

# Your guide to **Wine Tourism**

## The Cellar Door Experience 1

### What do visitors expect?

People visit wineries for a range of reasons, but these generally include the following:

- To have a good time – entertainment
- To learn a bit more about wine generally and the particular winery and wine region
- To taste the wines and perhaps buy some

Most visitors to wineries come as part of a day trip, short break or weekend away. They don't drive for 2 hours just to buy a bottle of wine. They come to a region to experience its character, its food, its lifestyle, its cultural attractions, to visit friends and relatives, and increasingly to unwind and relax.

A desire to have fun and escape the stresses of the city can often be involved. Something as simple as a change of scenery and a chance for romance also play a role for many. Clearly there is an emotional investment in a weekend away, so there are greater expectations of every aspect of it.

The visit to a winery is just one of many experiences the visitor will have in their 48-hour stay in a wine region. Just as important will be:

- Accommodation
- Dining experiences, including cafes, takeaways, coffee
- Hospitality of operators and locals
- Variety, quality and authenticity of attractions and activities
- Ease of getting around - signage and roads - and ease of finding information and maps (that work from the perspective of a first time visitor not a more familiar local resident)
- Availability and provision of trusted, reliable advice on all of the above

If any of these components of the experience do not meet the visitor's expectations, or are of poor quality, the experience as a whole will be downgraded and the wider region will suffer. With repeat visits and word of mouth recommendation being the most important motivators for tourists, a poor experience - with for example dining - may overshadow the best efforts of the cellar door staff.

## Differences between Cellar Door and Bottle Shop

The essential difference between a cellar door in a wine region and a bottle shop in a capital city, is that the visitor to a cellar door wants much more from the visit than simply to buy a bottle of wine. They want a personal experience they cannot get at the local bottle shop back home. They also have higher expectations regarding the personal feel and attention levels of the customer service provided.

Expectations might include: that they will be able to "browse" (taste) the wines; that they will learn something in an informal, entertaining way and not feel awkward or intimidated; that they will discover a new taste sensation, a new wine to take home.

# Your guide to **Wine Tourism**

## The Cellar Door Experience 1

### What do visitors expect?

A visit to the local bottle shop is made in the context of shopping, but a visit to a cellar door is made in the context of leisure, entertainment and a holiday. The customer is in a much different frame of mind in these two places. To successfully meet the expectations of such visitors, and to make sales, the cellar door operator needs to understand this difference.

While the focus may be cellar door sales, the approach must meet the visitor's needs for education and entertainment. In operating a cellar door, a winemaker is effectively entering the hospitality industry and will benefit from considering the skills required when employing staff. The visitor wants to be engaged, to interact with the cellar door staff in a way that does not necessarily happen to the same extent (if at all) in a retail shop.

## Market demand and key appeals

In marketing terms, there is often a combination of appeals or offers that are presented before a consumer makes a value judgement and purchases a product. Wine tourism is no different.

Several triggers are required to be developed before consumers will adopt a product, and in wine tourism the winemakers can only deliver some of the long term appeals to attract these customers.

A successful wine tourism destination will position itself as a region and will have a number of key appeals:

- A well known brand or identity
- Good access, signposts and information
- Good pre-publicity and public relations
- A range of good food
- A range of good accommodation
- A range of visitor activities

It is only when the majority of these customer appeals are met that the destination attains the sustainable critical mass as a tourism destination in its own right. The wine and tourism industries must work together to make the destination successful.

## Location, Location, Location

As with any business, a vital determinant of success in attracting visitors is the location of a winery relative to the prevailing market. It is preferable if a winery cellar door is located close to a major tourism route, close to a major source market or in an existing high profile tourism region.

When considering location, competition should be viewed positively. A concentration of good quality cellar door operations that exist in close proximity to one another adds to a region's 'sense of place' and concentrates consumer interest.

Successful wine tourism operations have set their first marketing priority as "creating awareness and desire" as the precursor to any visit. This can be achieved a lot more easily with a number of wineries than by a single wine tourism operator striving to achieve the same result.

# Your guide to **Wine Tourism**

## The Cellar Door Experience 2

### Creating a Successful Cellar Door

There are hundreds of winery cellar doors in Australia. What is going to make yours memorable to the visitor? Think about the wineries or bed and breakfasts that you have visited – how many can you remember clearly? Which ones have you revisited? What makes a winery/cellar door memorable?

