
Selling culture:

The Growth of Wine Tourism



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Damien Wilson runs the MSc in Wine Business at the Burgundy School of Business. He is a prolific researcher and writer and engages with consumers via radio and television with as much ease as he teaches students face-to-face or online. Marrying a new-world perspective of the wine industry with an old-world taste for product excellence, Dr Wilson drew from his academic education and solid professional background in wine marketing to create the MSc in Wine Business in 2009. The programme has gone from strength to strength and enjoys worldwide recognition.

We've learned that tourists look for a short-term change in their lives; a sense of excitement in the unfamiliar, and to live life of 'the other' albeit briefly (Ooi & Laing, 2010; Smith et al., 2010; Getz & Cheyne, 1997). Tourists actively search for experiences that enrich their lives.

'Tourists bring money and jobs to [a] local economy' (Xie, 2011, p. 162); but this new-found commercial appeal, while it might deliver economic development, is a two-edged sword. As any local economy grows, the spending power of tourists inflates prices, affecting the capacity of local communities to maintain their lives in their traditional manner. The charm of an authentic experience of life in another culture quickly begins to wane once tourist services overtake local culture. In essence, the commodification of culture can damage the lived experience of indigenous people.

The challenge for an increasing number of wine regions is to balance the need for economic growth through tourism with the requirement to maintain

the very traditions that stimulate tourist demand. In this chapter I explore the need for authenticity in the wine tourism experience, using three case studies to highlight different approaches. They illustrate that wine is part of the appeal of local culture, but that alone it is insufficient to generate significant levels of tourist activity. The provision of additional services is an essential prerequisite for making tourism a profitable pursuit for the wine businesses. Additionally, although the provision of services may directly affect the perceived authenticity of wine producing regions, a balanced approach can result in the maintenance of cultural authenticity alongside economic growth.

Traditionally, the simple process of tending to grapes and making wine, largely for local consumption, was motive enough for the vigneron. Increasingly, the explicit communication of cultural integrity and authenticity, however they might be defined, has become central to sustainability and growth. And a certain form of tourism, built upon the distinctive cultural characteristics of particular locations, lends itself to many wine producing regions.

Cultural authenticity in wine tourism

While some still challenge the existence of wine tourism as an identifiable category (Wangbickler, 2012), commentary on the topic has grown considerably in recent years. Central to studies, such as those conducted in Australia (O'Neil and Charters, 2000), is the concept of authenticity – what does it mean, how is it maintained, and what are the benefits of it to consumers and producers?

The proposal that wine regions need to communicate their authenticity in their offer to tourists has been explored, in the context of France, by Frochot (2003), who reveals evidence from numerous surveys on the importance of gastronomy, including wine, as a motive for tourist activity. Despite the central role of gastronomy in French culture, it seems to be relatively inconsequential in the minds of tourists. However, linked to the concept of *authenticity*, encompassing *history*, *tradition* and *nature*, it takes on greater importance and