

Wine promotion through tourism: understanding tourist motivation and behaviour.

Abstract

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The wine tourism industry is growing of importance both in the Old and in the New world, and it is emerging as one of the most promising segments of the tourism sector. While in the past rural tourism was considered a second-choice vacation, often undertaken by low spending tourists, this has changed drastically in the last decade. Rural tourism today is more and more a high-standard segment both in terms of services delivered and spending patterns. The discover and tasting of wine is often the main (or one of the main) motivation for rural tourism, and this calls for the adoption of appropriate strategies to exploit this potential. Two aspects are here relevant: the enhancement of the identity of wine origin places and the ability of the local stakeholders to implement an entrepreneurial approach based on an effective understanding of wine tourism demand. This opens to a series of questions related to a better understanding of tourism demand. Previous research has proved that often wine producers and local decision makers lack in awareness of tourism demand characteristics and this weakens their promotional strategies. Given the lack in awareness of tourism demand by wine producers and local decision makers this paper seeks to fill this gap, analyzing some key aspects of wine tourists.

In order to identify the main features of wine tourism demand, essential for a better territorial development through wine tourism, the focal objectives of this study are:

- (a) understanding the relationship between territorial enhancement and wine promotion through tourism;
- (b) comprehending the push and pull factors of wine tourism;
- (c) determining the willingness to pay for wine purchases and for cellar tourism;
- (d) recognizing the level of knowledge of wine producers of tourism demand.

Thus, the paper aims to highlight the key features of wine tourists and the level of knowledge of wine producers of the wine tourism market.

Two cross sectional surveys were conducted through interviews and questionnaires submitted both to wine tourists and Italian wine cellar managers. The distribution of wine cellars interviewed by regions is wide, and comprehends the most important Italian wine areas. It also roughly reflects the current wine territories' notoriety, and therefore the predictable wine cellars' presence and tourist's attendance. Distribution of tourists interviewed by regions is similar. With regard to tourists, variables at three levels are investigated: motivations underneath wine tourism; behaviour at destination also with regard to experiential components; spending patterns. The data is then crossed with the data obtained from the interviews to a sample of wine producers, in order to evaluate their level of knowledge of tourism demand.

The main results are an in depth knowledge of Italian demand for wine tourism experiences and policy implications in terms of local development of wine territories. Wine tourism has a high potential to be a valuable link among tourism, agriculture, and rural habitat. Operators and local authorities, however, should enhance such opportunities by implementing a planned development process by adopting an appropriate strategic positioning. The research shows that while having typical and high-quality food and wines is paramount in order to attract visitors, their role in terms of long-term competitiveness of rural areas may be questionable. Destinations relying too heavily just on their resources may not be able to upgrade true underlying competitiveness and a better understanding of tourism demand is key in order to provide memorable and satisfying experiences. This can help also in diversifying the offer of cellars and rural areas that seems to be quite standardized and not based on an in depth knowledge and comprehension of their demand. The right choice of means of communication, service typologies and the quality level provided, in addition to adequate price policies to contrast some growing speculation (that risks to be not sustainable in the medium-long term) seem to be the aspects to work on.