

Studying Marsa Alam as a Babymoon Destination

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Abstract:

This research aims to investigate the increasing popularity of Marsa Alam as a babymoon tourist destination, focusing on its healthcare infrastructure, transportation facilities, and tourist preferences. Employing a descriptive research design, the study analyzed data from various sources such as Tourism of the Red Sea Governorate. A sample of 106 respondents was surveyed to understand their preferences and perceptions of Marsa Alam. The results indicated a significant increase in tourist numbers from 2017 to 2022, with the majority of tourists favoring relaxation as their primary reason for visiting. The study found that Marsa Alam's appeal lies in its natural beauty, cultural richness, and a wide range of tourist activities. The city's healthcare facilities, particularly its well-equipped hospitals and medical centers, along with the efficient services of Marsa Alam International Airport, were found to play a crucial role in supporting tourism growth. The study concludes that while Marsa Alam is evolving as a desirable tourist destination, there is a pressing need for sustainable tourism practices to balance development with environmental conservation.

Keywords: Marsa Alam, Tourism Trends, Babymoon, Tourist Preferences.

1. مدرس مساعد قسم دراسات سياحيه جامعه حلوان

1. Introduction

Marsa Alam, a gem nestled on the western coast of the Red Sea in Egypt, is rapidly emerging as an enticing destination for expectant couples seeking a serene and memorable babymoon experience. Located approximately 270 kilometers south of Hurghada, this city is uniquely positioned at the intersection of the Arabian Desert and the Red Sea, near the Tropic of Cancer. With a sprawling area of 15,000 km², Marsa Alam is increasingly recognized as a promising tourist center, offering a blend of natural beauty and cultural richness (Center of Information and Decision Support of Red Sea Governorate, 2022).

Marsa Alam, a rapidly emerging tourist destination located on Egypt's Red Sea coast, not only captivates visitors with its natural beauty but also assures them of comprehensive healthcare facilities and efficient transportation services. This introduction, drawing upon data from various sources such as Hospitalby (2022), the Egyptian Tourism Authority (2022), Dalil 140 (2023), Expedia (2023), Youns et al. (2020), Flight Connections (2023), Jodogo Airport Assist (2023), and Flight From (2023), provides an overview of the medical and transportation infrastructure in Marsa Alam, highlighting its readiness to cater to both local residents and international tourists.

1.1. *Attractions of Marsa Alam*

Natural Attractions:

Marsa Alam's allure lies in its pristine beaches and exceptional coral reefs, making it a paradise for nature enthusiasts and water sports aficionados. Renowned sites like Satayh Dolphin Reef, Dolphin House, Samadi Reefs, and Marsa Moubark National Park, along with Abu Dabab National Park, Sharm El Lulli, Wadi El Qulaan, Wadi El Gemal National Park, and

Hankorab Beach, offer a plethora of activities ranging from snorkeling and diving to desert safaris (Center of Information and Decision Support of Red Sea Governorate, 2022; Abulhaggag et al., 2023).

Man-Made Attractions:

The city also boasts significant man-made attractions. The Shrine and Mosque of Al-Arif Allah Abu Al-Hassan Al-Shazly represent religious landmarks of great importance. Archaeologically, sites like the Siti Temple on the Edfu Road, along with the Ptolemaic Road and Pharaonic inscriptions, speak volumes about the region's rich history. The Marsa Alam International Conference Center in Port-Ghalib adds a modern cultural dimension (Center of Information and Decision Support of Red Sea Governorate, 2022).

1.2. *Tourism Trends in Marsa Alam*

Yearly and Monthly Patterns:

The tourism sector in Marsa Alam has witnessed fluctuating yet generally increasing trends from 2017 to 2022. The Department of Tourism of the General Office of the Red Sea Governorate has detailed this progression. Notably, 2022 saw the highest influx of tourists, amounting to 896,504 visitors, closely followed by the years 2019 and 2018. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was markedly seen in 2020, with a significant drop in tourist numbers to 177,370. However, a recovery trajectory is observable in the subsequent years (Department of Tourism of the General Office of the Red Sea Governorate).

