

# Babymoon Tourism: Co-Creating Well-Being for Traveling Mothers

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## Abstract

This article aims to provide insight into how babymoon tourism can contribute to well-being by using a multimethod approach, combining autoethnography and netnography. The findings show that mothers-to-be experience well-being derived from co-creation and meaning. Participation in activities and everyday-like events at the destination can lead to happiness and improved quality of life. Self-development, empowerment, interpersonal interactions, and engagement with local culture all inspire well-being. In contrast, destinations' representations of babymoon tourism focus on physical facilities, where culture and co-creation are absent in the realization of well-being. Viewing co-creation of well-being through a cultural interaction lens suggests an untapped potential for tourism businesses and could be a way forward for promoting babymoons. The study makes theoretical and practical contributions. Its original methodological approach, namely an autoethnographic narrative of babymoon tourism, could lower the threshold for conducting autoethnographic studies in current travel research, and encourage further studies of babymoon tourism.

## Keywords

babymoon tourism, tourist well-being, co-creation experience, cultural interaction, quality of life, autoethnography

## Introduction

At an early age I discovered the joys of travel, spending weeks every summer on my parents' boat. For me, travel was not about distance away from home, it was about experiencing a new place, and the sheer bliss of *being* somewhere new. I also loved going to the library, spending time in the travelog section. Those visits became part of my preparations, borrowing as many books as possible to bring for our vacations. I suppose I had a “traveling mind.” As a teen I discovered the excitement of traveling alone or with friends. Years later I made a pact with my boyfriend (now husband of 14 years) that for me to settle down in a small town in northern Norway we would have to travel at least twice a year, if our situation allowed us. I had become “the traveling kind.” I realized that traveling enhanced my perceived quality of life. This did not change when I became a mother—but babymoons were a different way of traveling and experiencing.

Babymooning is a current trend in tourism (Gabor and Oltean 2019) and can be defined as “a relaxing or romantic holiday taken by parents-to-be before their baby is born” (Oxford Dictionaries). Studies (Gabor and Oltean 2019; Pharino and Pearce 2020) have positioned babymoon tourism as a form of special interest tourism. In many cases, babymoon tourism and pregnant women as tourists are defined as a niche market within health tourism (Gabor and Oltean 2019; Voigt and Laing 2010). This view categorizes

mothers-to-be as a group of health tourists with a condition that requires them to focus on health and relaxation, as marketed by all-inclusive destinations (Voigt and Laing 2010). This seems a somewhat reductionist view of pregnant women who on the contrary might very well feel energetic and ready to take on new experiences. I know I was, despite some concerns given my new circumstances.

Studies show that it is increasingly common for pregnant women to travel abroad (Kingman and Economides 2006; Pearl 2011); just over 80% travel for leisure purposes, whereas nearly 19% travel for business, and others travel for birth tourism. Only a third seek advice before traveling, but those who do see their doctor or a midwife (Kingman and Economides 2006). Even from a medical perspective there is a need for more studies to provide guidelines, as it is important to raise awareness of the potential risks of traveling when pregnant, particularly in the third trimester, for example, the risk of venous thromboembolism (Kingman

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and Economides 2006), and restrictions on flights over four hours.

Despite the limitations relating to travel during pregnancy, there is great potential for babymoon tourism to provide positive experiences. For many mothers-to-be, traveling can offer time to focus on the coming event and attend to their well-being. In recent years, babymoon vacations have emerged as a niche market that can be valuable for destinations (Gabor and Oltean 2019; Voigt and Laing 2010); however, it remains an under-researched market. To gain deeper insights into babymoon tourism, it is necessary to understand the experience of the mother-to-be. However, mothers' own experiences of how babymoon travel enhances well-being are to my knowledge largely overlooked in the tourism literature, despite notable exceptions (Gabor and Oltean 2019; Small 2005; Voigt and Laing 2010). The study thus adds to the body of literature on well-being (Lindberg et al. 2022; Yi et al. 2022) by filling the current gap on co-creation of well-being.

The study further contributes to the theoretical literature by exploring the experiential aspect of babymoons, providing deep insights as experienced by a traveling mother-to-be (me). The study introduces a cultural co-creation framework as a possible way of understanding babymoon tourism and the way in which well-being is experienced during babymoons. This study seeks to shed light on the following research question: How can babymoon tourism enhance well-being for pregnant travelers? In so doing it provides a narrative of the babymoon experience. The findings have implications for travel and tourism management; gaining knowledge of how well-being is co-created will lead to greater insight into how one can co-create to appeal to babymoon travelers.

## Conceptual Framework

### *Cultural Interaction and Co-Creation*

Whereas previous research has positioned babymoon tourism within the health tourism segment, this study, by contrast, adopts an experiential value perspective of mothers-to-be who wish to travel, experience and be tourists in much the same way as before they were pregnant. The study thus takes a position within experiential tourism (Barnes et al. 2020; Christou 2020) and views babymoon tourism through a cultural lens.

Getting to know new cultures, novelty and the authenticity of a place can form part of tourists' motivation for travel (Crompton 1979; Soukhathammavong and Park 2019; Wang 1999), especially among women (Meng and Uysal 2008; Small 2005; Vespstad and Mehmetoglu 2015). On the other hand, perceived familiarity with a culture can also be a motivation (Weaver and Lawton 2014). This study draws upon Geertz (2000) understanding of culture as a set of control mechanisms and unwritten rules of society which guide our

behavior in a way that feels natural and right within a given community (Usunier, van Herk, and Lee 2017; Usunier and Lee 2013). International tourism has been established as an arena for cultural interaction and for tourists the interaction with locals at the destination contributes to the experience (Buzinde 2020; Chua et al. 2022).

