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Winery Visitation in the Wine Appellations of Pelee Island and Lake Erie North Shore

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WINERY VISITATION IN THE WINE APPELLATIONS OF PELEE ISLAND AND LAKE ERIE NORTH SHORE

ABSTRACT

This paper examines visitors to wineries of two viticultural regions in South Western Ontario. It initially explores what is wine tourism and who are wine tourists, and then addresses why winery visitation is paramount to the financial sustainability of many Ontario wineries. The paper examines the various factors that encourage consumers to experience wines at their point of production and profiles their demographic traits, attitudes and motivations, consumption patterns and purchasing behavior. A convenience sample of 396 visitors to six wineries provided data for this study. The results can serve Ontario vintners in developing effective marketing programs that attract visitors to their cellar doors.

Key Words: Wine Tourism; Wine Tourist; Viticulture; VQA; Winery

INTRODUCTION

The growth of the wine industry in Canada in terms of production volume and quality has stimulated the curiosity of wine enthusiasts, general consumers and travelers, to visit the wineries of Canada. The paper addresses the sociological/ psychological motivations and demographics of visitors to the wine appellations of South Western Ontario. The visitation to the winery is not just informational; beyond understanding how wine is made, it also involves sampling wineries vintages and purchasing wine directly from the winery retail store, also known as the cellar door. The increased number of visitors to wineries in Ontario and British Columbia since the early 1990s has created a new tourism niche market in Canada known as “wine tourism” (Telfer, 2000).

In Ontario, the wine industry has developed over the years from generating low-quality table wines to producing high-quality world-renowned wines. The growth of the Canadian wine tourism industry and popularity of Ontario wine is largely due to the creation of the Vintners Quality Alliance (VQA) in 1988. Similar to the appellation system already existent in the ‘old world’ producing countries (i.e. France's AOC and Italy's DOCG), the VQA appellation system governs the quality of wines produced in Ontario and British Columbia.

WINE TOURISM

Wine Tourism may be defined as “visitation to vineyards, wineries, wine festivals and wine shows for which grape wine tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of a grape and wine region are the primary motivations for the visitor.” (Hall et al, 2000, as cited in Carlsen, 2004, p. 5). This type of tourism, where visitors go to the site of wine production has grown in popularity in places like Canada, considered to be a new world destination for wine (Carmichael, 2005). Beyond the exposure that wineries get from tourists, the benefits are reaped by the regional community as well (Carlsen, 2004). From Carmichael’s (2005) research, it was determined that there was a positive correlation between wineries and the local economy, including accommodations, natural and cultural attractions, shopping and food. As more people visit wineries, this will benefit area businesses as well.

Other authors have categorized wine tourism as a “lifestyle and personal development experience” (Beames, 2003, as cited in Yuan, 2008, p. 210) or an important way for the wine industry to develop a relationship with their consumers (Hall et al, 2000, as cited in Yuan, 2008, p. 207). Charters & Ali-Knight (2002) summarized all these characteristics of wine tourism as a “lifestyle experience, supply and demand, an educational component, linkages to

art, wine and food, incorporation with the tourism-destination image and as a marketing opportunity which enhances the economic, social and cultural values of the region.

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CLASSIFYING WINE TOURISTS

Wine Tourists can be classified by their level of interest in wine (Hall, 1996, as cited in Charters & Ali-Knight, 2002, p. 312) or their knowledge of wine (Maddern and Golledge 1996, as cited in Charters & Ali-Knight, 2002, p. 313). But according to Charters & Ali-Knight (2002), looking at the level of interest rather than the level of knowledge may be more insightful.

In 2006, collaboration by different tourism bodies within Canada sponsored a study of the recreational activities and travel habits of adult Canadians and Americans. The TAMS (Travel Activities and Motivations Survey) 2006 also looked specifically at the interest levels of Canadian travellers in wine and cuisine-related activities. Tourists were categorized as Wine Enthusiasts if they displayed a high or moderate interest in wine related activities. In the 2006 study of Canadian travellers, 4.4 million were found to be Wine Enthusiasts (Ontario Ministry of Tourism, 2007). The Wine Novice or Curious Tourist, from Hall's (1996, as cited in Charters & Ali-Knight, 2002, p. 312) definition, are more likely to engage in tours of the winery and probably have attended a tasting before. This group's main purpose for their trip was not to visit the winery but that they were in the area for other reasons.

