

# Touched BY YOUR PRESENCE

The opportunities for experiential tourism, that can be charged for, are all around you. You've just got to step outside the four walls of the cellar door.

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**P**icture this. You've just arrived in San Sebastian in northern Spain for a weekend break. Food and drink is high on your menu, but which of the following options would you choose?

- a) Bag as many Michelin stars as you can. There are three three-starred restaurants in town, so you won't be short of options;
- b) Wander around the maze of streets in the old quarter, grazing on small Basque pintxos (tapas) washed down with foaming tumblers of the local white wine, Txacoli;
- c) Drive to the mountains where they are carrying out the annual pig matanza. You'll be up to your arms in blood and guts making chorizo and smallgoods and drinking rough young Tempranillo; or
- d) Try and find a pizza restaurant. It's the safest bet. You don't trust that foreign rubbish.

If you chose a) you could be described as a gourmet tourist. You like the finer things in life, but are happy to be a spectator to the main performance rather than a participant. If you chose b) you are an adventurous foodie, you want to eat what the locals eat and you don't mind taking a few risks along the way. If you chose c) you are an experiential traveller, you want to immerse yourself in local culture, meet real people and learn about their community through doing. You don't want to take a picture of your food and post it on Instagram. You want to be *in* the picture and live it.

I was asked to give a talk at the Royal Adelaide Wine Show lunch last month on the subject of experiential tourism and the opportunities for the Australian wine industry presented by this growing global trend. Many wineries don't even realise they operate in tourism, but the second you hang a sign at the end of your driveway saying 'Cellar Door' you are part of the tourism industry. However, a cellar door operation is not a tourism offering in itself, it is wine retail, pure and simple. The definition of a tourism product is one that provides the opportunity for commissionable content. In other words, you charge someone to do something, and this enables you to provide a commission for those companies working in the travel sector to send tourists your way. A good example of this would be the blending bench exercise at d'Arenberg, one of a raft of new experiences they are offering visitors, from four-wheel-drive tours to vintage biplane flyovers. Visitors to their cellar door are offered the opportunity to pay \$65 to take part in a private blending exercise, which involves a little bit of education, plenty of dry ice and lots of theatre. d'Arenberg is part of Ultimate Winery Experiences Australia, a website that was established using seed funding from Tourism Australia to sit alongside Great Walks and Great Golf as a 'best of' guide for adventurous visitors.

Seppeltsfield is also a member of the Ultimate site, and Warren Randall's stated aim is to transform the winery into a wine tourism destination; note the two words being used





together. Seppeltsfield has the ability to bring something of the MONA effect to South Australia, acting as a beacon that drives visitation to the state. Not everyone is lucky enough to have 100-year-old port to attract visitors, however. One simple solution I heard about recently for taking advantage of winery tourism is the development of the Barossa Box, a branded cardboard wine box that visitors can collect from their hotels and fill up as they tour the region. Once they've filled the box with wines from different wineries it can be posted back to their home either interstate or overseas. Simple, practical and very tourism friendly.

The definition of experiential tourism is to create meaning through direct experience. It's all about providing people with the opportunity to get under the skin of a region and learn about the culture and history through engaging with locals and local story-tellers. The concept of experiences as a commercial product is part of economic progression. Alongside premium pricing, unique experiences are an advanced form of differentiated positioning. I was chatting to Nick Baker, head of Tourism Australia Marketing, and he made the point that wine is one of the few tourism experiences where visitors can meet real Australians. One of the most exciting aspects of experiential tourism is that it's all about giving people authentic experiences, not necessarily luxury with a capital L. I've been doing a fair amount of work in this area recently with my newly-established wine tourism company, Vineyard Safaris. I spent last summer







taking journalists and travel agent partners on tours to develop the product, mainly in the Barossa Valley. The visits that got the agents and journalists most excited weren't necessarily the big-name wineries or fine-dine restaurants. It was sitting around the kitchen table at Hutton Vale drinking their Eden Valley Riesling, listening to John and Jan Angas talk about their organic lamb farm and ancestry going back six generations to George Fife Angas himself. Or sitting in ratty old arm-chairs in Marco Cirillo's wine shed, drinking Grenache from some of the oldest vines in the world, eating pizza made by his Italian mother using a 300-year-old recipe. I was with a travel agent from New York who specialises in ultra-high-end travel, her guests usually fly into Sydney and do only the five star circuit: Wolgan Valley – Southern Ocean Lodge – The Lousie – Qualia – out. She said that punching down a vat of Grenache and eating homemade pizza in Marco's shed was exactly what her mega-wealthy guests were looking for. To know they are far off the beaten path, beyond the coaches, crowds and cellar doors, that they're being treated more like friends than customers.

This aspect of experiential tourism, where authentic and personal is valued more highly than luxury, offers huge opportunities for Australia and its wine regions. As I said to the audience at the Adelaide lunch, suddenly the whole state offers a commissionable tourism opportunity, from the Fleurieu to the Flinders. This all ties in nicely with the recently-launched Restaurant Australia campaign by Tourism Australia. Wineries can go into the Restaurant Australia website and upload their own food and wine offering via 'Share your Business Story'. If you do this, remember that effective tourism products require more than just a retail offering. Ask yourself if your product offers one or more of the following

experiential touchstones: education, escapism, entertainment or aesthetic. One of the fundamental aspects of a successful experiential experience is that it involves all five senses, not just tasting, but also talking, touching, smelling and listening. The more of the senses engaged, the more likely the person is to remember the experience, and creating unique memories is the currency of experiential tourism. People no longer want to show their friends their holiday snaps, they want to talk about the unique experiences they had.

Part of the challenge in developing experiential tourism experiences is opening your eyes to the aspects of your surrounding environment that you may take for granted. I was in Victoria recently putting together an experiential tour for a journalist from the UK. I was at Mount Mary, planning a visit with Sam Middleton, and looking out over the beautiful mature vineyard that runs down to a dam. I asked Sam if there was anything in the dam. "Oh, just yabbies," he said. Bingo! We'll get our journalist to go yabbing after the wine tasting, which we'll then cook later on a bush BBQ. Similarly, I was down on the Mornington Peninsula where Julian Hills, chef at Paringa Estate, will be taking our guests on a walk along Merricks Beach to forage for sea spinach, warrigal greens, rock samphire, pig face succulents, beach parsley and sea mustard. We'll then cook up some fish we've caught that morning on a flat rock on the beach, and wash it all down with a glass of Pinot. The chances of our journalists being wowed and remembering the experience, as well as understanding the regional offerings, is significantly higher than if we'd just taken him to a cellar door and restaurant. The opportunities for experiential tourism, that can be charged for, are all around you. You've just got to step outside the four walls of the cellar door. ■

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