Tourist-to-tourist interaction is recognized as an important part of experience co-creation (Lin, Zhang, and Gursory 2022; Rihova et al. 2018), and a vast number of studies are devoted to business-to-consumer interaction and acknowledge the importance of co-creation as a strategy for involving tourists in value co-creation (Campos et al. 2018; Giuseppe et al. 2022), often drawing upon service dominant logic (Vargo and Lusch 2004, 2016, 2017). Fewer studies have centered on tourists-to-locals interaction, one being Chua et al. (2022), who investigated the role of residents' attitudes toward international Muslim travelers. The current study, however, addresses tourists-to-locals interaction from the traveler's point of view. The cultural interaction thus plays a part in the co-creation.

Moreover, drawing upon Geertz' cultural theory, this study relies on consumer culture theory (CCT) (Arnould, Crockett, and Eckhardt 2021; Gallarza, Gil-Saura, and Holbrook 2011; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982) to emphasize the importance of cultural context for value co-creation (Arnould and Thompson 2005, 2018) in babymoon tourism. Cultural contexts (norms, practices, resources, and meanings) play a significant part in understanding experiential value for the consumer (Akaka, Schau, and Vargo 2013; Shin and Perdue 2022), particularly in tourism (Cooper et al. 2021). CCT thus seeks to unravel the complexities of consumer culture and outcomes of experiential consumption (Arnould, Crockett, and Eckhardt 2021) and is therefore considered applicable as a field of inquiry that seeks to understand the meaning of babymoons. Cultural interaction in experiential tourism can thus inspire meaningful co-creation which in turn leads to well-being.

### *Well-Being*

Well-being has been the focus of several tourism studies (Laing and Frost 2017; Pomfret 2021; Shi, Gordon, and Tang 2021; Xu and Zhang 2021); the concept is complex and can be defined in many ways (Laing and Frost 2017; Ryan and Deci 2001). Well-being can be understood as the processes and practices of a life well lived or as living well (Buzinde 2020). From a psychological perspective, a commonly used framework of well-being distinguishes between eudaimonia and hedonia (Hao and Xiao 2021; Vittersø and Dahl 2013). Eudaimonic well-being concerns "meaning and self-realization and defines well-being in terms of the degree to which a person is fully functioning," whereas hedonic well-being emphasizes "happiness and defines well-being in terms of pleasure attainment and pain avoidance" (Ryan and Deci 2001, 141).

The literature identifies the following dimensions of well-being: growth, authenticity, meaning, excellence, identity, positive relationships, environmental mastery or competence, engagement, pleasure, and life satisfaction (Laing and Frost 2017). The authenticity concept can have a wealth of meanings (Rickly 2022); relevant to this study are perceived existential (Karagöz and Uysal 2022; Yi et al. 2022) and experiential authenticity as possible contributors to well-being. Identity, in turn, is a concept made up of the constructs of personality, self-concept, identity project, and self-presentation (Schau 2018). This represents a complex and relational context which suggests a need for a holistic approach to studying well-being.

Laing and Frost (2017) used well-being as a theoretical framework for studying women's travel narratives of transformation and self-discovery in Italy and found the following six well-being dimensions: detachment-recovery, autonomy, mastery/achievement, meaning, affiliation/positive relationships, positive emotions, and identity. Similarly, Pomfret (2021) used well-being as a conceptual lens for studying family adventure tourism. That study found that subjective well-being constructs such as hedonic well-being (high positive affect, diminishing feelings of distress and boredom) and eudaimonic well-being (challenge, negative affect, optimal experiences, flow-like feelings, accomplishment, self-efficacy, and personal development) were important to the parents (Pomfret 2021). Identity projects are context driven (Schau 2018) and could therefore also play a role in mothers' experience of well-being in babymoon tourism.

Well-being tourism can be defined as "a multidimensional state of being describing the existence of the positive health of body, mind, and soul. Well-being is an individual issue but is manifest only in congruence with the well-being of the surrounding environment and community" (Hjalager and Flagestad 2012, 726). Well-being has received recent attention in tourism literature (Hao and Xiao 2021; Hung and Wu 2021; Xu and Zhang 2021; Yu, Sirgy, and Bosnjak 2021); it can be relevant to consumers' experiencescapes (Fossgard and Fredman 2019; Mossberg 2015; Vespestad and Hansen 2020) and enhance the feeling of quality of life (Sirgy 2010). A traveler's experiencescape can be defined as a metaphorical landscape of social interactions related to all types of experiences and contexts (Gyimothy 2005; O'Dell and Billing 2005). Thus the "babymoonscape" is a context in need of further insights to fully appreciate its commercial potential.

During tourism, optimal experiences and well-being can be achieved through connecting body, mind, and soul, and can result in the realization of happiness and flow (Csikszentmihalyi 2008; Pomfret 2021). If people perceive that their level of skills matches the challenges they meet, they can experience flow through physical activities such as surfing, scuba diving, and climbing, as well as in social settings (Pomfret 2021; Tsaur, Yen, and Hsiao 2013). While

flow refers to a harmonious state of mind during various activities, participation in mindfulness experiences such as yoga is also an opportunity to develop one's sensory or physical skills, which can improve quality of life (Csikszentmihalyi 2008). Mothers-to-be might experience considerable stress from being in an unfamiliar or somewhat uncertain situation, where they are unsure whether their own abilities will match the demands of giving birth and becoming a mother. Thus, being able to experience the connection between body and mind through improved skills could provide some physical reassurance that one can manage the challenges. Hence, flow-like feelings during babymoon vacations could enhance the happiness and well-being of mothers-to-be.

