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# Wine and Food Tourism in NSW

Wine and food tourism experiences have been gaining in popularity over recent years. As a result, niche wine and food tourism experiences have become key drivers of destination choice amongst visitors.

The top five wine regions in Australia in terms of wine tasting activities for domestic overnight visitors in 2009 were the Hunter, Margaret River, Barossa Valley, Mornington Peninsula and Yarra Valley (Tourism Research Australia data, December 2009). Three quarters of wine visitors in NSW are intrastate visitors (i.e. they reside within NSW).

## Objectives of the Research

This qualitative research aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the domestic overnight visitor market for wine and food tourism in NSW. It focussed on Sydney residents, as Sydney is the key source market for wine tourism in NSW.

## Research Method

The research used face-to-face in-depth interviews, speaking with 12 pairs (couples or friends, across all life-stage groups).

Participants were selected such that they had a high level of interest in wine and food, with the majority having taken holidays where they had visited wineries.

## Findings

Wine emerged as the leader on food and wine holidays, complemented by a mix of quality dining/eating options in the wine regions.

Most felt fairly confident and comfortable about their wine tastes and were not afraid or embarrassed to voice their opinions and describe their experiences. While the experienced and the very keen sought out exactly what they wanted or liked, others were happy to take recommendations.

In visiting wine regions, wineries are selected based on the visitors' experience and knowledge, often from reading reviews or from food and wine shows. Equally important is word of mouth, from friends as well as their extended social network including informal wine clubs. During the trip, recommendations from locals are also relied on.



Preferences for particular types of wines varied. More experienced drinkers' preferences may lead them to favour a particular region – e.g. Victoria for its colder climate Shiraz, Margaret River for a Sauvignon-blanc drinker. Margaret River, Mornington Peninsula, Yarra Valley, Barossa and the Hunter Valley are more likely to be top of mind.

#### Wine purchase behaviour

For everyday consumption most purchase at liquor chain outlets (Dan Murphy's, Coles etc) and local bottle shops (good prices and discounts from labels of larger wineries, advice from staff). More experienced wine-drinkers also source more obscure wines direct from the winery, from wine retailers online or by phone. On their wine and food holidays, all will buy wine at cellar doors, although they are more likely to purchase direct from cellar doors at smaller, boutique wineries than larger wineries (smaller labels not available elsewhere; well-known wines often cheaper at bottle-shops than cellar door).

#### Local fresh produce is desirable

When 'on the road', fresh-local produce is desirable albeit not essential. Visitors to a region are not keen on going out of their way to seek out this (unlike for King Island cheese, Tasmanian salmon or even Modena balsamic). However, on occasions when visitors came across cheese, olives or chutneys at or adjacent to wineries they enjoyed them - implying "bring it to me".

#### Decision making, motivations/barriers to food & wine holiday in NSW

Broadly, people are looking to get away from the routine and sameness of their everyday lives to spend quality time together – alone, as a couple and to spend time connecting with family and friends (e.g. group of girlfriends taking a break away, groups of couples meeting up a few times a year, family getting together with parents, siblings).

NSW wine regions, dominated by the Hunter, are seen as weekends away or short break holidays. On a weekend or long weekend, choice of destination is influenced significantly by drive time.

Wine tends to be more of a hook for destinations than food across all life-stage groups. Few build a holiday primarily around produce and food, with wine being the drawcard for destination choice.

#### Across the life stage groups

Couples with no kids are interested in short holidays, particularly weekend getaways.

Empty nesters have more time on their hands, plan trips based on an area and could spend a week or more in a region.

Families consider 'what will we do with the children' to some extent and tend not to be driven by wine and food per se.



### Consumer expectations of an ideal food and wine experience

Visitors will engage in a mix of fine dining, or casual dining options including sandwiches and a place to picnic.

Activities like farm-gate tours and 'pick your own' were less likely to be part of a wine holiday, which is more about indulgence and relaxation. However, visitors were open to local produce if showcased at cellar doors, adjacent to a winery or near town centres.

Good coffee and tea options are needed for those who drink less, do not drink or are the designated drivers. It is appealing to offer something else to do besides drink wine – a little art gallery, a garden, some space to sit and eat and enjoy the ambience of the vineyard.



Figure 1: Consumer mind set (expectations) of an ideal food & wine holiday

### Perceptions of NSW wine regions

The Hunter Valley dominated perceptions of NSW wine regions, with first impressions associated with larger wineries and a commercial atmosphere. It is a popular wine destination, attracting repeat visitors, due to its location within easy reach of Sydney. However, visitors desire more intimate wine tasting experiences, which some discovered at smaller, boutique wineries in the region.



Although less known or visited, visitors had well formed and positive impressions of Mudgee; it emerged as one of the NSW regions that can be marketed easily and more immediately. The Southern Highlands, Canberra and Port Macquarie were known by a small minority in the context of wine, while the Riverina and Armidale were not really regarded as wine and food destinations as such.

NSW wine regions, dominated by the Hunter, are seen as short break holidays. In contrast, interstate and regions which are more than a few hours away from home are seen as a part of a longer holiday and require pre-planning.

## Conclusions

Opportunities for further development centred around:

- helping local operators in the regions to build alliances and work with other supporting businesses to make consumers aware of the region and what's on offer - bringing local food to wineries, and elevating it to indulgence and speciality/luxury status;
- targeting of specific interested consumer segments;
- lifting the less known wine regions in the consumer's consideration set;
- enriching the awareness and perceptions of the full offering available from the larger wine regions.

## For more information

Please visit [www.tourism.nsw.gov.au](http://www.tourism.nsw.gov.au)

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