

Business of Wine and Food Tourism Conference positions industry as national asset

The first annual [The Business of Food and Wine Tourism Conference](#) saw representative from the wine, food, tourism and hospitality industry gather at Spier Wine Farm on 1 to 2 November. Here, national and international speakers shared valuable insights with the industry including international best practice; food, wine and travel trends; digital marketing; festivals and events, service excellence and training.



Matome Mbatha of Wines of South Africa says: “The conference was a much needed initiative and stimulant to drive tourism to the Winelands. The innovation shared around communicating what we have to offer, inspired me. We have made good strides towards a balanced South Africa, but it is work in progress.”

Wine tourism a national asset

“The Business of Wine and Food Tourism Conference was a wonderful opportunity for the industry to get together and debate the various facets of wine tourism, international best practice and benchmarks, getting to grips with digital aspects, and the importance of service excellence to name but a few. What I hope everyone took away from these two days, is that wine tourism is a national asset that requires commitment and strategy and very importantly, cooperation – between industries, between disciplines and also between Cape Town and the Winelands. We need each other – not only to create a successful and profitable wine tourism industry, but also to sustainably have a quality offering that will result in job creation and that will make a difference to the lives of our people and communities,” says La Motte and Leopard's Leap CEO, Hein Koegelenberg.

Investing in staff to improve the cellar door experience

Peter McAtamney of Wine Business Solutions says that 88% of direct revenue starts with a visit to the cellar door. Peter believes that one of the most important changes that could be made, in order to improve the cellar door experience, would be to invest in staff training and make the consumer the hero of the narrative. This sentiment was echoed by Felicity Carter, editor-in-chief of Meininger's Wine Business International, who emphasised that “the single most important investment a business can make, is staff training.”



Promoting a unique destination

Clay Gregory, CEO of Visit Napa Valley, shared the inspirational story behind the Napa Valley, which used wine tourism to set itself apart as a unique destination. The visionary Robert Mondavi, whose community spirit succeeded in putting Napa Valley on the map, can be seen as an example for all modern wine regions who wish to market themselves, and certainly as an inspiration for our local initiatives. He believes that the key to the success of the Napa Valley is collaboration, above all else.

Wesgro's Research Unit undertook a research study with 60 tourism experts. Their findings are very relevant to the industry. CEO Tim Harris says that it is clear from the data that the Western Cape as a wine region holds special significance in the mind of the visitor, with a demand for food and wine tourism experiences being dominant.

The key take-outs of this conference is that collaboration is everything, training is imperative and international marketing needs to be prioritised.

Peter McAtamney says: "South Africa boasts the most spectacularly beautiful winelands in the world, but it is crucial to visually promote it." When asked about the next big thing in marketing, Paula Hulley of gloo singled out short form video, stressing the importance of visual storytelling in a content-cluttered world.

The conference ended on a high note with an awards ceremony celebrating South Africa's 2017 Great Wine Capitals Best of Wine Tourism Award winners, with our own global and regional winners honoured.

The Business of Wine and Food Tourism Conference vision

“If business in the wine and food tourism industry does well, then more jobs will be created. More jobs translate into dignity for more people. This is the vision of The Business of Wine and Food Tourism Conference,” says Margi Biggs, MD of Specialised Tours and Events.

The next conference will be held at the Vineyard Hotel in Cape Town on 19 and 20 September 2017.

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