This study is inspired by the embodiment turn in consumer research, appreciating "perception as an active bodily process" (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Murphy, Patterson, and O'Malley 2019, 441). Skilled embodiment can be facilitated through experiential processes (Murphy, Patterson, and O'Malley 2019). This autoethnography thus provides original insights into the babymoon experience by recognizing the body as a source of knowledge (Kuuru 2022) for how traveling mothers experience well-being. By addressing babymoon tourism with a focus on embodied well-being, this study enables a novel understanding of this form of tourism.

## Methodology

Following an interpretivist paradigm, this study is an autoethnography (Cova and Cova 2019b) complemented by netnography (Kozinets 2020). These approaches are rooted in ethnography (Tavakoli and Wijesinghe 2019) and allow for exploration of babymoons from the consumer angle, using an experiential perspective. These methodologies allow for an emic and etic understanding of babymoon tourism (Kozinets 2020; Luna and Forquer Gupta 2001) and are beneficial in experiential studies (Christou 2020). According to Kozak (2021), emic is perceived as oriented toward people, whereas etic is more researcher focused. The combination of autoethnography and netnography represents a multi-method approach that can improve trustworthiness and authenticity related to the ecological validity of the study (Bell, Bryman, and Harley 2019; Tavakoli and Mura 2018).

## Autoethnography

I, the author-researcher, thus engaged in autoethnography, which enabled a deeper understanding of what it means to be on a babymoon vacation. Ethnography has been used in tourism studies (Konu 2015; Mura and Yuen 2019) to learn more about subcultures and nature consumption and has also been used in seminal studies in CCT to gain insights into specific consumer communities (Arnould and Price 1993; Holt 1995; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). Autoethnography is a form of ethnography that allows the

researcher's own experience to be evident (Tavakoli and Mura 2015), with complete member status of the researcher (Houge Mackenzie and Kerr 2013). The method is not mainstream in tourism and business research (Buckley 2012), perhaps due to reluctance by researchers to reveal personal experiences (Bell, Bryman, and Harley 2019). Nevertheless, autoethnography is an emergent approach in tourism (Beeton 2022; Buzinde 2020; Houge Mackenzie and Kerr 2013; Kuuru 2022; Noy 2008; Scarles 2010; Shepherd, Laven, and Shamma 2020), which allows for understanding one's own subjectivity and the way in which we relate to those we encounter (Stephens 2020), and was therefore considered appropriate for this study as it allowed for an insider perspective on babymoon tourism, providing rich data about the experience of a mother-to-be.

So, who am I? A white Norwegian woman, born in 1979, and raised in a rural area on the south-west coast of Norway in a family of four that included an older sister, my mother, who was a postal worker, and my father, who was an electrician. Studies have led me to towns and cities around the world, as have my later jobs. I guess I have always considered myself a traveler, perhaps originating from my childhood where my family would spend all summer vacations at sea, traveling from place to place in our 25-foot (later 32-foot) boat, enjoying the thrill of waking up at a new place, and then running around to experience it. Now, with a husband and two children, I am fond of my home on the coast in the north of Norway, but I am still a traveler. I am aware of the privileges of my cultural background and of my current socio-economic status, living in a location full of opportunities for outdoor activities. Naturally, all these factors color and form the context of this autoethnography (as did the writing up of this article).

Autoethnographic analysis is suitable for a qualitative exploration of the meaning of the phenomenon of interest (Holbrook 2005, 2021). The embodied nature of experience is recognized (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Kuuru 2022; Murphy, Patterson, and O'Malley 2019). Being pregnant, I used my own embodied experience in the data collection of this autoethnography. This allowed for engagement in a "process of self-witnessing by observing" my "own inner- and outer-focused experience," just as Cova and Cova (2019b, 570) did in their study of pain, suffering, and spirituality during pilgrimages. A great deal of walking also allowed for reflections during my vacations.

Autoethnography emphasizes researcher engagement and immersive involvement in the research process (Bell, Bryman, and Harley 2019). I have traveled as a mother-to-be on several occasions both domestically and internationally, during two pregnancies. I have also been a mother on vacation, irregularly (approximately 25 days a year), since 2015. In the specific context referred to in the introductory narrative of the findings section, I was traveling as a pregnant mother to Portugal, my travel companions being my husband

and three-year-old daughter. This vacation lasted for two and a half weeks, where over two weeks were vacation and two days were dedicated to attending a scientific conference (i.e., work), in May 2018. During the vacation, I was a tourist at a small destination, a fishing village and surfing reserve in Portugal. Moreover, I was also a tourist and business traveler in Lisbon for three days.

Adding to the knowledge of the context of the phenomenon under study, emphasized as important by Kozinets (2020), I have extensive experience of being a tourist in Portugal, both with and without children. This has enabled me to become familiar with the country and the culture. I have visited the country 12 times, with an average stay of two weeks; two visits have been mainly for business (three and seven days), the remainder being two- to three-week vacations. During these visits, I have become acquainted with the culture and experienced being a tourist as a young adult without children, a pregnant mother-to-be, and a mother with a baby/child(ren). Further, I have experienced being a tourist and taking in the experiential context of tourists in the same places and regions for 18 years, from 2001 to 2019.

I experienced what it means to be on babymoon vacation. This involved experiencing, interacting with, and observing others in similar situations, as well as reflecting, at different times of day and different days of the week. The personal observation of co-experiences of my travel companions (particularly my daughter) also enriched the methodological outcomes of the study in terms of "etic," as advocated by Kozak (2021).

