

Just here for the scenery? Chinese holidaymakers and wine tourism in New Zealand

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Abstract:

Purpose: This paper explores the potential of wine tourism to add to the experiences of Chinese short stay holidaymakers in New Zealand, and investigates the elements of a winery visit that would be of interest to Chinese visitors.

Methodology: This research is based on in-depth interviews with stakeholders with an interest in Chinese wine tourism (Chinese inbound tour operators (ITOs) and winery respondents), supported by an intercept survey conducted in Chinese with 123 Chinese holidaymakers in New Zealand. The data from these surveys was entered in SPSS and analysed using descriptive statistics, including chi-square and t tests.

Findings: At this stage the general Chinese holidaymaker has limited interest in wine tourism, however a growing proportion of them are visiting wineries, either as part of a group tour or independently. The main appeal of wineries for Chinese visitors is the opportunity to relax and enjoy the scenery, although learning about wine making, or hearing stories about wine making are of interest to visitors also. Opportunities to buy wine are less important factors for Chinese visitors than may be anticipated.

Practical implications: The needs of Chinese visitors to wineries may differ considerably from other winery visitors, so providing opportunities for relaxation, and highlighting the scenic appeal of the winery, are important strategies to attract Chinese visitors. Communicating to these visitors is critical also, given their interest in hearing stories and learning about wine.

Keywords: Wine tourism, New Zealand, Chinese consumers

1. INTRODUCTION

There is increasing recognition of the importance of Chinese visitors to the New Zealand tourism industry (Expert Advisory Group, 2012). Visitor numbers from China have experienced a rapid growth over the past decade, and in late 2012, China became the second largest source of visitors to the country (Insights Team TNZ, 2013). Chinese visitor numbers continue to increase, and in the year ending June 2015, 313,000 Chinese visitors (including 215,000 holidaymakers) came to New Zealand; a 30% increase over the previous year (Tourism New Zealand, 2015a). To date, most Chinese holidaymakers have been very short staying visitors. For example, the median length of stay of all Chinese holidaymakers is three days, due largely to the high proportion of visitors on group, or 'shopping tours'. However there are signs that this is beginning to change; while the majority of holidaymakers are still on group tours (144,000 visitors), the number of Free Independent Travellers (FITs) are growing considerably, with the 73,000 FITs representing a 60 percent increase on the previous year (Tourism New Zealand, 2015a).

The New Zealand tourism industry is committed to increasing the proportion of longer staying and higher-spending Chinese FITs to New Zealand (Tourism New Zealand, 2015a). In order to achieve this, considerable focus is being placed on improving the quality of Chinese visitors' experiences in New Zealand (Expert Advisory Group, 2012). This has included the launch in 2013 of the Premier Kiwi Partnership scheme (PKP) which offers quality assured accreditation to Chinese tour operators offering high quality itineraries (Tourism New Zealand, 2015c). Another way to achieve this objective is to shift the focus of Chinese experiences from 'shopping tours' to high quality tourist experiences, which enable Chinese holidaymakers to travel to more of the country, explore the regions and achieve more memorable holiday experiences; wine tourism experiences may offer potential in this regard.

On the surface, it would appear that wine tourism has little appeal to Chinese visitors to New Zealand. Figures from 2008 indicate only two percent of Chinese tourists visited a winery while in New Zealand (Ministry of Tourism, 2009, p. 2), and there is little indication that this proportion has increased in the past five years (Tourism New Zealand, 2014). However, there are many aspects of wine tourism that seem to closely match the interest of Chinese visitors to New Zealand, including the chance to get out into the rural landscape, enjoy clean, beautiful fresh air and meet local friendly people; all reported highlights of their New Zealand experience (Insights Team TNZ, 2013). The importance of buying gifts, and the desire to purchase high quality local produce (Expert Advisory Group, 2012), coupled with the role of foreign wine in gift giving in China (Camillo, 2012), suggest other potential synergies with wine tourism. Furthermore, evidence from Chinese visitors in the Tourism New Zealand Visitor Experience Monitor suggests that they are impressed by the good quality wine in New Zealand (Tourism New Zealand, 2012, p.9), and perhaps most interestingly, while only nine percent of Chinese visitors in this survey participated in 'food and wine events/shows', 77 percent of respondents said that they would have been interested to participate in this type of activity (Tourism New Zealand, 2012, p.19).

