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More Than Just Wine: The Evolution of Wine Tourism in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

Flanked by two oceans, surrounded by magnificent mountains, and enjoying an agreeable Mediterranean climate, South Africa is recognized as being the oldest “new world” wine producing country. This beautiful and increasingly popular tourist destination has seen many wine farms expanding their offerings from wine tasting and sales to the inclusion of a wide range of additional tourist products and activities, many of them non-wine related. This paper updates and discusses the current trends in wine tourism in South Africa. It examines the increasing sophistication of the country’s wine tourism product as it evolves into a broad-based, authentic agritourism offering, with many wine estates becoming tourist destinations in their own right.

Keywords: *wine tourism, agritourism, South Africa*

INTRODUCTION

With the first vineyards having been planted by the Dutch in 1655 and the first wine made in 1659, South Africa is recognized as being the oldest “new world” wine producing country. With more than 100,000 ha of vines producing wine grapes, South Africa ranks as number seven in the world in terms of wine production (WOSA, 2010), with wine being the country’s biggest agricultural export and third only to minerals and automobiles. Over 275,000 people are employed either directly or indirectly in the South African wine industry, R26.2 billion was contributed to national GDP by the wine industry in 2008, and some R4.3 billion is generated through wine tourism activities centered in the winelands (SAWIS, 2009). The wine industry and wine tourism have thus become important contributors to regional and rural economic growth and job creation in the Western Cape Province, where most of the vineyards are located.

Lying within the unique and diverse Cape Floral Kingdom, a UNESCO World Heritage site, and with an agreeable Mediterranean climate, the beautiful Cape winelands are extremely attractive to tourists. With most of the winelands being easily accessible for day trips from Cape Town, and with little restriction on the commercial activities that may be conducted on wine farms, more and more wineries are realizing that they have the ability to expand their tourist product and to become tourist destinations in their own right, not restricted merely to the tasting and sale of wine. Bruwer (2003) highlighted an array of tourist activities offered by wineries at that time, in addition to wine tasting, wine sales and cellar tours. The list has increased dramatically since 2003.

Since the end of apartheid and the advent of democracy in 1994, international sanctions have been lifted, international tourism has increased, and government restrictions on the wine

industry have been eliminated. The number of wine producing cellars has increased from 282 in 1991 to 627 in 2010 (WOSA, 2010). Although the first wine route in South Africa was created in Stellenbosch in 1971, this served more as a wine sales tool than as a tourism product. There are now seventeen wine routes in South Africa, representing 458 wineries open to the public.

Since the formation of the first wine route, wine tourism has undergone a considerable evolution, especially over the past few years. Yet there is no central organization to support or promote wine tourism, no strategy to develop it as a whole, and therefore no statistics by which to measure its success. There has been little academic research into wine tourism in South Africa, with the few articles published (Bruwer, 2003; Demhardt, 2003; Tassiopoulos, et al., 2004) written during the early part of the last decade, and are now somewhat out of date.

Background

Wine tourism is usually thought of as tourism that takes place on a wine farm and involves the tasting and/or purchase of wine, sometimes combined with cellar and/or vineyard tours. A definition of wine tourism that has been widely cited is “visitations to vineyards, wineries, wine festivals and wine shows for which grape wine tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of a grape wine region are the prime motivation factors for visitors” (Hall & Sharples, 2000). Studies about wine tourism have focused mainly on how to increase tasting room sales, or to understand visitors as wine buyers in order to better promote product sales (Charters et al., 2009). It has been found that wine tourists desire more from their experience than just the tasting and purchase of wine. They also desire culinary offerings, cultural and recreational attractions, retail choices, and an enjoyable rural landscape (Brown et al., 2006; Bruwer and Alant, 2009; Cohen and Ben-Nun, 2009). Wine tourism has also recently been looked at from an experiential view (Quadri-Felitti and Fiore, 2012), using the 4Es of the experience economy model (Pine and Gilmore, 1998), being entertainment, educational, esthetics and escapist.

Authenticity has also been a topic of much tourism research, especially as a motivation of the rural or agri-tourist, which includes the wine tourist (Taylor, 2001; Wang, 1999). In today’s fast paced, high tech world, many people are looking to engage in more authentic or ‘real’ experiences.