Private photographs served as a way of remembering the different events of the vacation. The use of photographs is acknowledged as valuable for providing input to the author's memories and recollections, which can be "susceptible to mental lapses" (Holbrook 2005). I used the photographs to reflect on the days' events. Although this study is not categorized as a visual autoethnography, there are elements of this method that enabled me to explore, unpack and reflect on my embodied experiences (Pink 2008; Scarles 2010). The use of pictures enhances the trustworthiness of this autoethnography (Holbrook 2005).

Further, as in the study of Holbrook (2005), I also took pictures of what gave me pleasure and joy, and sparked my curiosity, and of the things, people and moments that were meaningful to me. Moreover, the experiences of being a mother-to-be traveler involved the contexts of both vacation and work, which allowed for reflections in different contexts. One benefit of this researcher involvement was the emic insider perspective (Buckley 2012; Triandis 1994), while a limitation would be reduced objectivity. However, in this study the aim was to explore the experiential aspects of babymoon tourism, hence first-hand experiences were beneficial for privileged access to and understanding of the phenomenon (Cova and Cova 2019a; Holbrook 2005).

## Netnography

In this study, I sought understanding through close engagement with the data, the site, and the context, as well as through an insider's view on the phenomenon under study. Engagement and involvement are also important in netnography (Kozinets 2020), and therefore the autoethnography was complemented by the netnographic approach to become acquainted with the online community and to inspire reflection. The netnography also allowed for the etic to emerge through my observations of the online postings of the experiences of other babymooners and mothers-to-be, as advised by Kozak (2021).

Netnography is "a form of cultural research that uses qualitative practices to investigate social media" and focuses on understanding a phenomenon such as babymoon tourism (Kozinets 2020, 2); it therefore represented a viable approach to complement an autoethnographic study. Netnography is an appropriate method when the aim is to understand communities or cultures from online tourism platforms (Mkono 2017). A passive or observational form of the netnographic method was used (Janta et al. 2012). Data were only collected in open public forums, blogs, and other open online sources. The photographic and textual data were collected from landing pages of websites appearing as the first five hits from Google searches with the search terms "babymoon travel," "babymoon vacation," and "babymoon." The threads were followed to the initial landing pages. The netnography used purposive sampling (De Vaus 2014), with a focus on what traveling mothers emphasized in their posts from babymoon experiences, which pictures they posted and what they wrote about their babymoons.

Netnography favors quality over quantity (Kozinets 2020), and a selection was therefore made from the searches on Google. A general Google search of babymooning destinations gave 323,000 results and 11 results with the specification "babymooning destination," with headings like "20 absolutely perfect babymooning destinations," "9 best babymoon destinations from real moms-to-be," "30 Top babymoon destinations trips and ideas," "The 31 best babymoon destinations," "Best babymoon destination for every month of the year," and "21 Babymoon trips and tips from real couples—The Bump." This shows a wealth of posts and great interest in sharing experiences and gave good insight into the online community. Among these, the sites that focused on posts from moms-/parents-to-be were studied more closely.

As a researcher, I was browsing babymoon sites and blogs for about two years as preparatory field research and to become acquainted with the online community and gain a general understanding of what was being posted, for example, by looking at Instagram. A search for #babymooning on Instagram revealed 27,753 posts/pictures and for #babymoon 851,580 postings. However due to ethical considerations, I did not include the pictures from Instagram in the data

collection, as that requires consent, which was impossible to obtain, and this could therefore have affected the trustworthiness of the study. My engagement in online sites was limited to reading and studying photos and posts to add to my understanding of the phenomenon. The ethics of this study was important to me, and therefore I let the ethical concerns guide my netnography and I followed the guiding principles of ethical research (Kozinets 2020).

In this study, an immersion journal worked as a reflective, catalytic, and analytic guide (Kozinets 2020, 282) to complement my autoethnography. I followed the four immersive operations described by Kozinets (2020): (1) reconnoitering, (2) recording, (3) researching, and (4) reflecting. As part of the reconnoitering process, I maintained a focus on exceptions, individuals, or other aspects that "stood out." For example, one of the blogs was written by a tourism academic who was also a babymoon traveler. The blog stood out because it covered the topic in a thorough and somewhat different way. I therefore chose to visit it regularly over two years, along with one other blog also dedicated to babymoon travel, motherhood and traveling, and covering relevant topics. Both blogs were written by mothers(-to-be); they were open and available for all to read, and I studied them to gain greater insight into the consumer perspective of babymoons. Reflection is introspective and allowed me as the researcher to capture my own experience of encountering and learning about the representation of the online babymoon tourism environment. It also made me reflect more deeply on my own travels, as well as improving my perspective on context.

## Findings and Discussion: Experiencing Well-Being in Babymoon Tourism

"Staring at the young man in the supermarket, not really believing what I just heard: Did he just ask me if he could carry my nine liters of bottled water and put them up on the counter? Astonished, I thanked him and let him do so. He then offered to carry them all out to the car for me but feeling slightly awkward because my husband was waiting in the car, seemingly unworried about the weight I was carrying, I refused the offer. After this and several other similar experiences during a two-week vacation, I was left wondering why it was so much better to be seven months pregnant in Portugal than in Norway. Why did I feel I was being treated like a queen here, whereas at home I just followed the laissez-faire mentality? I concluded that it should be the privilege of all pregnant women to travel – to babymoon and feel good about being waited on like a queen."

