

## **Wine Tourism and Staff Training in a Novice Wine Region: the Case of Northern Virginia**

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### *Abstract*

◦ *Purpose:* Prior research reveals the importance and interconnectedness of the tasting room experience, service quality, and tasting room staff and emphasizes the need for staff to receive training to maximize effectiveness. However, researchers and industry leaders alike assert that staff do not receive the necessary training. The objective of this paper is to understand the importance of training for tasting room staff in the novice wine tourism region of Northern Virginia.

◦ *Design/methodology/approach:* In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted in-person at 12 wineries in Northern Virginia. Wineries were selected using a judgment sampling, and information was analyzed applying an inductive approach.

◦ *Findings:* The wineries rely on wine tourism, the tasting room, and direct-to-consumer channels for 80-100% of sales. All interviewees emphasized focusing on the customer and telling their wineries' stories. The data show that the majority of the owners/operators believe training for tasting room staff is important. No one requires any wine knowledge when hiring candidates, and all provide some level of training using a range of methods, particularly shadowing and tasting. Consistent with the literature, the data indicate that more training could be offered in sales and professional selling. The study found time to be the main barrier to providing training due to the fact that all the wineries rely heavily on part-time tasting room staff.

◦ *Practical implications:* Three strategic recommendations with seven tactics are offered to help wineries strengthen their training programs.

*Key words: wine tourism, tasting room, staff, training, Northern Virginia*

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