DEMOGRAPHICS

The demographics of the typical wine tourist vary depending on the area (Charters & Ali-Knight, 2002) but generally, income is the best indicator as to whether a person would be interested in wine tourism (Dodd & Bigotte, 1997, as cited in Charters & Ali-Knight, 2002, p. 312). Studies from the United States, Australia and New Zealand have found that wine tourists are between the ages of 30 – 50, have a moderate to high household income (South Australian Tourism Commission, 1997, as cited in Charters & Ali-Knight, 2002, p. 312; Dodd, 1995, as cited in Getz & Brown, 2006, p. 148). The TAMS (Travel Activities and Motivations Survey) 2006 found that wine tourists in Canada were generally couples and families, and that there was a strong positive correlation between income, education level and level of interest (Ontario Ministry of Tourism, 2007). Based on this study, the affluent, educated and mature couples and families were more likely to engage in wine related activities. Carmichael's (2005) study of the wineries in the Niagara Region came up with a similar conclusion, that wine tourists tended to be well-educated, 73% were professional workers, 30% were between the ages of 41-50 and 44% of respondents had a household income over \$90,000.

TRIP AND VISITATION CHARACTERISTICS

Tourism visits to wine regions are often part of a longer itinerary and not the sole reason as to why people visit the area. They tend to incorporate a winery visitation into their vacation plans among other attractions. Whereas people that live close to wineries will be more likely to visit as their main purpose to be in the area (Carlsen, 2004; Dodd, 1995 as cited in Ignatov & Smith, 2006, p. 242). Carmichael's (2005) study of the Niagara area showed that only 45.8% of those surveyed came to the region for the wineries. The others either lived close by (9.6%) or were there as part of a longer vacation, visiting other attractions like the casino, Niagara Falls or the Shaw Festival. This study also showed that 72.3% of respondents visited other wineries in the area as well and that an average of 4.36 wineries was patronized. 23% partook in a tour of the winery, with 80.5% tasting the wine. Carmichael further showed that 41% of those surveyed were out on day trips and 46% staying in the area at least one night.

The TAMS 2006 study revealed that visitors tended to travel with their spouse / partner, without their children and for those that stayed overnight, their choice of accommodation was a hotel / resort / country inn. Wine tourists tended to garner advice from friends and family as the main source of information when planning their trip. Furthermore, the way wine enthusiasts look for information regarding their trip, they are more likely to use the Internet as a source of information and a means of booking the trip (Ontario Ministry of Tourism, 2007).

MOTIVATIONS/ATTITUDES/PERCEPTIONS

Some wine tourists' main motivation to visit is the destination itself and the winery is another activity that one can engage in while there. Other wine tourists' main motivation is the activity of wine tasting, the education and purchase of wines (Macionis, 1998, as cited in Carmichael, 2005, p. 187). According to the TAMS 2006 survey, 23% or 4.9 million Canadian travellers participated in wine related activities. Of this 4.9 million, 19% or 931,000 Canadian travellers stated that wine related activities were the main purpose of their trip. Carmichael's (2006) Niagara

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study showed that what motivated visitors were rest and relaxation, a unique experience in a beautiful setting, to learn about wine and to have the opportunity to purchase, as well as being with family and friends. Focus groups were conducted in Australia and found that the following could be improved or were important to making the winery visits more enjoyable. They were looking for an authentic experience; value for the money; service interactions; settings and surroundings; product offerings; adequate information; personal growth; learning experiences and indulgence (Roberts & Sparks, 2006).

CONSUMER PURCHASE BEHAVIOUR

While at the wineries, the decision whether to purchase is guided by these factors: the taste (95%) and the price (86%) (Charters & Ali-Knight, 2002). Mitchell (2006) found that not only was the taste of the wine an important factor in purchase decisions, but that the service received was also relevant. In making purchases post-visit, the memory of that winery experience was also important. In Dodd & Gustafson's study (1997, as cited in Carmichael, 2005, p. 189) they determined that four elements influenced purchasing: the service, the wine, the winery environment and the price. In Carmichael's (2005) study of the Niagara region, she found that the VQA label had little influence on purchasers, mainly because they were not familiar with the term. Although a recent VQA AD Tracking Study commissioned by the Wine Council of Ontario discovered that 83% and 82% of Toronto residents in 2006 and 2007 respectively were aware of the term VQA (Wine Council of Ontario 2008). In reference to Carmichael's study approximately 70% of those surveyed purchased wine at the winery.