There are a number of ways of being distinctive and memorable for your visitors:

- The design and physical appearance of your winery/cellar door and its setting within the surrounding environment or landscape
- The ambience generated internally
- The service and atmosphere generated by your staff
- The product - the wines themselves.

In general, having only one of the above is not enough to create a memorable experience for the visitor. The wines may be very good, but if the service is abrupt, if people feel intimidated, or if the appearance of the winery is uninviting, it is more likely that either you will be forgotten in a few days, or will only be commented on negatively when your visitors are asked by their friends how they enjoyed their visit to the wineries.

Using the above information, your chances of success are far greater – and your visitors are very likely to buy more product.

## Can you read visitors?

If your staff are well trained, the visit will become memorable and the visitors' needs will be met. The impression made by helpful staff is a lasting one.

Well-trained staff will be tuned into 'body language' and be able to "read" visitors to ascertain their mood, knowledge of wine and expectations - within just a few minutes' conversation. Liking people a lot and enjoying interacting with them in the first place helps a lot here!

Once staff discover if a visitor knows a little or lot about wine, they can then anticipate their needs and expectations - in terms of possible tasting preferences and the type of questions they will want answered. A key point to remember here is 'never assume' and to 'be nice to everybody'. Never jump to conclusions regarding the purchasing potential of your visitors based on the car they drive or the clothes they wear.

In order to understand your visitors, put yourself into their shoes. Go and visit some cellar doors in other wine regions and note what you liked or didn't like about the service you received.

While wine enthusiasts are becoming more knowledgeable about wine, the increase in both overseas visitors and general tourists visiting wine regions, means that many people come through the cellar door with little knowledge and want to be guided through the tasting and the wines. If they feel comfortable, that they are learning something in a pleasant informal and fun way, they are more likely to buy. It is important to take care not to intimidate your customers as this will turn them off immediately and could cause them to leave your facility without purchasing any wine.

# Your guide to **Wine Tourism**

## The Cellar Door Experience 2

### Creating a Successful Cellar Door

#### What am I selling?

A successful cellar door staff member has said: "I don't sell wine, I just sell myself". Ask yourself - What business am I in? Selling wine? The hospitality industry? Selling an experience, a good time? Selling myself? Selling the region? Or all of the above.

A customer who buys a bottle today, may join your mail order newsletter and buy a case next month. Or they may enjoy their visit so much that they return later in the year with friends and buy much more wine. Or they may order your wine next time they go to a restaurant back home, or buy it at their local bottle shop because they remember how much they enjoyed visiting your winery.

A memorable visit to a cellar door can be the beginning of a successful transition from wine tourist to loyal customer. You want your visitors to say, "Remember that winery ..."

# Your guide to **Wine Tourism**

## The Cellar Door Experience 3

### Cellar Door checklist

## Creating a good first impression

Here are some guidelines assembled from successful winery tourism operations. Based on years of cellar door experience, it is a formula that works.

- **The Entrance** - First impressions matter. How easy are you to find? Do you have adequate signage from all major roads leading to your cellar door? You should check this with your visitors and the tourist information centre. Some visitors will have never been to your region before.
- **Signage** - Those at the front gate set the tone. The style of your sign, the information on it (such as opening hours) - all create a first impression.
- **Car park** - Mud spattered shoes do not get a winery visit off to a good start. The car park does not have to be sealed, but it must be well drained and potholes filled in regularly. "Where do I park?" is the first thing a visitor thinks of. Any difficulties with parking or confusion about where to park do not create a good impression.
- **Landscaping** - The style, maintenance and look of the landscaping also play a key role. A few barrels with some flowers are most likely forgettable. Your gardens could be a feature of your cellar door, but ensure they are well maintained.
- **The look from outside (the building itself)** - This can make you memorable or forgettable. Choose a style that reflects your product's image. It may be historic, folksy, rustic, modern, cottage, imposing, or grand, but it should be authentic. Attention to detail, creativity, functionality and innovation are more important than grand design and spending a fortune on an architectural statement. A colourbond shed could, with clever design, landscaping and layout, be exciting and welcoming, but it takes imagination and professional help.
- **Enhancing existing facilities** - If considering this, and the building has visibly become tired and run down, try using similar principles as above to renovate or revitalise it - either externally, internally or both.
- **Consistency of image** - Your cellar door design and "look" should reflect your product's image and be consistent with your brand. Spend as much time and expertise on getting your cellar door design and furnishing right as you spend on your label, especially if your cellar door is your principal retail outlet.
- **Attention to the outdoor areas** - Outside facilities, such as places for people to linger on a terrace, a place for picnics, and children's play areas should be considered. Some wine tourists travel with children and if they have somewhere safe to play outside, the parents will have more time to taste your wines, relax and buy.
- **Indoor-outdoor connections and relationships** - both visual and physical - are achieved through astute structural and design linkages (doorways, windows with a scenic outlook, etc) and should be explored to further enhance the overall feel and visual/physical flow of the place.
- **Interior Ambience** - Aim to create an inviting atmosphere upon entry to the cellar door. Include design elements and features which stimulate the visitor's senses. For example, if situated in a cold climate area, consider the merits of a hearty fire and appropriately positioned fireplace (assuming this can be achieved in a manner which does not impact on the wines). You must also not forget the other public facilities located within your winery (e.g. toilets) and ensure that they also reflect an image consistent with your overall presentation.
- **Walls** - These should have more on them than certificates or medals won at wine shows. Wall space can be used to educate the visitor on your wines in a subtle and interesting way, such as a history of the vineyard - old photos - if you have a winery with significant history and heritage.

