safe Travels Stamp to DOT-Accredited Primary Tourism Enterprises, Open Tourism Destinations and Tourist Attractions"

² "Implementing Guidelines of the Safety Seal Certification Program"

NOW, THEREFORE, in view of the foregoing, these consolidated updated guidelines on the operations of tourism enterprises are hereby issued as follows:

I. GENERAL PROVISIONS

Section 1. Short Title. – This Order shall be known as the “*Relaxation of Health and Safety Protocols for Tourism Enterprises.*”

Section 2. Definition of Terms. – For purposes of these Guidelines, the term:

- (a) “Accommodation Establishments” shall refer to establishments operating primarily for accommodation purposes including, but not limited to, hotels, resorts, apartment hotels, tourist inns, motels, pension houses, private homes used for homestay, ecolodges, serviced apartments, condotels, and bed and breakfast facilities. In these Guidelines, “Accommodation Establishments” shall be interchangeable with “Hotels;”
- (b) “Minimum public health standards (MPHS)” shall refer to the national, local, and sector-specific guidelines on mitigation measures for its COVID-19 response across all settings by implementing non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs), consistent with the Department of Health (DOH) Administrative Order No. 2021-0043 or the Omnibus Guidelines on the Minimum Public Health Standards for the Safe Reopening of Institutions. This term shall also encompass specific NPIs of community mitigation strategies or public health measures that do not involve vaccines, medications, or other pharmaceutical interventions, that individuals and communities can carry out in order to reduce transmission rates, contact rates, and the duration of infectiousness of individuals in the population;
- (c) “New Normal” shall refer to the emerging behaviors, situations, and minimum public health standards that will be institutionalized in common or routine practices and remain even after the pandemic while the disease is not totally eradicated through means such as widespread immunization. These include actions that will become second nature to the general public as well as policies such as bans on large gatherings that will continue to remain in force;
- (d) Safety Seal Certification Program - a certification scheme affirming that an establishment or public transportation unit has been inspected by the government and was found compliant with minimum public health standards, is using or its contact tracing is integrated with StaySafe.ph and the establishment or public transportation unit possesses the requisite business permits or franchise;
- (e) “Tourism Enterprises” shall refer to facilities, services, and attractions involved in tourism, such as, but not limited to: travel and tour services; tourist transport services, whether for land, sea or air transportation; tour guides; adventure sports services involving such sports as mountaineering, spelunking, scuba diving, and other sports activities of significant tourism potential; convention organizers; Accommodation Establishments, including, but not limited to, hotels, resorts, apartelles, tourist inns, motels, pension houses, and home stay operators; tourism estate management services, restaurants, shops and department stores, sports and recreational centers, spas, museums and galleries, theme parks, parks, natural sites, historical landmarks, convention centers, and zoos;
- (f) “WTTTC Safe Travels Stamp” shall refer to the world’s first-ever global safety and hygiene stamp, a specially designed stamp which will allow travelers to recognize governments and business around the world which have adopted health and hygiene global standardized protocols.

Section 3. Coverage. – This Order shall apply to all Tourism Enterprises in the Philippines.

II. HEALTH AND SAFETY PROTOCOLS

Section 4. Voluntary Wearing of Face Masks and Observance of MPHS. The wearing of face masks in indoor and outdoor settings of tourism enterprises shall be voluntary. Tourism enterprises and their guests shall exercise diligence in observing MPHS.

Section 5. Vaccination Requirement. In line with IATF Resolution No. 02 (s.2022) allowing the entry to the country of unvaccinated, partially vaccinated or those whose vaccination status cannot be independently validated, the presentation of proof of full vaccination shall no longer be required in tourism enterprises.

Section 6. Removal of Signage and Barriers for Relaxed Protocols. Tourism enterprises shall ensure compliance with the following:

- a. Signage, visual cues and other installations in tourism enterprises on mandatory health protocols which have been liberalized, such as but not limited to the wearing of face mask, shall be removed.
- b. The use of plastic, acrylic barriers, dividers shall no longer be required.

Section 7. Cessation of the Issuance of Safety Seal and WTTC Safe Travels Stamp. The DOT shall no longer issue the PH Safety Seal and WTTC Safe Travels Stamp to tourism enterprises, destinations and tourist attractions in view of the policy shifts on minimum public health standards.

Section 8. Reporting Requirements for Checked-in Guests. The inclusion of the following in the monthly reports submitted by Accommodation Establishments to the DOT Regional Office concerned, pursuant to DOT Administrative Order No. 2022-001³, shall **no longer be required**:

- a. Number, nature of work (e.g., BPO, Healthcare workers, Banking, Telecom) and length of stay of permitted guests; and
- b. The companies or business enterprises whose employees are booked with the Accommodation Establishment.

III. OTHER PROVISIONS

Section 9. Repealing Clause. This Circular repeals or modifies the provisions of all Memorandum Circulars, Administrative Orders, Joint Memorandum Circular, and other DOT issuances inconsistent herewith.

Section 10. Effectivity. This Circular shall take effect immediately upon filing with the University of the Philippines – Office of the National Administrative Register (UP-ONAR) and publication with the Official Gazette or a newspaper of general circulation and shall remain effective until otherwise superseded, amended, or repealed accordingly.

For guidance and strict compliance.

17 February 2023.


MA. ESPERANZA CHRISTINA GARCIA-FRASCO *het*
Secretary



³ Guidelines on the Operations of Accommodation Establishments under the Alert Level System for COVID-19