



I've just finished the sixth James Busby Travel tour which saw 12 overseas wine buyers and journalists from the US, UK, Sweden, Norway, China and Japan travelling across three states, over a dozen wine regions and attending nearly 40 winery visits over a two-week period.

Back in 2010 when we ran the first trip, it was in response to a need to change attitudes to Australian wine on the export markets and to engage a new generation of buyers and influencers. At the time Wine Australia had pretty much stopped its wine flight program (thankfully now active again) and the downturn in the markets discouraged distributors organising trips. The flow of bodies had pretty much dried up right at the time they were needed most. The Busby model was developed in collaboration with the industry itself, and in the early days there were plenty of knockers. Many 'experts' told me we wouldn't be able to get buyers to pay for their own air fares, a central tenant of the model. This feature of 'no freebies' has ended up working in our favour, acting as a filter that ensures we only attract those people who are serious about investing in a visit to Australia and their own professional development. We're now reaping the benefit of experience and reputation by being able to attract a calibre of attendee who are usually too busy (or too important) to go on regular trips. We have more than 100 ex-Busby travellers in our Alumni community and they are the most powerful advocates of the trips and recruiters of future high-calibre guests.

There has been a noticeable rise in activity in trade trips recently, Wine Australia is bringing travellers from all markets on a regular basis, there are State-funded trips, and it won't be too long before confidence in the market and

stronger exports leads to distributors and producers putting on their own trips once again. There is a huge opportunity in the next five years to ride the wave of rising interest in premium Australian wine and to bring the next generation of opinion leaders, influencers, buyers and journalists to Australia, but we need to get much better at the job of hosting overseas visits. Here's my Top 10 checklist for those running or receiving trade visits in the coming year to avoid kicking own goals and to help ensure every visit is a 10 out of 10 experience.

1. Curation and clarity

We always ask that wineries should show no more than 12 wines to the Busby group, which over a two-week tour adds up to approximately 500 wines, not the 2,000 plus as is the case with some tours of a similar length. Our aim is that the guests are as fresh on day 12 as day two, not worn out and exhausted by a succession of swim-through tastings. It's a courtesy and kindness to edit your range and show guests a curated selection. Throwing the kitchen sink at them not only exhausts them, but sabotages their concentration and palates for the wineries and regions that follow. Guests should be asked to consider no more than 50 wines a day, any more than that and the law of diminishing returns kicks in, they simply won't be fresh enough to take it in, and crucially the chances of them remembering, and buying your wine back in market, is greatly reduced.

2. Criteria and conditions

It's an expensive exercise to host overseas visits, it's in



everyone's interests that the calibre of visitors is as high as possible. We should always be asking the question: who is coming on this trip? What criteria are set for inclusion? Does the sommelier have buying power? Does the retailer have a buying remit in their role? Does the journalist have influence? The more criteria applied at the selection stage the higher the chance of a positive commercial outcome for all involved.

3. Constructive criticism

It may be tough medicine to swallow, but asking guests exactly what they think of your wine styles, packaging and direction can be a humbling and incredibly enlightening experience. I increasingly believe that feedback from the guests, both on your wines and their market insight, is the greatest benefit that can be gained from overseas visitors, and even outweighs the commercial opportunity of selling wine to them. See it as free consultancy, from experts who know their markets best.

4. Catering and coffee

Rightly or wrongly you will be judged on the food and coffee you provide as much as your wine. Many buyers work in hospitality, they have high standards, it's a clumsy own-goal to serve low-grade coffee and a false economy to cut corners on food, but an easy win if you get it right.

5. Communicate concisely

There was a recurring complaint made by the recent group that the hosts talked too much, and didn't allow time for writing tasting notes or the space for questions to be asked. They were also frustrated by what they perceived to be a particularly Australian habit of telling them what flavours they should be tasting in the wines. The best presenters are those that can convey a clear message, concisely, and pitch their message according to the level of knowledge and experience in the group. Communication shouldn't be one way either. Hosts who make the effort to turn the switch from 'send' to 'receive' benefit greatly from the market insight provided by guests.

6. Comfort and collateral

We had a Swedish journalist on the recent Busby trip whose blog receives 20,000 views a week, and he was posting a blog a day while on tour. Those wineries who didn't provide seats or tables for him during tastings could not expect to have their wines reviewed, as he couldn't write notes directly to his computer standing up. Too many tastings are still held in uncomfortably cold – or dark – cellars, vineyard visits too long in the hot sun. Your guests will thank you if you show consideration for their physical comfort, which will provide them with the best environment to record and report what

they are being shown. Collateral should be on USB sticks, don't load your guests down with bottles or books, they all have baggage weight limits. These wine professionals carry their own tasting books, a single A4 sheet with wines to be tasted, vintage and price information is all that is needed.

7. Carafing and chilling

It's amazing how many wineries still open their reds right at the start of a tasting instead of carafing them in advance to allow the wine to breathe, or if necessary decanting them off their sediment. Similarly there's no excuse these days for using ISO glass for tasting, reds served too warm or whites too cold. We're in the wine game, guys, this should be the simple stuff.

8. Collaboration and community

Overseas visits can never be an opportunity for all. Groups cannot visit all states, all regions within a state or all wineries within a region. Corrina Wright's recent open letter in *The Week That Was* summed it up when she said there's no room for people who ask "what's in it for me". As Corrina pointed out, you are meant to be doing things for you. In organising the Busby trips I regrettably still come across wineries or regional associations that ask "what's in it for me" and mistakenly believe that what we offer is a personal taxi service not a bus tour. Egos and agendas should be checked in at the door.

9. Culture and cricket

The best wine visits are more than just wine. Since the first Busby trip, we've included dawn squid-fishing in McLaren Vale and it often ranks as a highlight of the tour. Get them on bikes, up in helicopters, sleeping on river boats, playing beach cricket, if you don't have a beach, bung cricket. Show them Australian culture, fun and plenty of sunshine, dial up the play and dial down the work.

10. Commerce vs Comms

Marketing essentially has two purposes, to change attitudes or to change behaviour. The latter means sales, and if that is the purpose then content and follow-up should reflect that. However, changing attitudes is just as important, and that's more relevant for events hosted by regional associations. Ask yourself, am I setting out to change behaviour or attitudes, then plan accordingly.

This is my last column for *WBM* (it's been a fun two years but time to pass the baton) and I'd just like to throw it out there that it might be interesting to hold a seminar to discuss best-practice for trade visits. The 10 points above are just the starting point for a discussion. If you'd like to see this happen in 2015, drop me a line at tim@jamesbusbytravel.com ■