# Your guide to **Wine Tourism**

## The Cellar Door Experience 3

### Cellar Door checklist

- **Wine information** - Information on grape varieties (posters are available from peak organisations) or make your own collation. For example, if Cabernet is your premium product, make up a Cabernet poster - why you grow it, pictures of the bunches, picking time, how the wine is made, how your climate influences the flavour - wine tourists are hungry (or thirsty!) for this type of information. Develop a montage of "A year in the vineyard" with photos and some text showing pruning, budburst, flowering/fruit to harvest and autumn colours. These can make beautiful posters and be educational. Or a montage on "How our wine is made" and a display of some items used in winemaking will make your cellar door interesting without the need to give winery tours. Articles or "What makes our wines special" posters can be used to market your leading products.
- **Using and promoting local talent** - Link up with local artists - you might have sufficient room to have a display by a local artist - ceramics, woodturning, fabrics, glass and metal works or paintings. These exhibitions could change every few months, or you might develop a relationship with one artist. Many local artists are really keen to have their work displayed (particularly with the prospect of a sale and these could also be commissionable). Local artists can also create distinctive furnishings, fittings, wall features/hangings, etc., to add character to your facility.
- **Promoting the best of the wider region** – This is another idea for making your cellar door a total experience. Photos of local national parks or scenic attractions, a display of heritage items or similar adds another dimension for visitors.
- **Considering families** - If you have room, a small children's play area of a toy box with a few toys will be really appreciated by couples with small children. They need to be able to keep their children nearby, but will not stay and taste/buy if the children get restless. You don't need to turn your cellar door into a kindergarten, and alienate other visitors, but just a small acknowledgement that small children need to be entertained may bring big rewards from their parents.

## Cellar Door staff

Cellar door staff are the public face of the winery, just as much as the winemaker. Well-trained, friendly cellar door staff will make visitors feel comfortable, help them enjoy themselves and sell more wine. Some wineries focus their staff training exclusively on the wine products that they produce. Consequently staff have excellent product knowledge but may not have learnt the professional way to greet people; handle more than one or two customers at a time; how to qualify customers (i.e. assess their interest in buying); how to elicit information by asking probing questions; and how to close a sale.

Cellar door staff training should cover the following topics:

- Dealing with Customers – including how to greet customers and how to acknowledge them when staff are busy.
- Retail Operations – including banking and stock control.
- Product Knowledge - detailed vineyard and product knowledge including varieties grown, best years, size of vineyard, wine styles produced. Tasting notes on all wines produced.
- Hospitality Service – including how to conduct a tasting and responsible service of alcohol.
- Regional Knowledge – eg places to eat, where to get good coffee, places to visit (both other wineries and general attractions in the region).
- Professional Selling – including the ability to identify and seek repeat business and establishing an ongoing relationship (eg wine club/mail order). The ability to close a sale professionally and not let opportunities go by.



Winemakers' Federation of Australia

For the Industry by the Industry

[www.wfa.org.au](http://www.wfa.org.au)