The findings of this study are the narration of my experiences of what it means to be on a babymoon. The findings are presented under headings relating to well-being, in the sense that I experienced it. The findings of the netnography are used to nuance the discussion.

### *Anticipation: Decreasing Discomfort*

I discovered that considerable preparation is needed before a babymoon, as there are practical issues to clarify. Part of the preparation phase was to search for information about my destination that I had never previously considered, such as the reputation of health care facilities for pregnant women at the destination. It was also important to make sure that good hospitals were relatively close by in case I experienced complications while staying there. I also had to ask myself whether I would be ok with giving birth there, in terms of unfamiliar surroundings, language issues and/or spending more time there than planned. In this case, I had no misgivings about that, if it became necessary. In line with the findings of Kingman and Economides (2006), preparatory work was needed in the sense that I had to make myself acquainted with the airlines' rules and regulations for flying when pregnant (with two different airlines), including obtaining letters of recommendation from my local nurse and doctor to confirm that I was healthy enough to travel. I also had to consider the length of the journey, and what I would be eating and drinking during the flights to feel well.

The pre-travel phase was prolonged and included more planning than usual. Although the pre-travel phase did appear in some blogs as a point to remember and advice to other babymoon travelers, it was not focused on in the marketing. This contrasts with what is needed before traveling when pregnant. It was necessary to avoid pain as much as possible, thus enabling a form of hedonic well-being (Ryan and Deci 2001; Vittersø and Dahl 2013). In line with what has previously been suggested by research on special interest tourism (Pharino and Pearce 2020), some of the necessary information could have been provided to confirm that for example, health facilities are adequate at a given destination, to aid in the travel preparations and to ensure comfort.

Already during the flight and at the airports, differences struck me in cultural behavior toward me as a pregnant woman. In Norway and on board the Norwegian flights, it was "business as usual"; I was a traveler just like everybody else. A clear difference showed when arriving at Lisbon airport, where we were immediately waved to the front of the rental car line. At first, I did not quite understand why, as I had never experienced this before. This kind of "special treatment" was very unusual, yet much appreciated. Standing there feeling hot and weighed down and with a rather tired three-year-old in my hand, I really felt that this was a gesture that reduced my and our daughters' (and presumably my husbands') discomfort and provided added value and well-being.

### *Meaning and Transformation*

During my vacations it was important to me to stay active by going for walks and doing yoga. I practiced yoga as often as I could, at least three times a week. I joined local classes at

different levels in different centers. This allowed for authentic interaction with locals, other tourists (not pregnant), and most importantly skilled instructors. The yoga sessions involved similar interactions and community as in (religious) yoga tourism (Buzinde 2020). It was of great value to me to be met with respect and with the willingness and skill to adapt the regular classes into meeting my needs as pregnant, for example, by suggesting adjusted poses that ensured my well-being. It also demonstrated the importance of the knowledge of the teachers, as it led to positive co-creation. I would say that in some cases these practices also led me to experience flow, where my yoga skills were challenged but within the limits of my physical body at the time. Thus, flow as a catalyst for well-being and happiness was present (Csikszentmihalyi 2002).

I enjoy yoga first and foremost as a physical activity, but also as a way of developing my sensory skills and connecting my mental and physical awareness, that is, how I feel and experience myself during the different poses. I even discovered a more authentic self, in terms of both existential authenticity (Karagöz and Uysal 2022; Wang 1999), experienced as a state of being, and experiential authenticity (Rickly 2022), based on awareness, intentionality and an experience of my embodied self. In this sense, I argue that authenticity contributed to my well-being, and this finding could thereby serve as a response to questions raised by Rickly (2022) on the role of authenticity in well-being. Yoga clearly inspires a certain feeling of control over my thoughts and keeps my mind from wandering, while also opening lines of thought to be explored.

During my babymoon travels, regular participation in yoga classes certainly improved my quality of life, both in the moment and after returning home. This sense of enhanced quality of life is thus reminiscent of previous studies drawing upon goal theory (Csikszentmihalyi 2008; Sirgy 2010), where skills and goal achievement improve life satisfaction. In hindsight, some of the yoga classes also became transformative experiences where I found myself as a "different person," in the sense of having inner peace and confidence in a strong and fit body. Resources such as skills that are brought into the experience reflect immersion and can lead to transformations (Lindberg and Østergaard 2015). Hence, when my skill levels were pushed as well as being guided by an experienced instructor, I felt a bodily and mental transformation. Such an intertwined transformation through yoga could add to the embodied knowledge which extends into daily life (Kuuru 2022). I experienced a sense of meaning through well-being.

### *Self-Development, Self-Expression, and Empowerment*

My experience of well-being consisted of elements of eudaimonia and hedonia, in several ways. Eudaimonic well-being

can be about self-realization (Deci and Ryan 2008; Maslow 1964). In hindsight, I see that my travels as a babymoon tourist involved a need to travel to somehow make sure that pregnancy and becoming (and being) a mother did not reduce my mobility, or my ability to realize my own wish to “keep exploring.” I have a genuine interest in getting to know new places and exploring when traveling, and I have been to many parts of the world. The urge to travel around and the feeling of curiosity by knowing I can choose to go wherever I want has always been a driver for me, and perhaps a form of self-expression (Lin, Zhang, and Gursoy 2022).

Nonetheless, as a mother and mother-to-be I see a change toward also finding joy and happiness in gathering new experiences and experiencing in new ways at familiar destinations. Such a shift in perspective was unthinkable for me 10–15 years back, when I *had to* travel to new places. While I still consider myself a traveler with curiosity toward the unknown, this change in outlook has led me to find well-being in exploring different aspects of destinations and therefore a somewhat changed experiencescape (Gyimothy 2005), perhaps that of a babymoonscape.