IMPORTANCE OF WINERY VISITATION

Wine tourism is critically important to Ontario vintners since winery visitation may be the only means for many smaller wineries to market their wine by vending their product through their cellar doors. Typically, smaller operations have difficulty in securing a listing of their wine at the retail outlets of the government controlled Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO). This is due primarily to their limited and/or inconsistent supply of product. Of the 125 Ontario wineries, 97 produce VQA wine (VQA 2007) and less than half (40%) of these were able to secure a retail sales listing with the LCBO in 2006 (LCBO 2007). Furthermore, the LCBO carried only 335 of 879 VQA wines produced by the Ontario vintners in 2006 (LCBO 2007). This also accounts for less than 40% of all approved VQA wines. The LCBO subjects wines to a 58% mark-up, which along with other levies can reach as high as 100% (LCBO 2008). Since the retail prices are determined and controlled by this Provincial agency, the vintner's remuneration from a bottle of wine may amount to as little as one half of the LCBO's listed price.

Consequently, the costs of having wines listed with the LCBO may outweigh the benefits for some vintners. The importance of winery visitation is reinforced by the figure that 35.5% of VQA wine sales by retail value are sold at the point of production (VQA, 2006). Hence, there is a need to appreciate the characteristics of visitors to and the factors that motivate them to purchase at the "cellar door".

The four designated wine regions in Ontario are the Niagara Peninsula, Prince Edward County, Lake Erie North Shore and Pelee Island (VQA, 2007). These appellations encompass 15,000 acres under vine (Wine Council of Ontario, 2007). The focus of this study is on the latter two located in South Western Ontario.

Lake Erie North Shore with its 500 acres of vineyards situated on the north-westerly end of Lake Erie was one of the most vibrant commercial wine growing areas in Canada until the end of the nineteenth century. It is currently attempting to re-establish its reputation as one of the country's best wine growing regions. It lies at the same latitude as Navarra, Spain and Abruzzi, Italy (VQA Ontario 2008). With its southerly exposure and proximity to the warm summer waters of Lake Erie (the shallowest of the five Great Lakes), its fruit often goes to market weeks before that of other regions of Ontario (VQA Ontario 2008). Currently Lake Erie North Shore has 10 operating wineries.

Pelee Island marginally nearer the equator than Rome at N41° 45' latitude is Canada's most southerly point, and accordingly it enjoys a longer growing season than any other wine region in Canada. It is situated 25 kilometres off the north westerly shore of Lake Erie. Its southerly location and surrounding warm waters of Lake Erie give rise to an early harvest. The island was the home of Canada's first commercial wine growing operation when Vin Villa opened its doors in 1866. The only winery of this region is not located on the island, but is situated on the mainland of Lake Erie North Shore (VQA Ontario 2008).

RESEARCH DESIGN

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Information about wine tourists was obtained with a 32 question survey instrument that was developed from the existing literature (Telfer, 1999; Charters & Ali-Knight, 2002; Getz, 2005; Carmichael, 2005) in consultation with the Wine Council of Ontario. The survey instrument was also derived from a similar questionnaire used in the Niagara and Prince Edward County wine regions in recent years. Surveys were administered in person to visitors at six wineries: Pelee Island, Mastronardi, Colchester Ridge Estate Winery, Muscedere, Colio and Sprucewood Shores. This method of data collection was viewed to be the most appropriate in providing the greatest control over the sample frame while at the same time supplying the researchers with the most accurate data with respect to the current visitation of the survey participants. Individuals were approached on the basis of non-probability convenience sampling, and were visually screened for a minimum age requirement of nineteen years of age, the legal age of alcohol consumption in Ontario. Participants were given the questionnaire to complete independently, although a researcher was present to address difficulties that arose. The instrument contained four groups of questions that related to:

- Respondent and demographic characteristics
- Trip and visitation characteristics
- Attitudinal and motivational related aspects of winery visitation
- Wine consumption and consumer purchase behaviour

A total of 396 questionnaires were recorded within the two wine regions during July and August 2008. The questionnaires were then analyzed with the aid of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), a software program designed for the tabulation of survey related data. Since there is only one winery (Pelee Island Winery) located on the mainland of Lake Erie North Shore representing Pelee Island Appellation, the study does not attempt to differentiate between the two regions in terms of data collection and analysis. The two regions will be referred to South Western Ontario (SWO) throughout the report.

