

International report gives thumbs up to SA wine industry

In its latest report on South African wine, part of which it devoted to its wine tourism, the web-based *International Wine Review* has stated that "Wine tourism is better developed in South Africa than any country we know".

The editor, Don Winkler, and publisher, Mike Potashnik, both from the US, visited the Winelands in December 2011, to evaluate the country's top premium and ultra-premium wines and, at the same time, evaluated its wine tourism. The *International Wine Review* is widely rated as one of the world's most influential opinion formers on wine.

Winkler and Potashnik write that "while the country is located far from most foreign wine lovers, it offers huge rewards to those who visit its wine country. Most wineries have excellent tasting facilities and many have superb restaurants with spectacular mountain vineyard views."

André Morgenthal, spokesperson for the Cape Town and Cape Winelands chapter of the Great Wine Capitals (GWC), which annually organises an international Best Of Wine Tourism competition, said: "That is high praise indeed, coming as it does on top of the US Weather Channel recently placing the Cape Winelands second after Andalucia in Spain on its annual list the world's top-10 wine trails."

Leading wine-producing cities and regions

The GWC is a network of the world's leading wine-producing cities and regions dedicated to advancing the standards of wine tourism. Its members, in addition to Cape Town-Cape Winelands, include Mainz-Rheinhessen (Germany), Bilbao-Rioja (Spain), Bordeaux (France), Florence (Italy), Mendoza (Argentina), Porto (Portugal), San Francisco-Napa Valley (US) and New Zealand's Christchurch on South Island.

The municipalities of both Cape Town and Cape Winelands contribute to the running costs of the local competition.

The annual competition, in which last year the La Motte estate near Franschhoek became the South Africa overall winner, has grown enormously in stature in the local wine industry as the importance of wine tourism in the Western Cape's economy increases. It is estimated that wine tourism now generates annual income excess of R5 billion, while also being a major job creator.

A major factor in the growth of tourism

The attractions of the wine industry are seen as a major factor in the growth of Cape Town's tourism, which has maintained its impetus despite the global economic slump.

Morgenthal, who is also communications manager of Wines of South Africa (WOSA), said that not only has the number of participating wineries in the competition escalated since Cape Town was inducted into the network in 2001, but also that the standard of entries had greatly improved.

"I believe it is because participants have benefited substantially from benchmarking themselves against international best practice. The quality of facilities and services offered has improved greatly. Where

choosing the winners was a fairly straightforward exercise in the early years, it now requires hours of deliberation as virtually all the entries are of such a high standard that very little separates the ultimate winner from its closest competitors."

Call to enter 2013 competition

Morgenthal encouraged local wineries to enter now for the 2013 competition. "We are awaiting entries in the seven categories in which awards are made and which include: accommodation, architecture and landscapes, winery restaurants, innovative wine tourism experiences, art and culture and wine tourism services." Entries should reach the organisers no later than 29 June. Entry forms can be downloaded from <http://greatwinecapitals.com>.

The category finalists will be announced in the spring and the name of the overall winner at a gala event in Florence on 8 November 2012.

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