To date there has been little research globally on the emerging Chinese wine tourism market. This is beginning to change, with scholarly and popular articles exploring domestic wine tourism opportunities and motivations in China (Howson et al., 2013, 2014; Ye et al., 2014;

Zhang et al., 2013) and recent research on aspects of Chinese wine tourism in New Zealand. For example, recently completed Masters theses have examined the wine consumption and wine tourism experience of New Zealand Chinese residents (Deng, 2013) and the characteristics of a small cohort of female Chinese tourists who have visited a winery during their trip (Huang, 2014). Therefore, the objective of the current research project has been to explore the potential of wine tourism to engage and enhance the tourist experience of Chinese visitors to New Zealand, with this paper focused specifically on Chinese holidaymakers staying less than one month.

2. METHODOLOGY

The research for this study took two forms. Firstly, a series of in-depth interviews with key stakeholders in the wine and tourism industry was conducted to gain insight into current levels of activity and engagement by Chinese visitors in wine tourism activities, and particularly winery cellar door visitation. All Chinese Inbound Tour Operators (ITOs) who at the time of study were registered as part of the Premier Kiwi Partnership scheme were contacted, and five of the twelve agreed to be interviewed. Wineries were selected on the basis of an identifiable tourism focus in their operations (that is, a cellar door site advertised on their website) and were primarily larger operators with well-known brand names. There was some snowball sampling, whereby interviews with Chinese ITOs identified wineries they included on tours, and these wineries were then approached for interviews. All interviews were conducted face-to-face and were audio recorded and later transcribed and analysed for themes. The ITO interviews were conducted in Auckland, and winery interviews were conducted in Auckland and Central Otago.

The second part of the project was an intercept survey conducted in April 2014 with Chinese visitors in Auckland and Queenstown. In total, 240 Chinese visitors to New Zealand were surveyed, including 123 shorter-stay Chinese holiday makers (staying a month or less) and 80 longer-staying students. The survey, written in Chinese, was administered by a Chinese researcher. Respondents were asked their interest in experiencing various activities and attractions whilst in New Zealand, including wine tourism. They were asked about their experiences of wine tourism in New Zealand, and what factors were important to them for winery visitation. All data was entered into SPSS and descriptive analysis, including Chi square and *t*-tests, was conducted.

3. FINDINGS

3.1. Wine tourism stakeholders' perceptions

Findings from the in-depth interviews with stakeholders indicated that wine tourism was still of interest to a minority of the group holidaymakers who currently make up the bulk of Chinese visitors to New Zealand, with the activity of more interest to the 'high end' FIT holidaymaker and business and political groups. Lack of interest was explained by the ITOs to be due to limited knowledge or experience with wine and wine culture, the short stay of many visitors, and the fact that wine is not a key motivator for Chinese to visit New Zealand, as the following quotations attest:

I think the main priority when they come to New Zealand is still the natural scenery, that's the number one, and all the experiences of different cultures. Very small number of clients want to visit wineries (ITO-1)

Actually it depend on location because most of the people come from China they come to New Zealand for the beautiful natural scenery ..., if we change the [location], going to France, they definitely would want to go to winery, yeah. (ITO-2)

There was the perception, however, that this was beginning to change as the characteristics of visitors changed – longer stays and more travel experience in particular – and as awareness of New Zealand wine increased. Despite the relative lack of interest amongst their clients, ITOs acknowledged that winery visits often were a part of itineraries.

Unlike the Chinese ITOs, winery respondents were generally in agreement that the number of Chinese visitors to wineries was increasing, although a lack of market research meant that they were unsure whether these visitors were domestic Chinese, international students or holidaymakers. The ITOs and winery respondents were in agreement, however, that the major appeal for Chinese holidaymakers at wineries was the scenery and opportunities to take photos, rather than the wine itself:

I think first of all they enjoy the scenery, as I experienced a winery tour in Waiheke, I feel it is a very good, beautiful area and really elegant environment to enjoy, and very relaxing, and you can see very far away about the sea coast and about the vineyards. And you enjoy wine, so it is a very good experience. (ITO-2)

You know you'd start the wine tour and then some of them would just drift off, and they'll be posing and taking photos down by the lake, and then you come back here to do a tasting with them and they want to have a photo with you. I think that's part of the whole thing. They've got photos they can show people back home. (Winery-2)

Winery respondents reported that many Chinese visitors bought wine, with older visitors buying expensive red wine for gifts, while younger visitors were more likely to buy sweet white wine. Amongst these respondents there was a perception that interest in the wine, and learning about wine making in particular, was increasingly important for Chinese visitors. The Chinese ITOs felt also that with time, wine and wine knowledge would become a bigger focus of winery visits for holidaymakers.