LIMITATIONS

Limitations of this study were unavoidable because of convenience sampling and in the selection of wineries which was limited to those members of the Wine Council of Ontario, a non-profit association representing a large majority of the Ontario wineries. Another limitation arose from the need to conduct the survey on weekends in the prime tourist season, during various wine and non-wine related events and festivals. It was apparent from the outset that the allotted time of administration would limit data collection to weekends and to higher traffic wineries.

RESULTS

Respondent and Demographic Characteristics

The survey indicated that more than one half (48.3%) of the visitors to the six SWO wineries were 50 years of age or older, suggesting they were a relatively mature audience (Table 1). Only 24.0% of the visitors were under 35 years of age.

Table 1
Visitor Household Demographics of SWO Winery Visitors

| Demographics | % | Demographics | % |
|----------------------|------|---------------------------------|------|
| 19 - 24 years | 7.8 | No children living at home | 66.7 |
| 25 - 34 years | 16.2 | Children living at home | 27.5 |
| 35 - 49 years | 26.0 | Less than \$70,000 yearly | 28.0 |
| 50 + years | 48.3 | \$70,000 - \$99,000 yearly | 28.9 |
| Male | 40.1 | \$100,000 - \$150,000 yearly | 27.1 |
| Female | 49.1 | More than \$150,000 yearly | 16.0 |
| High school or less | 8.1 | Professional/manager/proprietor | 61.9 |
| Some college/diploma | 35.6 | Skilled/unskilled worker | 8.6 |
| One or more degrees | 52.5 | Other occupations | 25.8 |

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to missing responses.

The mix of wine tourists on the basis of gender was found to be unevenly balanced between the two genders, with females (49.1%) outnumbering males (40.1%). The levels of education attained by both genders suggest that

winery visitors for the most part were fairly well educated since 52.5% of the sample population had earned at least one university degree. Another 35.6% of them had either graduated or attended college. In terms of occupation, those employed in the Professional/Manager/Entrepreneur category were strongly represented. Of the sample population 61.9% of the winery visitors identified themselves as being in this occupation category. It was also observed that the annual income levels of the wine tourists were relatively high, with 43.1% reporting annual household incomes of \$100,000 or more. Another 28.9% had annual incomes between \$70,000 and \$100,000. The median household income in Ontario in 2005 was \$66,917 (Census 2006). The survey also reported that a large majority (71.5%) of visitors were residents of Canada with 28.5% having domicile in the United States (the USA border is within 35 kms. of the SWO wine region).

One other interesting finding addresses the family status of the sample population. It was observed that there was a high incidence (66.7%) of households that did not have children living at home.

Trip and Visitation Characteristics

A majority (55.1%) of the visitors could be characterized as “day trippers”, typically composed of parties of 2-3 persons (Table 2). They accounted for 60.8% of the respondents. Party sizes of four or more persons were represented by 39.2% of the wine tourists. It was discovered that a majority of the respondents had planned their trip to SWO within a time frame of three weeks or less, with 58.3% reporting this time period. Interestingly, 41.0% had planned their trip to SWO in the past week. The sources of information used in planning these trips were primarily advice from family or friends and local websites. The former was represented by 31.8% of the respondents with the latter accounting for 21.6% of the sample population. The frequency of visitation varied among the respondents with 29.8% being regular visitors indicating they patronize the SWO wineries three or more times per year, with another one third (33.5%) reporting once or twice annually. When visiting wineries almost one half (49.4%) of the respondents indicated that they typically visit three or more wineries per trip.

Table 2
Trip and Visitation Characteristics of Wine Tourists

| Trip & Visitor Characteristics | % | Trip & Visitor Characteristics | % |
|---|----------|---|----------|
| Day trip | 55.1 | Advice from family/friends | 31.8 |
| Two or four days | 35.6 | Local websites | 21.6 |
| More than four days | 7.0 | Local wine & tourism guides | 16.5 |
| Two – three persons parties | 60.8 | Other sources of information | 29.9 |
| Four or more persons parties | 39.2 | Less than once/year | 47.9 |
| Planned trip in the past week | 41.0 | One - two times/year | 33.5 |
| Planned trip in past 2-3 weeks | 17.3 | More than 2 times/year | 29.8 |
| Planned trip for > than 3 weeks | 37.5 | One -two wineries per trip | 50.6 |
| | | Three or more wineries per trip | 49.4 |