Year	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
2017	32331	27802	36478	43711	44111	41312	65095	49881	64325	63274	59599	44495	572414
2018	43332	40967	52018	59929	51360	60645	83021	91814	79674	63717	70497	66156	763130
2019	57665	55335	66106	81889	71243	74169	85832	107053	83186	82086	75472	64064	904100
2020	57568	59362	23920	0	0	0	0	6928	9483	6225	3224	10660	177370
2021	6447	7677	14372	24086	32045	31547	41696	50257	45034	55530	56250	43737	408678
2022	39926	36998	44908	51537	74867	69173	96647	199353	87201	85102	63289	47503	896504

Source: Department of tourism of the general office of Red Sea governorate (2023)

Figure 1 Number of tourists coming to Marsa Alam from 2017 to 2022

The peak tourist months have varied each year, influenced by seasonal trends, holidays, and global events. For instance, July 2022 saw the highest number of tourists, indicating a preference for summer visits. The winter months also attract a considerable number of tourists, likely due to the region's mild weather and festive periods. Moreover, The global pandemic undeniably affected Marsa Alam's tourism, causing a steep decline in 2020. However, the gradual increase in tourist numbers in 2021 and 2022 signifies a resilient recovery (Department of Tourism of the General Office of the Red Sea Governorate).

1.3. Marsa Alam as a Babymoon Destination

The concept of babymoon tourism in Marsa Alam offers a unique and enticing proposition for expectant couples looking for a serene and memorable getaway. Renowned sources such as Khalil (2020), Fattouh (2022), the Egyptian Tourism Authority (2022), and Lonely Planet (2023) have highlighted several advantages that make Marsa Alam an ideal destination for babymooners. Firstly, the city is celebrated for its relaxing atmosphere, providing a tranquil environment that is perfect for couples

seeking peace and quiet. This serene setting is crucial for expectant parents looking to unwind and enjoy each other's company in a stress-free environment.

In addition to its calming ambiance, Marsa Alam is also known for its high-quality hotels. These accommodations are not just places to stay; they are havens of comfort, known for their excellent service and delectable cuisine. Such top-tier hotel experiences ensure that babymooners have a comfortable and enjoyable stay, adding to the overall experience of their special vacation. The natural beauty of Marsa Alam is another significant draw. The city boasts beautiful beaches with pristine sands and crystal-clear waters, creating ideal settings for a variety of leisure activities such as swimming and sunbathing. These picturesque beaches offer a perfect blend of relaxation and beauty, allowing couples to bask in the sun and enjoy the soothing sounds of the sea.

Furthermore, Marsa Alam offers a diverse array of activities, catering to a wide range of interests. From exhilarating water sports for adventure seekers to cultural explorations for those interested in experiencing local traditions and history, the city ensures that there is something for every couple to enjoy. This diversity in activities means that babymooners can tailor their vacation to their specific interests and desires, making their trip truly unique and memorable.

1.4. Additional Activities and Attractions

Marsa Alam also offers a variety of inland attractions, as noted by sources like Egypt Travel Guide (2022), Khalil (2020, 2021), and Expedia (2023). These include exploring the Wadi El Gemal National Park, unique mangrove forests, engaging in water activities at renowned spots like Abu Dabab Beach

and Satayah Dolphin Reef, experiencing traditional camel rides, and savoring local cuisine. Each of these attractions, detailed by the Egyptian Tourism Authority (2022) and Khalil (2021), adds to the city's appeal, making it a comprehensive destination for a range of interests.

1.5. Healthcare Facilities in Marsa Alam

The city of Marsa Alam is well-equipped with a range of medical facilities, ensuring that healthcare needs are adequately met for both its residents and visitors. Marsa Alam International Hospital, strategically located in the city center, is a testament to the city's medical preparedness. Offering an array of medical services including surgery, pediatrics, obstetrics, gynecology, and emergency care, the hospital is distinguished by its modern medical facilities and a team of experienced healthcare professionals (Hospitalby, 2022; Egyptian Tourism Authority, 2022).