In some of the online posts from mothers-to-be, and certainly in the two blogs, self-development and exploration are illustrated by the fact that the writers still define themselves as travelers but also mothers. They remain traveling individuals and focus on how to keep doing what they love although perhaps in a somewhat changed form. Despite this, the marketing and postings on “best babymoon destinations” (or similar sites) seem to disregard us babymoon travelers, as the physical facilities of attractions and destinations are prominent in the marketing, and very often focus on elements of luxury, ease, and comfort. Although the mother-to-be and the baby bump are at the heart of many images posted by babymoon tourists, suggesting a natural focus on the coming event, it also shows these tourists’ ability and perhaps desire to prove their sense of well-being in the moment. I believe that a focus on the broader babymoonscape, drawing on the experiencescape (Bitner 1992; Mossberg 2015; Vespestad and Hansen 2020), could enrich the experience. Through an emphasis on co-creation and activities that encourage control of the self and the body and achievement, this could inspire a sense of empowerment and well-being. Given space and time to experience can be an empowering benefit of leisure and vacations for mothers(-to-be), as also noted by Small (2005).

Drawing upon my varied experiences of well-being during my babymoons, I would say that they show similarities to the studies of well-being among female travelers in Italy by Laing and Frost (2017) and the study by Hao and Xiao (2021) on eudaimonic well-being from residential tourism. Laing and Frost (2017) found that the identity dimension underpinned “mechanisms of detachment—recovery, autonomy and mastery,” involving finding one’s existential authentic self (Wang 1999). During my babymoons it was natural to reflect on my identity, who I was and who I would become in

this changing life phase. Self-development thus became an aspect of well-being, as also seen in studies of parents in family adventure tourism (Pomfret 2021). Reflections on how my pregnancy would affect me and my sense of identity fluctuated during my vacation as I had more time to think, as opposed to just getting on with business as usual.

The identity dimension is also evident in babymoon posts from other mothers-to-be, as there seems to be a need to focus on who you are in the moment, as well as a need to experience your authentic self. The behavior, relationships and social contexts of our lives are part of our identity projects (Schau 2018), and vacations can be sites where women construct identities (Small 2005). During my walks or yoga sessions I found a way of connecting with my inner authentic self. The different contexts I experienced during my babymoons helped me to negotiate my own identity project.

### *Cultural Co-Creation*

The very experience of being on a babymoon, taking in a new place and culture, through co-creation with locals and my family, led to positive experiences and well-being. A variety of activities, with different levels of involvement, provided fertile ground for attachment to the place and culture. In this sense, I found that our babymoon vacations provided a sense of belonging. While aware of the privilege of our ability to travel (e.g., time, money, white middle class), co-creation allowed me to feel this belonging to a new place and culture. This then follows along the lines of eudaimonic well-being, as experienced in previous studies on residential tourism, where a sense of tranquility and dignity represented positive changes toward eudaimonic well-being (Hao and Xiao 2021), as also recognized by Han (2019). Moreover, the temporary change of environment made me feel part of another culture, which through repeat visits had started to feel familiar and offered a sense of attachment (Laing and Frost 2017).

My meeting with new cultural traditions through co-creation with the locals at the destination clearly created value. Through interaction in everyday tasks such as grocery shopping, I was treated with respect and care that I have not experienced in my home country, which could be defined as a more individualistic society (Hofstede 2011). Nevertheless, such interaction with locals was a most welcome change that again led to a feeling of well-being. Being waved to the front of a line at the supermarket or local café was surprising but appreciated. Surprise is also a valued element of an experience (Pine and Gilmore 2020). However, in this context it was not a deliberately staged element to create experience value, but rather a co-creation initiated by a cultural tradition based on family values. The staff indicated, as did signs in some places, that pregnant women have priority, and other customers smilingly stepped aside. This amazed me and resulted in positive interactions between us as co-creators of the experience.

Interaction between the tourist and the locals thus affected my well-being, as also recognized in other tourism contexts (Chua et al. 2022). Based on my previous experience and familiarity with being pregnant in an individualistic Nordic country, I felt like excusing myself for passing the others in the line and going straight to the counter, yet I enjoyed it. Such recurring events during my babymoos stood in great contrast to what happened at the airport in Lisbon, on the return flight to Oslo, where we were also unexpectedly waved to the front of the long check-in line. An employee came over and said we should go to the front as I was pregnant and had a child in the stroller. As we entered the front of the queue, our fellow passengers (Norwegians) made rather loud protests and comments on the unfairness of this line jumping. Naturally, those negative remarks reduced the value of this sort of “special treatment” and resulted in negative tourist-to-tourist interaction (Lin, Zhang, and Guroy 2022; Rihova et al. 2018).

Well-being can come from being an active co-creator. Nevertheless, the Instagram search on #babymoontravel showed pictures of luxury retreats, hotels, and beaches, while only a few pictures showed one person (e.g., doing yoga or relaxing). Pictures show solitude and relaxation, without local culture or specified places of interest or attractions. The lack of people is striking, with just a few exceptions. For #babymoon the 100 postings with most likes are photographs of (a) mother-to-be, alone, often on a beach, (b) a couple either on a beach or in an urban setting, and (c) baby clothes and accessories. For #babymooning the first 100 posts show a variety of images from babymoon travelers, focused on pictures of the mother-to-be, the baby bump and couples involved in activities.

