

WORKING WITH AN INBOUND TOUR OPERATOR (ITO)

Caroline Densley from **Diverse Travel Australia** offers some tips on what an ITO is looking for when working with a winery.

The role of an ITO involves some of the following:

- One-stop-shop for the overseas agent
- Provides booking/reservation services
- Provides package quotations
- Sources product and constructs packages
- Provides ground assistance for travellers

Why work with an ITO?

- Marketing your product on your behalf
- Absorbing international communication and marketing expenses
- Expertise in handling global time variations, language barriers and cultural differences
- Financial risk taking
- Providing advice in product distribution methods suitable for your business
- Approximately 70% of overseas leisure travel to Australia is directed through the inbound operator

Information an ITO needs from you:

- International clients generally plan their tour several months in advance of travel and therefore you are given ample notice of their impending visit to your cellar door.
- They tend to know wines by their regions not which State in Australia they are in. The local knowledge of the ITO is important in ensuring the itinerary is seamless and the clients are not back tracking or experiencing unrealistic days of travel. This can mean that in some instances some wineries may need to be missed.
- Often the client will request to visit a winery that does not have a cellar door and this information needs to be relayed back to the client.
- To enable the ITO to respond as promptly as possible to the wholesaler overseas it is helpful to have information already at hand.

ITOs find the following information useful

Private and personalised tastings:

- Do you offer private tastings for individuals or groups?
- If so, are they conducted in a separate room or in the main cellar door area.
- How many can you cater for?
- Is there a cost for private tastings?
- What are your gross and nett rates?
- What does the cost include?
- What does it exclude?
- Can you guarantee clients a personalised tasting experience?
- What is the recommended length of time needed for a tasting experience at your cellar door?
- What are your payment and cancellation conditions?

Food/ catering:

- Do you have a restaurant or cafe?
- If so, what is the capacity?
- Do you have a sample menu available?
- Can you offer any food such as a tasting plate to accompany private wine tastings?

General cellar door tastings:

- What are the minimum/maximum numbers you can cater for?
- Is there a charge for a general cellar door tasting?
- What are your standard hours of operation?
- Are you willing to conduct tastings outside these hours?
- Descriptive paragraph that can be used in promotional material and in client itinerary
- Contact and booking details
- What to wear (i.e. closed toed shoes if you offer winery or vineyard tours)
- Liability/ Insurance documents - proof you have the correct insurance for visitors onto your property
- Slides, photos and brochures to assist with promotional activities that may include your wine tasting experience
- Turn around time - 24 hours is recommended when bookings are requested

Overseas clients who seek wine experiences as part of their itinerary are generally quite knowledgeable about wine and are often looking for a personalised or private tasting experience. They buy their tour package with everything included and are happy to pay for a private wine tasting experience.

ITOs will make bookings for these clients whether they are coming for a private tasting or general cellar door tasting as they want their client to be expected and greeted accordingly. First impressions and quality service are key to a positive experience for a client to your cellar door. Clients who have paid for an experience will carry a pre paid voucher from the ITO (or wholesaler) and will exchange this in return for their experience.

Profile of an International Winery Visitor

Inbound Tour Operators frequently receive requests to put together individual itineraries for wine-interested overseas clients. Caroline details how the process of collecting information and designing an appropriate itinerary works.

Case Study

Country of origin:	USA
No of pax:	2
Age range:	50+
Date of enquiry:	October 2003
Date of planned travel:	March 2004

Client Profile:

- 1970 Started collecting and cellaring wines
- 1982 Became members of the Society of American Wines in Montreal, Canada
- 1983 Took a 3 week wine and vineyard tour of France with a group of California winemakers
- 1983 Started a local "Friends of the Vine" wine tasting society
- 1984 Became a member of the Society of Wine Educators
- 1986 Took a 3 week wine and vineyard tour of Italy with the same group of California winemakers
- 80's & 90's Trips to California to observe winemaking processes and visit the important wine areas of that state
- 2003 Sold 15 bottles of wine at an auction in New York City to pay for trip to Australia to learn more about Australian wines

These clients are obviously knowledgeable about wine so the first thing to do is to ask if they have any wineries of preference they would like to visit. Once this list is received the itinerary routing plan can be designed. Winery visits are a major part of the itinerary not just the odd day or two of their itinerary.

These clients would be classed as VIP and they would expect private or personalised tastings wherever possible. These clients will pay for their itinerary and its inclusions and therefore expect to have paid for any private tastings in advance.

If the ITO doesn't already have the information regarding the cellar door experiences offered, they would contact the wineries their clients wish to visit and request information on the following:

- Private tastings
- Winery and / or vineyard tours
- Opportunity to meet the winemaker
- Any associated costs
- Suggested length of time for visit

From the information they receive they would plan the itinerary and each day's timings and then make bookings at each of the wineries involved. The client profile would be passed onto the cellar door so they are aware they are receiving clients with a high level of wine knowledge. This also assists the cellar door manager to ensure the appropriate staff member is assigned to look after the clients when they arrive.

Clients will generally have a car and driver who is given the winery appointment schedule and will communicate with the cellar door if there are any last minute changes or delays as the days unfold.

Where experiences have attracted a charge, the client will have a pre-paid voucher to pass onto cellar door staff in exchange for their experience.