In addition to Marsa Alam International Hospital, there are other notable medical centers such as Al-Monira Hospital, El-Fayrouz Medical Center, Al-Salam Medical Center, and Marsa Alam Medical Center. These centers, spread across the city, provide various medical services ranging from internal medicine to surgery, equipped with modern medical equipment and staffed by skilled doctors and nurses. Al-Monira Hospital, for instance, offers 24-hour emergency care alongside specialized services, underscoring the city's commitment to comprehensive healthcare (Dalil 140, 2023; Expedia, 2023).

1.6. Marsa Alam International Airport

Complementing its healthcare infrastructure is Marsa Alam's transportation hub, the Marsa Alam International Airport. Located approximately 60 kilometers north of the city, the airport is a vital gateway to this picturesque region (Youns et al., 2020). Owned by EMAK Marsa Alam for Management

& Operation Airports SAE and operated by the M.A. Al-Kharafi Group of Kuwait, the airport facilitates the influx of tourists and business travelers alike. It hosts several airlines such as Air Cairo, Chair Airlines, Corendon Airlines, and easyJet, offering both scheduled and charter flights (Egyptian Tourism Authority, 2022; Flight Connections, 2023).

Marsa Alam International Airport is renowned for its range of passenger services. These include airport meet and greet services, 24-hour service for international and domestic flights, and a commendable capacity of handling 1200 passengers per hour through its 13 aircraft. The airport's accessibility is further enhanced by direct flights from numerous international destinations, making it a convenient and welcoming entry point for visitors to Marsa Alam and its surroundings (Jodogo Airport Assist, 2023; Flight From, 2023).

1. Literature review

Babymoon tourism, a relatively recent concept in the realm of travel, caters to expectant couples seeking a peaceful getaway before the arrival of their child. The choice of destination is pivotal in ensuring a serene and rejuvenating experience. Marsa Alam, a burgeoning tourist spot in Egypt, has garnered attention in this context. This literature review delves into the suitability of Marsa Alam as a babymoon destination, drawing upon various studies and reports.

1.1. Marsa Alam as a Tourist Destination

General Tourism Trends:

Marsa Alam's emergence as a tourist destination has been documented in several studies. The city's strategic location on the Red Sea coast, coupled with its rich natural and cultural heritage, positions it uniquely in the tourism landscape of Egypt (Center of Information and Decision Support of Red Sea

Governorate, 2022). The increase in tourist footfall over the years, as reported by the Department of Tourism of the General Office of the Red Sea Governorate, underscores its growing popularity.

Natural and Cultural Attractions:

Key to Marsa Alam's appeal are its diverse natural and man-made attractions. The city's beaches, coral reefs, and national parks offer a multitude of activities for nature lovers (Abulhaggag et al., 2023). Additionally, archaeological sites and cultural landmarks add depth to the tourist experience (Center of Information and Decision Support of Red Sea Governorate, 2022). These aspects are crucial for babymooners who seek both relaxation and enriching experiences.

1.2. Babymoon Tourism

Concept and Importance:

The concept of babymoon tourism has gained momentum, with couples increasingly seeking destinations that offer tranquility and comfort. Studies by Khalil (2020) and Fattouh (2022) highlight the importance of a relaxing atmosphere, quality accommodations, and a variety of activities, all of which are essential for babymoon tourism.

Suitability of Marsa Alam:

Marsa Alam's tranquil environment, high-quality hotels, and serene beaches align well with the needs of babymoon tourists. The city's ability to offer a mix of relaxation and adventure makes it an ideal choice for expectant couples. The Egyptian Tourism Authority (2022) and Lonely Planet (2023) acknowledge these attributes, reinforcing Marsa Alam's potential as a babymoon destination.

1.3. *Challenges and Opportunities*

Impact of COVID-19:

The global pandemic has had a profound impact on tourism worldwide. Marsa Alam was not immune to this, with a significant drop in tourist numbers in 2020 (Department of Tourism of the General Office of the Red Sea Governorate). However, the subsequent recovery indicates resilience and presents an opportunity for promoting babymoon tourism.

