

ADVANCES IN HOSPITALITY & TOURISM MARKETING AND MANAGEMENT (AHTMM) CONFERENCE

An International Hospitality and Tourism Research Conference

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

**13th Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Marketing and
Management (ATMM) Conference Proceedings
June 22 – June 26, 2026**

**Macau University of Science and Technology – School of Liberal
Arts & Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Management
Macau**

ISBN: 978-0-9964244-7-9

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Publisher: Hospitality and Tourism Management Academy

*All papers and extended abstracts included in the 13th AHTMM Conference
Proceedings were peer-reviewed using a double blind review process*

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates tourists' motivations for choosing Airbnb accommodation and explores their lived experiences in Mardin, Türkiye, a culturally, historically, and religiously layered destination that remains underrepresented in tourism research. Situated within the broader context of the sharing economy and peer to peer accommodation, the study responds to calls for deeper qualitative insights into how global digital platforms such as Airbnb shape tourist experiences, perceptions of authenticity, and connections to place beyond mainstream urban tourism hubs.

Adopting a qualitative research design, semi structured interviews were conducted with 25 domestic and international tourists who stayed in Airbnb accommodation during their visit to Mardin. The data were analysed using thematic analysis, allowing for an in-depth exploration of participants' motivations, experiences, and behavioural intentions. The findings reveal complex and multi-layered factors influencing the preference for Airbnb over traditional hotel accommodation, alongside rich experiential narratives rooted in place, culture, and social interaction.

Seven overarching themes emerged from the analysis, including motivation, reliability, advantages, disadvantages, experience, intention to revisit, and recommendation to others, each comprising several interrelated sub themes. Key motivational drivers included opportunities for social interaction, a comfortable and homely environment, cleanliness, affordability, favourable locations, accessibility, pet friendliness, and a strong desire for authenticity. Participants consistently perceived Airbnb as offering greater flexibility and personalisation compared with conventional hotels, while also enabling closer contact with local lifestyles and host communities.

Experience related themes highlighted the immersive nature of Airbnb stays in Mardin, a city characterised by the coexistence of Turkish, Kurdish, Arab, Assyrian Syriac, and Armenian cultural influences. Participants frequently described a heightened sense of belonging and emotional connection to the destination, facilitated by staying in residential neighbourhoods and interacting with local hosts. This sense of embeddedness within everyday local life emerged as central to visitors' understanding of authenticity and played a significant role in shaping positive evaluations of their stay.

The findings further demonstrate that positive Airbnb experiences strongly influence tourists' intentions to revisit Mardin and to recommend both the destination and the accommodation platform to others. By foregrounding a lesser-known heritage city, this study contributes to the growing literature on Airbnb by extending understanding of peer-to-peer accommodation beyond dominant tourism destinations. It offers valuable insights into how digital platforms mediate place making, authenticity, and cultural engagement in culturally hybrid destinations, with implications for destination marketing, heritage tourism development, and the sustainable integration of sharing economy platforms within local contexts.

Keywords: Sharing Economy, Airbnb Motivations, Airbnb Experiences, Qualitative Research