3.2. Chinese holidaymakers' perceptions and experiences

The following findings focus on the 123 short stay Chinese holiday makers to New Zealand in the sample. It is worth noting that they differ considerably from the average Chinese holiday maker in New Zealand, in particular, they are longer staying visitors than the average holiday maker. This is partly a reflection of the location of the surveys; the average group tourist who stays in New Zealand only 2-4 days is unlikely to leave the Auckland–Rotorua area, so with 61.8% of these surveys being conducted in Queenstown, it is more likely that the longer stay holidaymaker will be over-represented. In this sample only 18.7% were staying a week or less, with 52.8% staying between one and two weeks, 22.8 were staying three weeks, and 5.7% staying between three weeks and a month. Similarly, while 27% of all Chinese holidaymakers to New Zealand are independent (FIT) travellers, 61.8% of this sample were travelling independently, with only 25.2% travelling in organised tour groups

exclusively, and a further 13% travelling in a mix of tour group and independent travel. For three quarters of respondents (76.4%) the main purpose of the trip was for a holiday. The majority of the sample were with travelling a spouse (33.3%) or family (30.9%), however 16.3% were traveling with friends and the same proportion were traveling on their own. There was an even gender split of 50% males and 50% females, and while there was a mix of age groups, the sample was generally younger than the overall profile of the Chinese visitor in New Zealand. This was a well-educated sample, with more than three quarters having either a four year degree (48.7%) or postgraduate qualification (29.1%). The largest proportion of respondents came from Shanghai (24.4%), followed by Beijing (13.8%), and Guangdong (12.2%), which reflects the profile of Chinese visitors to New Zealand overall.

Respondents were asked how interested they would be in participating in each of a list of activities available, using a Likert-scale where 1 is not at all interested and 7 is extremely interested, and the mean for these activities is presented in Table 1. It is not surprising that the highest rated activities relate to experiencing New Zealand's natural scenery (visiting a beach, scenic landmarks, scenic tour), as this is recognised as the main reason Chinese visit New Zealand. By comparison, visiting a winery or vineyard was ranked 13th out of 19 activities, which would suggest limited interest. It should be noted, however, that these holidaymakers were more interested in visiting a winery than shopping for souvenirs, participating in adventure activities, or experiencing or learning about Maori heritage and culture; all activities that are heavily promoted in the New Zealand tourism industry. Chi-square tests revealed that there were no statistically differences between those who stated an interest in visiting a winery and those who were not, although they were slightly more likely to be under 40 years of age and male. When asked why they were not interested in visiting a winery the most common reason given was that the respondent did not consume alcohol, or did not like alcohol, while other respondents said that they knew nothing about wine.

Table 1: Interest in New Zealand tourist activities (*n* = 123)

	Mean		Mean
Visit a beach	6.16	Visit museum/ historic building	4.48
Visit scenic landmarks	6.01	Learn about NZ European history	4.48
Go on a scenic tour	5.97	Visit a winery or vineyard	4.32
Take a scenic bushwalk	5.65	Shop for gifts or souvenirs	4.11
Visit an national park	5.46	Visit an art gallery	4.09
View/learn about NZ's wildlife	5.29	Participate in adventure sports	4.06
Visit geothermal sites/hot pools	5.23	Experience Maori cultural show	3.99
Visit a farm	4.96	Learn about Maori history/ culture	3.95
Experience local food and wine	4.84	Visit a casino	2.32
Go to a botanic garden or park	4.78		

When asked if they had visited a winery, or intended to visit one on their trip to New Zealand, 35.7% of holidaymakers stated they had visited, or would visit, a winery during this trip. This represents a much higher proportion than has been reported elsewhere. Of those 25 respondents who had already visited a winery, a slight majority had done so independently (57.1%), rather than as part of a tour (42.9%). Of respondents who stated they were not interested in visiting a winery (rated neutral or not interested), 34.7% had done so or intended to do so on their trip, compared to 54.5% of those expressing an interest in such a visit. To what extent a previous visit had reduced their interest, or need, for a winery visit was not investigated. Most of those who had visited a winery could not name the winery(s) in question, with only six respondents able to do so. There was more certainty about the wine region visited, with Central Otago (19 respondents), Waiheke Island (15 respondents), Auckland (10 respondents) and Marlborough (5 respondents) most frequently mentioned.