Marketing and Accessibility:

Effective marketing strategies and enhanced accessibility are critical for promoting Marsa Alam as a babymoon destination. The city's direct air connectivity with several international destinations is a significant advantage in this regard (Khalil, 2020).

2. *Methodology*

The methodology employed in this study aimed to explore the preferences of expectant parents for babymoon vacations, with a specific focus on evaluating Marsa Alam as a potential destination. A comprehensive approach was adopted, encompassing survey design, participant selection, data collection, and analysis techniques. The goal was to gather and analyze data that accurately reflects the attitudes and preferences of the target demographic regarding various aspects of babymoon travel.

2.1. *Research Design*

A descriptive research design was chosen for its effectiveness in obtaining precise information about the preferences and behaviors of a particular population - in this case, expecting couples interested in babymoon vacations. This approach facilitated the collection of quantitative data, which was essential for the statistical analysis required in this study.

2.2. *Target Population and Sampling*

The target population for this study comprised couples expecting a child, as they are the primary group interested in babymoon vacations. The sampling frame was defined as expectant couples accessible through online platforms such as parenting forums, social media groups, and community portals. A non-probability sampling method, specifically convenience sampling, was employed due to its efficiency and practicality in reaching a specialized and dispersed population.

2.3. *Sample Size*

The study engaged 106 participants, a sample size determined based on the balance between statistical significance and resource constraints. This size was considered sufficient to provide a representative overview of the target population's preferences and behaviors.

3. Result

3.1. *Babymoon Preferences*

■ What factors are most important to you when choosing a babymoon destination?

The answers of the study sample members were divided into (Relaxation) 66.7 % (Adventure) 7 % (Romance) 24.6 % and (Culture) 1.8 % of the study sample and it turns out that most of the study members believe that the most important factor when choosing the babymoon destination is relaxation

Table (9) sample according to factors

Categories	N	%
Relaxation	38	66.7
Adventure	4	7.0
Romance	14	24.6
Culture	1	1.8
Total	57	100

■ **What type of accommodations do you prefer for your babymoon vacation?**

The answers of the study sample members were divided into (Luxury hotel) 35.1 % (Boutique hotel) 57.9 % (Vacation rental) 1.8 % and (Bangols) 5.3% of the study sample and it turns out that more than half of the study sample of the study prevailed during the babymoon vacation in Boutique hotel

Table (10) sample according to type of accommodations

Categories	N	%
Luxury hotel	20	35.1
Boutique hotel	33	57.9
Vacation rental	1	1.8
Bangols	3	5.3
Total	57	100

■ **What activities or excursions would you like to participate in during your babymoon vacation?**

The answers of the study sample members were divided into (Spa treatments) 21.1 % (Beach activities) 22.8 % (Enjoying nature) 43.9 % (The practice of yoga sport) 10.5 % and (Cultural experiences) 1.8% of the study sample and

it was found that approximately half of the study sample preferred to spend their babymoon vacation enjoying nature

Table (11) sample according to activities or excursions

Categories	N	%
Spa treatments	12	21.1
Beach activities	13	22.8
Enjoying nature	25	43.9
The practice of yoga sport	6	10.5
Cultural experiences	1	1.8
Total	57	100

■ **How long would you prefer your babymoon vacation to be?**

The answers of the study sample members were divided into (One) 35.1 % (Two) 59.6 % and (Three or more nights) 5.3% of the study sample and it was found that about two-thirds of the study sample preferred that the duration of the babymoon vacation be two days or more

Table (12) sample according to long babymoon vacation

Categories	N	%
One	20	35.1
Two	34	59.6
Three or more nights	3	5.3
Total	57	100

■ **How much would you be willing to spend on a babymoon vacation?**

The answers of the study sample members were divided into (Less than 10000) 47.4 % and (10000 – 30000) 52.6% of the study sample and it was found that the study sample members want to spend less than 30000 during babymoon vacation