THE EVOLUTION OF SOUTH AFRICAN WINE TOURISM

Many wine regions cater to wine tourists’ desires for an authentic experience that is more than just wine tasting and purchasing. In most regions, however, wine farms still offer mainly wine tasting and sales, cellar tours, and possibly a gift shop. In South Africa many wineries have added other products to their product mix, such as the tasting and sale of cheeses, charcuterie, chocolate, olives, olive oils, and other agricultural products. Additionally, wineries have branched out to include such facilities as boutique hotels, B&Bs and other types of accommodation, restaurants, delicatessens, bakeries and picnic areas as well as various sporting, cultural and nature activities. No academic study has been found, however, that looks at the experiential components being provided by individual wine farms, as opposed to wine regions.

Mitchell (2004) found that only 23% of visitors to New Zealand wineries identified tasting and purchasing wine as their main motivation for visiting the destination. No such study has yet been undertaken in South Africa, but it is now possible to visit wineries in South Africa without wine being the prime motivator for the visit. An example of such a winery is the Fairview Wine and Cheese Estate in Paarl, 40 miles from Cape Town.

Besides producing wine under its Fairview, La Capra and Goats do Roam labels, Fairview is also the largest producer of gourmet cheeses in South Africa, with a herd of 800 dairy goats. In addition, Fairview grows olives, produces olive oil, and grows organic herbs and produce for its restaurant. Besides its tasting rooms, delicatessen and restaurant, Fairview also has a bakery, an art gallery, meeting facilities, a Saturday morning market, a goat tower, tractor rides and a game viewing enclosure. It is currently the most visited winery in South Africa, attracting approximately 250,000 visitors per year. Fairview recently purchased a neighboring wine farm, which has become the home for its Spice Route brand. Besides an existing tasting room, restaurant, B&B and glass blowing studio, a coffee bean roastery with coffee shop, chocolatier, brewery and charcuterie are currently being added. Located on the slopes of Paarl Mountain, with magnificent vistas of mountains and valleys, Fairview also fulfills the aesthetic experience by immersing its visitors in a sensual, rural environment.

It is therefore possible to spend an entire day at Fairview and its sister farm Spice Route. Although wine tasting, purchase and cellar tours may be an important motivator for a tourist's visit, not having an interest in wine would certainly not diminish the experience. It is therefore proposed that the definition of wine tourism, certainly in the case of South Africa, be updated to "tourism taking place on wine farms and within wine regions, but not restricted to the tasting, consuming, or purchasing of wine".

Government Initiatives

September 2012 will see South Africa's first specialist wine tourism exhibition, 'Vindaba', to be held simultaneously with Cape Wine, the wine industry's biennial trade show. Both local and national government, as part of a long-term strategy to grow wine tourism, are supporting it. This is believed to be the first time in any wine producing country that the wine and tourism industries will jointly present wine and tourism trade shows (SouthAfrica.info, 2011). The shows will be held at the Cape Town International Convention Centre. Vindaba will target the local and international travel trade as well as wine, travel and lifestyle media.

Ethical Initiatives

With a growing interest and concern by consumers in both ethical trading and the environment, the South African wine industry has launched and participates in a number of programs in this regard. These include the Wine Industry Ethical Trading Association (WIETA), the Integrated Production of Wine (IPW), the Fairtrade Labeling Organization (FLO), and the production of both organic and biodynamic wines.

CONCLUSION

In an era in which much of our entertainment is driven by technology, and in which there are increasing environmental and ethical concerns, many people are seeking visits and vacations in rural areas where they may experience nature and get closer to the land. It is believed that the evolution and sophistication of the wine tourism industry in South Africa, together with both the government and ethical/environmental initiatives, will help to put the Western Cape winelands and South Africa firmly on the map as a major wine tourism and agritourism destination.

Empirical research is required to ascertain the dimensions of the current wine tourism industry in South Africa, and a cohesive wine tourism product may be developed given that there is currently no single coordinating body. The effectiveness of the innovative pairing of wine industry and wine tourism trade shows should also be researched once these have taken place.

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