Attitudinal/Motivational Aspects of Winery Visitation

Even though the survey was conducted on site at wineries, less than half (43.9%) of the respondents cited visiting wineries was the primary purpose of their trip (Table 3). A variety of other motivations were given for the trip from “visiting friends and relatives” (11.6%), “exploring local towns and communities” (9.6%), to “visiting attractions in the region” (6.8%). The most popular activities wine tourists engaged in during their trip included: “golf and other sports related activities” (25.8), “exploring local towns and communities” (22.6%) and “visiting attractions specific to the region” (14.5%) followed closely by “shopping” (13.5%). Respondents were also asked to indicate the level of importance that various perceptual influencers had on their decision to visit the region. It was knowing or understanding there was “a variety of things to do in the area” that ranked first of ten potential influencers presented to them. This aspect of the trip was “very” or “extremely important” to 51.9% of the respondent

Table 3*International CHRIE Conference-Refereed Track, Event 13 [2009]***Attitudinal and Motivational Aspects of Winery Visitation**

| Attitudinal/Motivational Aspects | % | Attitudinal/Motivational Aspects | % |
|---|----------|---|----------|
| Primary purpose of trip | 43.9 | Tasting events/prop. wines | 73.6 |
| Other purposes of trip | 56.1 | Winery tour/fine dining | 57.7 |
| Exploring local towns | 22.6 | Winery tour/overnight stays | 52.9 |
| Shopping | 13.5 | Tasting events/new vintages | 58.4 |
| Golf and other sports activities | 25.8 | Drinking wine gives me pleasure | 91.6 |
| Visiting attractions in area | 14.5 | Have a strong interest in wine | 67.8 |
| Variety of things to do | 51.9 | Like to take time to purchase wine | 58.1 |
| Other influencers | 49.1 | Don't understand much about wine | 18.4 |

The study also sought information about how various events or packaged activities could encourage wine tourists to visit wineries more frequently. Nine suggestions were presented to the respondents asking them to indicate how motivating they would be. "Tasting events offering wines only available at the winery" ranked first with 73.6 % of the respondents indicating that this would be "very" or "extremely motivating". The next three highest ranked motivators included, "tasting events for new vintage releases and/or unique wines" (58.4%), "winery tours packaged with a fine dining" (57.7%), "tour packages with winery tours and overnight stays" (52.9%).

Lastly participants in the survey were given the opportunity to express various opinions about wine by indicating their level of agreement with eight different statements. Not surprisingly, the statement "drinking wine gives me pleasure" ranked first with 91.8% of the respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement. There was also strong agreement with the statements "I have a strong interest in wine" (67.8%) and "I like to take my time when I purchase a bottle of wine" (58.1%). The statement, "I do not understand very much about wine" (18.4%) had the lowest ranking in the survey.

Wine Consumption and Consumer Purchase Behaviour

Wineries might not have been the primary purpose of the trip for a majority of the survey participants, yet there appeared to be a strong proclivity to purchase wine once on site at the winery. A large majority (72.6%) of the winery visitors spent \$25 or more on the purchase of wines and wine related products (Table 4). Only 5.7% indicated that they will not spend any money on wine this trip. This proclivity to purchase wine at the cellar door, reinforces the importance of winery visitation to the vintner.

Table 4**Wine Consumption and Consumer Purchase Behaviour**

| Wine Consumption and Purchase Behaviour | % | Wine Consumption and Purchase Behaviour | % |
|--|----------|--|----------|
| Less than \$25 per visit | 27.4 | Less than 50% is VQA | 41.9 |
| \$25 - \$250 per visit | 62.0 | More than 50% is VQA | 37.4 |
| More than \$250 visit | 6.4 | I do not know what VQA is | 16.4 |
| Less than 3 bottles of Ontario wine | 49.9 | Consume less than 1 bottle/wk. | 52.5 |
| > than 3 bottles of Ontario wine | 50.1 | Drink more than 1 bottle./wk. | 47.5 |

Respondents were also asked about their tendency to favour Ontario wines over those produced elsewhere and about the importance of the VQA designation. Almost half 49.9% of the participants in the survey reported that of the last 10 bottles of wine purchased, 3 or more was Ontario wine. Furthermore, 37.4% of the respondents indicated that more than 50% of the Ontario wine purchased was VQA. Interestingly, 16.4% of the sample population was not familiar with the term VQA.

Lastly respondents were asked about their wine consumption behaviour. Almost one half (47.5%) reported consuming one or more bottles of wine per week.