Table (13) sample according to spend babymoon vacation

Categories	N	%
Less than 10000	27	47.4
10000 – 30000	30	52.6
Total	57	100

- **Would you prefer a babymoon vacation package that includes everything, or would you prefer to plan your itinerary?**

The answers of the study sample members were divided into (Package that includes everything) 24.6 % and (Plan my itinerary) 75.4% of the study sample and Most of the study sample members explained that they prefer to plan a trip itinerary during their babymoon vacation

Table (14) sample according to prefer

Categories	N	%
Package that includes everything	14	24.6
Plan my itinerary	43	75.4
Total	57	100

3.2. *Marsa Alam as a Destination for Babymoon*

- **Are you familiar with Marsa Alam as a potential destination for a babymoon?**

The answers of the study sample members were divided into (Yes) 76.4 % and (No) 23.6% of the study sample and it was found that most of the study sample members have knowledge that Marsa Alam is a potential destination for a vacation before the birth of a child. It was found that there is a high level of knowledge among the study sample members that Marsa Alam is considered a distinctive place for

a vacation before the birth of a child where mean is 1.764 and S.D 0.427

Table (19) sample according to potential destination for a babymoon

Categories	N	%
Yes	81	76.4
No	25	23.6
Total	106	100

■ **If yes, what aspects make Marsa Alam an appealing destination for a babymoon?**

The answers of the study sample members were divided into (The untouched underwater world) 6.1 % (The beautiful beaches) 46.3 % (The exceptional service) 2.4 % (The available excursions and activities) 8.5 % and (The serene atmosphere) 35.4% of the study sample and it turns out that the most important aspects that make Marsa Alam an exciting destination for a pre-baby holiday are the beautiful beaches then the serene atmosphere

Table (19) sample according to aspects

Categories	N	%
The untouched underwater world	5	6.1
The beautiful beaches	38	46.3
The exceptional service	2	2.4
The available excursions and activities	7	8.5
The serene atmosphere	29	35.4
Total	81	100

■ **Would you recommend Marsa Alam as a babymoon destination to other expecting parents?**

The answers of the study sample members were divided into (Yes) 100 % and It was found that all members of the study sample recommend Marsa Alam as a pre-baby vacation destination for other expectant parents.

Table (20) sample according to recommend

Categories	N	%
Yes	106	100
Total	106	100

4. Discussion

4.1. *Tourist Preferences and Trends*

The study's results indicate a growing trend in tourism in Marsa Alam, as evidenced by the increasing number of tourists from 2017 to 2022 (Department of Tourism of Red Sea Governorate, 2021). This rise can be attributed to Marsa Alam's diverse attractions, catering to a range of tourist preferences from relaxation to adventure (Khalil, 2021; Fattouh, 2022). As tourists increasingly seek destinations that offer a blend of natural beauty and cultural experiences, Marsa Alam, with its stunning beaches and rich cultural heritage, has become an increasingly popular choice (Egyptian Tourism Authority, 2022; Lonely Planet, 2023).

However, the increasing tourist influx poses challenges to sustainability, as noted by Abulhaggag et al. (2023). Their call for applying sustainable city models to Marsa Alam is crucial, emphasizing the need for a balance between tourism development and environmental conservation. This approach is essential to ensure that the natural and cultural assets that attract tourists to Marsa Alam are preserved for future generations.

4.2. *Tourism Growth and Sustainable Development in Marsa Alam*

The steady increase in the number of tourists visiting Marsa Alam from 2017 to 2022, as reported by the Department of Tourism of the Red Sea Governorate (2021), reflects the city's growing appeal as a tourist destination. This upsurge in tourism aligns with the broader trends observed across Egypt and particularly in regions known for their natural beauty and cultural significance. Marsa Alam, with its unique geographical location and diverse offerings, has evidently captured the interest of a global audience. However, this increasing influx of tourists also brings to the fore the imperative need for sustainable tourism practices, a concern highlighted by Abulhaggag, Khalf, and Magdy (2023) in their study on the application of sustainable city models in Marsa Alam. Their research underscores the importance of balancing tourism growth with environmental preservation and community welfare, ensuring Marsa Alam's development does not compromise its ecological and cultural integrity.