Those who had already visited a winery were asked about their satisfaction with the experience. Three quarters of these respondents (21 respondents) stated that they were satisfied with their winery visit, however only 14.3% (four respondents) gave it the highest rating of 'extremely satisfied'. The most often stated reasons given for satisfaction were the quality of the wine (9 respondents) and the scenery (8 respondents). Three respondents each expressed satisfaction with the opportunity to learn about wine and wine production processes and good service quality. Few respondents gave explanations for dissatisfaction, but one respondent mentioned lack of interest in wine. Not surprisingly, a *t*-test reveals satisfaction with the winery experience was much higher amongst those who had expressed an interest in winery visitation (5.81) than those who were not interested (4.56; $p < .01$).

All respondents, whether they had visited a winery or not, were asked to think about the factors that would be important to them if they were to visit a winery. This proved a difficult question for respondents to answer, with the interviewer reporting that those who had never visited a winery felt unable to consider the options. Others refused to answer the question on the basis that they did not drink alcohol. For this reason only 47 people answered these questions, including 22 respondents who had expressed an interest in visiting a winery and 21 who stated they were not interested.

Not surprisingly, those who expressed an interest in visiting a winery rated most factors as more important than those who were not interested in winery visits, although given the small sample sizes, in general the differences are not statistically significant. Overall, the opportunities to relax rated most highly for the sample as a whole, with this being the most important factor for those not interested in winery visits. Attractive scenery was the most highly rated feature for interested winery visitors, followed by opportunities to relax. While opportunities to taste wine is the third highest rated activity overall, for those interested in winery visits it ranks fourth behind opportunities to learn about wine and wine making, and it ranks fourth also for those less interested in winery visitors, below opportunities to hear stories about wine growing and wine making. Interestingly, given the emphasis on the Chinese propensity to buy wines as gifts and to participate in gift shopping whilst in New Zealand, there is no evidence that purchasing wine is an important factor in visiting a winery.

T-tests reveal that those interested in a winery visit are significantly more interested in opportunities to learn about wine and wine making ($p < .01$) than those with little interest. The presence of China UnionPay is more important for this group also ($p < .05$), perhaps suggesting their intention and willingness to buy wines. This group's significantly higher rating of the availability of winery restaurant suggests they are keen to broaden their winery experience. The one factor that those not interested in winery visits rated higher than the interested respondent was the need for the journey to be a short one, which is understandable given the latter's greater willingness to invest in such an activity.

Table 2: Important factors for a winery visit

	Total n=47	Interested n=22	Not interested n=21
opportunities to relax	5.00	5.36	4.45
attractive scenery at the winery	4.83	5.52	4.30
opportunity to taste wine	4.54	5.04	3.95
opportunities to learn about wine and winemaking	4.43	5.23**	3.65
hearing stories about wine growing & wine making	4.24	4.72	4.00
wines available to buy for yourself	4.13	4.46	3.70
wines available to buy for gifts	4.02	4.43	3.70
opportunities to meet the winemaker	4.00	4.57	3.65
having Chinese speakers at the winery	3.81	4.17	3.10
being able to take a guided tour around winery	3.80	4.09	3.45
wine tasting free of charge	3.77	4.30	3.26
availability of China UnionPay	3.77	4.30*	2.95
availability of an organised tour to winery	3.77	4.27*	2.90
availability of a restaurant	3.74	4.35*	3.00
easy to find the way to the winery	3.67	4.05	3.40
a short journey (less than one hour)	3.36	3.33	3.50

4. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

It seems for the general Chinese holidaymaker in New Zealand wine tourism has limited, albeit growing, appeal. This is due in part to a lack of understanding of wine, or what is involved in wine tourism, but also due to priorities while visiting this country. It is important for wine tourism providers to recognise that the appeal of wine tourism for Chinese visitors may be quite different to other markets. For example, winery visitation is less about the wine, and more about the opportunity to participate in activities for which New Zealand is well known; opportunities to relax in uncrowded natural settings, and to enjoy the scenery and take photos. For some Chinese visitors, tasting wine may be less important than opportunities to learn about wine growing and wine making, or hearing stories about wine growing and wine making. These insights provide opportunities for both wineries and tourism operators; the latter might need to better highlight the scenic features of wine tours to give them greater appeal, while wineries need to provide opportunities for Chinese visitor to relax and enjoy the scenery, and to ensure staff can communicate effectively to ensure the Chinese visitor's desire for knowledge is fulfilled— whether that be technical information about wine and wine making, or human interest stories about the winery.

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