My experience shows that active co-creation can occur in many ways and often in unexpected settings. Even daily tasks like going to the supermarket or market or just taking a walk can provide value. This is not to any great extent reflected in the images posted online. Cultural co-creation and interaction are thus played down, although it is stressed in previous studies (Campos et al. 2018; Chua et al. 2022; Giuseppe et al. 2022). Exceptions to the above are those images focusing on co-creation between the parents-to-be, and posts in the blogs, where co-creation within the traveling family is reflected on and highlighted as positive. Thus, there seems to be a potential mismatch between what is being presented in pictures of the “most attractive babymoon destinations” and what might be sought by the travelers themselves.

For example, the focus in the blogs reflects how the writers are travel bloggers to begin with, that is, they normally like to travel, and that they subsequently started to write about babymoos when pregnant. This probably did not change them as people (which was also my experience); rather, it influenced the way they regard travel, by altering their focus. The posts focus on experiential aspects of what one can experience and do while pregnant, thus emphasizing

context, consumption practices and the bloggers’ consumer identities (Arnould, Crockett, and Eckhardt 2021). One of the blogs also wrote about what babymoon tourism is, from a more theoretical point of view. The bloggers did not focus on what they could not do, neither any limitations related to pregnancy and traveling nor any discussion of health-related issues. This is interesting as babymoon travel has often been categorized as part of health tourism (Gabor and Oltean 2019), which appears to be an unsuitable approach for the marketing and segmentation of this form of tourism. Being pregnant does not deprive you of a traveler identity, rather it could contribute positively to your identity project as a dimension of well-being (Schau 2018).

Most destinations and tourism businesses seem to show physical facilities to attract babymoon tourists, which is a clear mismatch with what babymoon travelers (including myself) experience and highlight in their representations of what their babymoos mean to them. This neglect of certain dimensions of well-being in the marketing seems contrary not only to the findings relating to well-being in this study, but also to elements that inspire well-being and pursuit of happiness in other tourism contexts (Laing and Frost 2017; Xu and Zhang 2021). The apparent lack of people in the marketing pictures makes the advertising seem distant, passive and somewhat unreachable. By contrast, in the blogs from moms there are mothers-to-be or couples involved in activities, which gives them more life and allows the reader to connect in some way to the situation and the location. Creating distance is not beneficial in a marketing context, neither does it inspire or facilitate any form of value co-creation (Giuseppe et al. 2022). Culture or any form of cultural co-creation is completely ignored in marketing postings, contrary to the actual co-creation of tourism experiences, where interaction creates lasting experiences (Melvin, Winklhofer, and McCabe 2020).

If a key motivation for babymoos is to enjoy time together as a couple or to feel well-being by escaping, it is not given that fulfillment comes only from relaxation in (luxurious) resorts, going to spas and visiting (empty) beaches. An image is created of babymoon travel as something introverted, with the claim that inner peace can only be found in solitude and in typical resort-type places. This seems contrary to current trends amongst travelers and babymooners, where an active experiential focus is more manifest. Naturally, a pregnancy does represent some limitations to what one can or cannot do, but these are not absolute. By adjusting my activity level and pace, I could still do most of the things that I did before, but in a different way or experienced differently, or perhaps with an altered mindset.

More importantly, to experience well-being, I for one would not wish to set my experiential focus aside; I prefer to adjust it to fit with this phase of life. Disregarding this way of thinking among mothers-to-be involves a risk of not seeing the untapped potential that lies in attracting babymoon travelers who long for well-being through experiences.



Experiences often rely on co-creation (Campos et al. 2018; Sørensen and Jensen 2015; Vargo and Lusch 2017) and the ways in which such experiences can come about are multifaceted. In contrast to Gabor and Oltean (2019), who suggest promoting babymoos as an innovative service, this study suggests that marketing managers who wish to attract babymooners should emphasize experiential aspects that enhance well-being, for instance by promoting cultural co-creation. Drawing upon the benefits of cultural co-creation could be a way to achieve well-being without having to invent the wheel.

To experience cultures and escape are important motivations for traveling (Crompton 1979) and inspired me as a babymoon traveler. In this case, the southern European culture naturally seemed to encourage co-creation between the locals and myself, which felt refreshing for a more reserved northern European. The cultural context was important for my appreciation of experiential value (Akaka, Schau, and Vargo 2013). Is it then the impulsive or naturally appearing co-creation in the encounter with a culture other than one's own that inspires well-being? Is it cultural, the fact that it felt so much better to be pregnant in Portugal than in Norway? There is perhaps no exact answer to that, but this autoethnography shows that well-being is at heart of babymoon travel. Balancing the art of cultural co-creation certainly seems to have a positive effect on well-being. After two weeks of "special treatment," I had got used to it, I enjoyed it, and I could feel the well-being. Nevertheless, my babymoon vacation ended when I once again set foot on Oslo airport, Norway, and reality hit me; it was back to the normal "if you want to join us, it's your choice." At that moment, it dawned on me—I was home again.

## Conclusions

This article addresses an understudied area of tourism, namely the experiential aspect of the babymoon traveler. The study gives valuable insights into how well-being can be experienced in different behavioral contexts of the traveling mother-to-be. Traveling, social bonding, being active, experiencing new cultures, and a bit of "special treatment" can all improve well-being. Interaction with a different culture offers the potential for meaningful co-creation, which in turn can lead to well-being and a sense of improved quality of life. The importance of cultural interaction and co-creation are rarely portrayed in online marketing or postings. This is in sharp contrast to my experiences as well as the postings in the traveling mothers' blogs. Hence there are opportunities for tourism managers to further develop experiential aspects of babymoos by gaining a better understanding of the behavior of traveling mothers-to-be.