4.3. *Tourist Attractions and Activities*

The allure of Marsa Alam is multifaceted, combining natural beauty, cultural richness, and a range of activities that cater to diverse interests. Khalil (2021) emphasizes the variety of must-visit places and activities in Marsa Alam, from its stunning beaches and coral reefs to the historical and cultural landmarks that dot the region. This diversity is crucial in attracting a broad spectrum of tourists, from adventure seekers to those looking for a more relaxed and culturally immersive experience. Similarly, Fattouh (2022) and the Egyptian Tourism Authority (2022) provide comprehensive insights into the myriad attractions that make Marsa Alam a compelling destination. This

includes its renowned diving spots, desert safaris, and the opportunity to explore rich marine life, which collectively contribute to its reputation as a premier tourist destination.

4.4. Infrastructure and Accessibility

The development of infrastructure in Marsa Alam has been pivotal in supporting its tourism sector. The availability of quality medical facilities, as documented by Dalil 140 (2023), is a testament to the city's preparedness to cater to the health and safety needs of both residents and tourists. This aspect of infrastructure development is particularly crucial for destinations like Marsa Alam, where adventure and outdoor activities are prominent. Additionally, the accessibility of Marsa Alam has been significantly enhanced by Marsa Alam International Airport. Flight Connections (2023) and Jodogo Airport Assist (2023) highlight the airport's role in facilitating easy access to the city with direct flights from various international destinations. The airport's capacity to handle a substantial number of passengers per hour and its range of passenger services have been instrumental in making Marsa Alam more accessible to a global audience.

Challenges and Opportunities

While the growth trajectory of Marsa Alam's tourism is promising, it also presents challenges that need to be addressed. The need for sustainable tourism practices is paramount, as emphasized by Abulhaggag et al. (2023). There is a delicate balance to be maintained between accommodating increasing tourist numbers and preserving the natural and cultural assets that make Marsa Alam attractive. This necessitates strategic planning and implementation of sustainable practices in tourism development, infrastructure expansion, and environmental conservation.

Moreover, as the tourism sector continues to grow, there is an opportunity to diversify the offerings further. Expedia (2023) and Lonely Planet (2023) suggest that expanding into niche markets such as eco-tourism, cultural tourism, and wellness tourism could cater to the evolving preferences of modern travelers. Such diversification not only broadens the appeal of Marsa Alam but also contributes to a more sustainable tourism model by spreading the economic benefits and reducing the pressure on specific sites and resources.

5. Conclusion

The comprehensive analysis of Marsa Alam as a tourist destination reveals a multifaceted growth trajectory marked by increasing popularity and evolving tourist preferences. The city's escalating appeal, as evidenced by the rise in tourist numbers from 2017 to 2022, can be largely attributed to its unique blend of natural beauty, cultural richness, and diverse activities that cater to a range of interests. Marsa Alam has successfully positioned itself as a destination that offers relaxation, adventure, and cultural immersion, drawing tourists from various demographics.

Crucially, the city's commitment to developing its healthcare infrastructure and transportation facilities has played a pivotal role in supporting this tourism growth. The presence of well-equipped hospitals and medical centers ensures the safety and well-being of both tourists and residents, addressing potential concerns about healthcare access in a remote tourist location. Furthermore, the Marsa Alam International Airport's capacity to handle a significant influx of visitors, coupled with its range of services, has enhanced the city's accessibility, making it a convenient gateway for international travelers.

However, the study underscores the importance of sustainable tourism practices in the context of Marsa Alam's development. The balance between accommodating increasing tourist numbers and preserving the city's natural and cultural assets is crucial. Sustainable practices in tourism development, infrastructure expansion, and environmental conservation are essential to ensure that Marsa Alam remains a vibrant and attractive destination while safeguarding its ecological and cultural integrity for future generations.



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