DISCUSSION

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As previously cited, the demographics of the 'typical' wine tourist can vary quite largely depending on the region (Charters & Ali-Knight 2002). According to the South Australian Tourism Commission 1997 (as cited in Charters & Ali-Knight, 2002, p. 312; Dodd, 1995, as cited in Getz & Brown, 2006, p. 148), studies from the United States, Australia and New Zealand have found that wine tourists are between the ages of 30 – 50 and have a moderate to high household income. The TAMS (Travel Activities and Motivations Survey) 2006 found that wine tourists in Canada were generally couples and families, and that there was a strong positive correlation between income, education level and level of interest (Ontario Ministry of Tourism, 2007). Similarly Carmichael's (2005) study of the wineries in the Niagara Region concluded, that wine tourists tended to be well-educated, 73% were professional workers, 30% were between the ages of 41-50 and 44% of respondents had a household income over \$90,000.

The SWO survey reveals similar results in terms of age, education, household income and career selection. Almost three quarters (72.3%) of the respondents were over 35 years of age with 48.3% being 50 years or older. Those who had attained one or more university degrees were 52.5% of the sample population with another 35.6% having attended or graduated from community college. Household income for 43.1% of the respondents was \$100,000 or more annually. Similarly, the occupation titles of Professional/Manager/Proprietor were well represented by a majority of the SWO wine tourists since they composed 61.9% of the sample population. The study also revealed that a majority (66.7%) of the wine tourists were from households where no children were living at home. What emerges is the profile of a wine tourist who is well educated professional working in Professional/Managerial/Entrepreneurial capacity earning a high income and who does not have children living at home.

The length of trips as reported by the winery visitors in SWO appears to be consistent with Carmichael's (2005) study of the Niagara region that stated "41% of those surveyed were out on day trips and 46% were staying in the area at least one night". In this study the "day trippers" represented 55.1% of the respondents with the remainder (44.9%) staying one or more nights. The study also revealed that the time frame for planning trips is quite short with over 40% of the respondents doing this within a time period of one week or less. The types of information sources used in planning their trips was primarily family and friends or local websites. This was consistent with the TAMS (2006) study which reported that "wine tourists tended to garner advice from friends and family as the main source of information when planning their trip". Furthermore it states, "the way wine enthusiasts look for information regarding their trip, is that they are more likely to use the Internet as a source of information and a means of booking the trip" (Ontario Ministry of Tourism, 2007). The Carmichael's (2005) study reports "that an average of 4.36 wineries were patronized" whereas the SWO study informs that three or more wineries were visited by 49.4% of the respondents.

In the study of the Niagara region, it reports that "only 45.8% of those surveyed came to the region for the wineries". The survey of wine visitors in SWO also revealed that winery visitation was not the primary purpose of the trip (56.1%), but it served as a strong secondary reason for visiting the area. Wine tourists liked to combine their trip with other activities including engaging in golf and other sports related activities, exploring local towns and communities and visiting attractions specific to the region. Key "drivers" of winery visitation include: tasting events offering wines only available at the winery, tasting events for new vintage releases and/or unique wines, winery tours packaged with fine dining and winery tours and overnight stays. Lastly, wine and wine related activities conjure up very positive images in the minds of winery visitors, for most of them drinking wine is a pleasurable activity, they have a strong interest in wine and like to take their time when purchasing wine.

While the primary purpose of the trip to SWO for most was not a winery visit, a majority of the visitors demonstrated a proclivity to purchase wine while at the wineries. Approximately three quarters of the visitors spent \$25 or more on wine and wine related products during their trip. This emphasizes the importance of attracting visitors to the cellar door; for once on site there is a strong tendency to purchase wine and wine related products. However, their proclivity to purchase Ontario wine is less forthright when given the opportunity to purchase wines from other regions of the world. Moreover, the purchase behaviour of wine tourists suggests that they tend to favour the higher valued VQA wine when they choose to purchase Ontario wine. It is also evident that some (16.4%) wine tourists were not familiar with the VQA designation. This is consistent with the VQA AD Tracking Study which discovered that 83% and 82% of Toronto residents in 2006 and 2007 respectively were aware of the term VQA (Wine Council Of Ontario 2008).

The study may be insightful to vintners in marketing their wineries to regional visitors. The survey results suggest that in addition to friends and family, the internet is a good source of information in trip planning, and knowing that there are “things to do in the area” is a motivating factor when choosing to visit wine country. Similarly many visitors favour the offering of proprietary tasting events and the packaging of wine tours with complementary activities such as fine dining or overnight accommodation when planning their trips.

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