



## Creating a new framework for wine tourism

The Winemakers' Federation of Australia has begun a 12-month project to create a new framework for wine tourism development in Australia.

The overall aim is to *develop innovative visitor programs that deliver high quality regional wine tourism experiences*. This will be achieved through four complementary initiatives.

- Revising and updating the *National Wine Tourism Strategy* (NWTs) to respond to shifts in consumer expectations and behaviour
- Creating templates for themed wine tourism experiences, so operators can customise and deliver additional tourism activities, and a national framework against which they can benchmark their performance
- Updating business improvement and support materials (including the existing Wine Tourism Toolkit) for online delivery and integrating new programs to attract a broader range of visitors
- Delivering a comprehensive workshop program in 15 regions between November 2010 and March 2011, in partnership with state and regional wine and tourism organisations.

The project, which is due for completion by 31 March 2011, is supported by a \$226,000 TQUAL (formerly the Australian Tourism Development Program) grant from the Federal Government and additional funding from WFA and the wine sector.

WFA was one of only four applicants to receive TQUAL funding under the newly created Category 3 section for national organisations. This is a significant investment by the Federal Government that recognises how important tourism is to the wine industry and how important wineries are to the tourism industry.

There will be significant input from state and regional wine and tourism associations, with initial workshop consultations planned for May and June.

The project coincides with the re-launch of the Australian Wine Tourism Alliance (AWTA) to bring together national and state, food and tourism wine organisations to create and guide tourism strategies for the industry.

A broad-based project committee chaired by Andrew Margan, the AWTA chairman, will drive the development of the new *National Wine Tourism Strategy* to ensure input from a wide range of stakeholders, including Tourism Australia, Restaurant & Catering Australia and Wine Australia.

### Building on strengths

Australia is the only country to have invested in the development and delivery of a dedicated wine tourism program at national, state and regional level. Through successive government and industry partnerships, tourism has developed into a significant economic activity for over 1600 wineries located in 64 wine regions across Australia. Tourism has thus been a key contributor in sustaining local employment and attracting considerable tourism and infrastructure investment from the private and public sector.

With more than 70% of Australia's wineries engaged in wine tourism activities and an increasing emphasis on growing direct sales, it is now timely to re-visit the objectives of the *National Wine Tourism Strategy* and focus on the challenges and opportunities facing the wine and tourism sectors over the next 10 years to ensure a sustainable future.

Providing compelling experiences that position Australia's key wine regions as desirable destinations for business and leisure travellers, including Tourism Australia's "experience seekers", is the impetus for developing a set of themed visitor experiences that closely match the expectations of defined consumer segments. The template format will form the basis of measurable quality assurance standards that can readily fit into any national accreditation framework and will be supported by a comprehensive, customisable cellar door customer service manual.

## Addressing modern needs

Few tourism attractions can provide the kind of focal point that cellar doors potentially achieve in conveying a region's cultural heritage and uniqueness and dispersing visitors throughout the region. Cellar doors are regional ambassadors, providing general tourism information and interactive experiences that go beyond the act of simply selling wine.

Wine tourism outperformed the average annual growth for all visitor types during 2000-2006, according to Tourism Research Australia, and the number of domestic and international winery visitors increased during the same period. However, as with any tourism product, the propensity for visiting cellar doors has the potential to wane in line with changing consumer preferences. The challenge for wine tourism operators and the regions they operate within is to continually evolve the offering to maintain relevance and attract new market segments.

Visitors to cellar doors have traditionally been presented with a one-dimensional tasting experience that appeals to a narrow range of consumers. However, research indicates that the experience needs to be broadened to capture greater market share and develop cellar doors as vibrant tourism attractions that promote a "sense of place". The essence of wine tourism is the ability to provide differentiated visitor experiences within or associated with a winery. Product offerings include partnering wine with food (cafes and restaurants), art, events, local crafts and produce and other lifestyle attractions.

## The task at hand

Updating the *National Wine Tourism Strategy* is an industry responsibility that requires significant input from tourism and government stakeholders and it is this strategic framework that will drive growth in the sector over the next 10 years. Objectives outlined in the current strategy (1998-2010) have either been met or rendered obsolete due to the rapidly changing economic and tourism environment so a robust consultation process is required to formulate a relevant forward strategic plan.

The development of sector specific experiences and the supporting resources and materials to deliver and maintain quality standards is an industry priority that remains unfulfilled. Similarly, the ability for wine tourism operators to capitalise on tourism e-marketing opportunities and government-led consumer initiatives is underutilised due to the limited take-up and understanding of technology solutions.

If this gap remains, wine tourism operators will fail to keep pace with other tourism attractions that are technologically ready to take advantage of consumer campaigns thereby adversely affecting regional tourism growth.

## Further information

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