This study makes theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions to the field, as its innovative approach to babymoon tourism provides new and more inclusive concepts to grasp the meaning of babymoon tourism. Meaning

serves as a catalyst for well-being. Instead of focusing on babymoon tourism as health tourism, a shift toward the experiential perspective could be essential for marketers and managers in attracting potential babymoon travelers. In the aftermath of the current COVID-19 crisis, a perspective on well-being could offer an innovative and fresh approach in attracting a new segment to smaller places, instead of the typical resort-type destinations aimed at large-scale tourism. Moreover, babymoon tourism could offer possibilities for businesses that need to innovate and rebrand after the current crisis in the tourism industry.

The main contributions of this study are fourfold. Firstly, it provides an emic understanding (an insider's view) of babymoon travelers, largely neglected in tourism research to date, and to my knowledge there appear to be few empirical studies on this topic using autoethnography. Secondly, it enhances knowledge of the experiential aspects of babymoon tourism. This represents a fresh approach, including existential aspects and meaning, which are important for understanding well-being (Farkić, Filep, and Taylor 2020). Thirdly, the article contributes to the understanding of the role of cultural co-creation and its meaning for well-being in babymoon tourism. This is of importance since well-being can improve both physical and mental health (Buckley 2020, 2022b). Travelers' own experience narratives have been pointed out as underrepresented in tourism management research (Buckley 2012; Tavakoli and Mura 2018). Thus, fourthly, the study makes a methodological contribution by employing an autoethnographic and netnographic approach, providing unique insights into a mother's experience. This differs from what has previously been done in tourism research.

## Theoretical and Methodological Contribution

Theoretically, this article contributes to the tourism literature. The autoethnography demonstrates insights into and a narrative of aspects of babymoon tourism that inspire well-being. Further, the study expands upon the concepts of well-being (Karagöz and Uysal 2022; Yi et al. 2022) and quality of life with a focus on experiential co-creation as part of experienced well-being during babymoos. The study also adds to the current body of literature on existential authenticity (Karagöz and Uysal 2022; Yi et al. 2022) as a contribution to enhanced quality of life. To my knowledge few studies have gone into depth on the well-being and quality of life of traveling mothers-to-be with experiential co-creation of well-being as an essential element. By reflecting on cultural interaction as a contributing factor to the co-creation of well-being, the article complements recent tourism literature on experience co-creation and value (Lin, Zhang, and Gursöy 2022; Shin and Perdue 2022).

The use of autoethnography complemented by netnography represents a methodological contribution as these approaches are not mainstream in tourism studies (Tavakoli

and Mura 2018), and have, to my knowledge, not been used in the field of babymoon tourism. Dare I suggest that this represents an original contribution (Buckley 2022a). This methodological approach allows for drawing upon embodied experiences, thus providing in-depth insight into the experiences and meaning of babymoon tourism.

### Managerial Implications

This study has demonstrated a potential for tourism management and destination marketers to offer babymoon experiences to travelers during this phase of life, not only by regarding babymoon tourism as a niche market or segment but also by aiming at individual consumers in search of well-being. Babymoon tourism has yet to reach its full potential as a valuable contributor to tourism destinations. Destination management organizations interested in welcoming babymoon tourists could benefit from supporting initiatives for tourist-local interaction. With the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and in its aftermath, it would also be useful for businesses and destination management organizations to emphasize the measures taken at the destination to ensure a safe stay, to reduce the level of discomfort and to ensure a safe vacation for the family(-to-be). This study gives a fresh insight into babymoon tourism with its focus on well-being. Drawing upon this study and further pursuing the information found among groups of expectant mothers in social media or online forums can be useful sources of information for tourism managers. Mothers are often decision makers for family vacations, and a well-being focus could therefore pave the way for businesses to develop this part of the experiential market.

### Limitations and Future Research

This study has its limitations. First, the emic perspective and author-researcher involvement suggests a subjective influence on the interpretation of data. However, the relevance of subjective personal introspective insights is also acknowledged (Holbrook 2005, 2021; Stephens 2020), and my experiences as a babymoon traveler, and my knowledge and perspectives in autoethnography and netnography, shape the interpretations, that is, go beyond what is in the data itself (Kozinets 2020). Second, this article does not encompass all cultural spheres, as it takes a female Western middleclass perspective, which has influenced the data. With other travel companions or no companions in very different countries, the outcome could have been different. Nevertheless, this study leads to the conclusion that babymoon tourism has a pent-up potential, as the currently promoted offerings mostly focus on “all-inclusive” types of vacations with a health focus. Considering that pregnancy is not an illness but merely a temporary “state of being” and represents a phase of life most often filled with joy and anticipation of the coming event of having a new family member, the current marketing

approach seems somewhat outdated. A woman does not change completely from being an active co-creator in the experience society to becoming a passive receiver of products and services during pregnancy.

Future research could explore babymoon tourism from an experiential perspective by collecting qualitative data from those engaged in babymoon tourism. This would provide deeper insight into babymoon tourism experiences. Well-being is clearly perceived and experienced at an individual level. Further research could explore the possibilities that lie in embracing a fully-fledged customering view (Pine and Gilmore 2020) of babymoon tourism, in which all people are individuals (not segments). This could provide inspiration for a more individualized approach to babymoon travelers, challenging the current marketing which addresses *one* babymoon segment.

### Author Contribution

There is one author of this article, who takes sole responsibility for this study.

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