

Making Memorable Experiences: Tour Guides in Wine Tourism

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1. INTRODUCTION

The wine tourist experience (WTE) is the result of various actors working within a tourism ecosystem (Sigala, 2019). These include organizations; the landscape; the constructed materiality of the winescape; the people (Quintal, et al., 2015; O'Neill, et al., 2002); and other aspects of local culture (Thomas, et al., 2018; Bruwer and Gross, 2017; Bruwer and Lesschaeve, 2012). While all these actors contribute to the WTE, at the core lies a sub-set who deliver the services upon which the experience is grounded; the service delivery network (Tax et al., 2013).

An actor that has a significant impact on customer experience is the tour guide (Whipple and Thach, 1988). While tourism and marketing literatures have long acknowledged the contributions of guides - and the critical role that they play in extraordinary experiences (c.f., Weiler and Black, 2015; Ap and Wong, 2001; Arnould and Price, 1993) - a review of the wine tourism literature reveals that of all the actors within the service delivery network of a wine tourism ecosystem the most under-researched is the wine(ry) tour guide.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to investigate the role(s) these wine(ry) guides play within the service delivery network of a wine tourism ecosystem.

3. RESEARCH SITE AND METHODOLOGY

The Wolfville Magic Winery Bus (WMWB) began in 2012 in the Annapolis Valley, Nova Scotia, Canada. It was North America's first double-decker hop-on hop-off wine tour experience. The tour starts in the centre of the Town of Wolfville traveling a 19-kilometre loop. The route is designed to allow passengers to visit each winery for 60 minutes before proceeding onwards. Passengers may stay at one winery for longer, re-boarding the bus on the next cycle.

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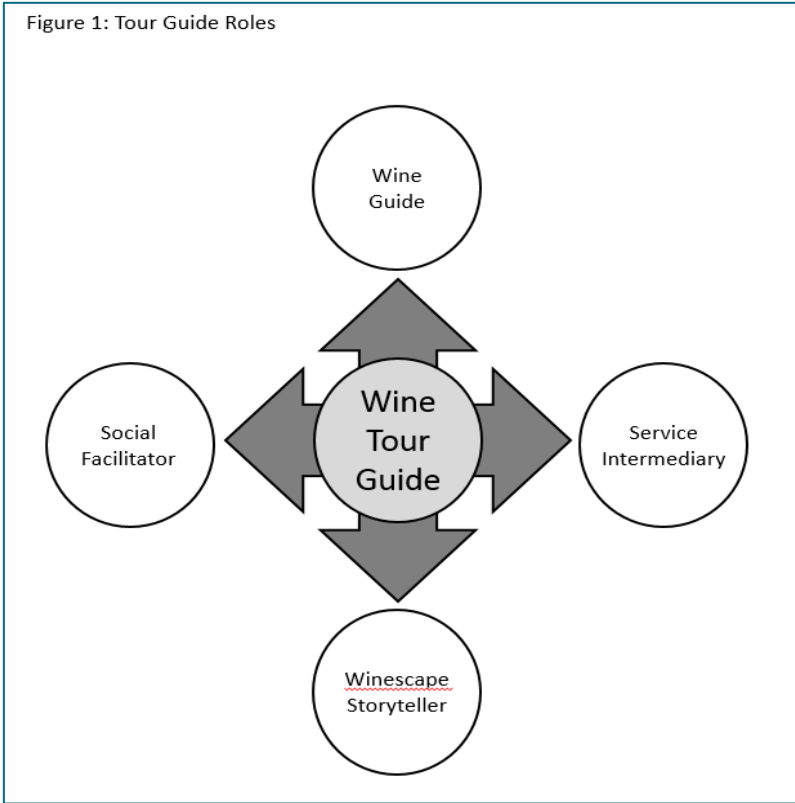
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Staff on the bus includes a driver and tour guide. The bus serves over 7,000 customers each season (Digby County Courier).

As part of a longitudinal survey (2012 – 2019) administered to the bus ridership, one question asked: “What was the most memorable aspect of your experience on the Wolfville Magic Winery Bus?” Participants were allowed an open-ended answer. A review of these comments led to a serendipitous and unanticipated finding (Campanario, 1996; Merton, 1968) regarding the roles of the wine tour guide.

4. PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

A thematic analysis of the data revealed that the tour guide fulfilled several roles (see Figure 1). An illustrative quote is used to describe each role in the sections which follow:



4.1 Wine Guide

It was very interesting learning about the production of wine, the variety of grapes grown and used in the production of the different wines. The whole experience was fun, enjoyable and relaxing. from riding on the bus, the guides, the wine and food, everything was excellent!

He made it fun and educational at the same time.

The tour guide is a source of information and expertise (Reisinger and Steiner, 2006) about local wine, winegrowing, and wine production. This is particularly significant for an emerging wine region where no printed wine guides existed.

4.2 Service Intermediary

Our terrific guide, Jeremy! He was like a juggler, handling all the groups and still showing enthusiasm for each destination and introducing the hosts as friends, as we arrived. We felt well cared for.

The link between guide service quality and customer experience (Ivens and Shaw, 2002) helps to create a sense of authenticity through real-life interpretation of the destination (Reisinger and Steiner, 2006). The way the guide communicated with tourists customized the WTE as the guide's narrative exposition connected the bus tour with each winery.

4.3 Social Facilitator

The tour guide on the bus! He's very entertaining and makes the ride memorable and fun! The drive[r] and our tour guide were always making sure that we spent as much time at each winery and made sure we were always accounted for each stop. Very knowable and friendly, keep everyone very entertained the whole day.

Guides enhance the tourist experience by facilitating social interaction (Arnould and Price, 1993), whether amongst other tourists (Nicholls, 2011) or with service providers (Prayag and Lee, 2019). The guide – through stories, sing-alongs, interesting anecdotes and recommendations – created a sense that he was not talking to tourists but rather having a conversation with them.

4.4 Winescape Storyteller

Jeremy, our tour guide was amazing. He constantly made the bus ride to and from the wineries a very enjoyable time and very entertaining as well. He was also very knowledgeable about the area and I found out a few tidbits of info that I didn't know about, and I have lived here all my life!

One important way that tour guides create memorable experiences is through storytelling (Gummerus et al., 2013; Bryon, 2012). The interactive nature of these stories lends an anecdotal feeling that customizes the experience in a way that isn't offered through a guidebook or map.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The literature makes it clear that although guides are interacting with groups (multiple individuals), effective guides manage to personalize/customize the narration and experience for tourists, creating those memory traces that are the hallmark of effectively delivered experiences (Zatori, et al., 2018; Carbone and Haeckel, 1994). Thus, guides are a critical component of the ecosystem that delivers satisfying and memorable WTEs.

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