

GWC Report

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In October last year, I travelled as part of the Hawke's Bay contingent to the Great Wine Capitals AGM in Lausanne, Switzerland. Our delegation included Hamish Saxton (Hawke's Bay Tourism, C.E.O), Rachel Campbell (Hawke's Bay Tourism and GWC Project Lead), Alwyn Corban (Councillor, Heretaunga Ward), Chandré Honeth (E.I.T, Lecturer - Viticulture & Wine Science). My role was to represent the interests of Hawke's Bay Winegrowers.

The AGM was the first since the beginning of the pandemic, and for many of the other regions, it seemed like a reunion of sorts but also an opportunity to formally announce Hawke's Bay as the 12th Great Wine Capital.

In the opening days, delegates from other regions shared their perception of Hawke's Bay, which was perhaps more akin to that of New Zealand as a whole. Green and clean. There was a lot of interest surrounding our approach to sustainability, and many were fascinated and intrigued by the integration of Māori ideas and language in our communication and approach to sustainability.

Whilst the network has a strong focus on promoting wine tourism, there was an emphasis on information shared between member regions in terms of Viticulture, Oenology and strategies to deal with natural disasters (fire, drought and storms being the main focus for this year). Being able to get in touch with winegrowing bodies in Napa Valley, Bordeaux, Barossa Valley, etc to share ideas and ask questions will be incredibly valuable if we utilise it. I heard from many delegates that the association would give you as much as you put in. So, we will have to work on how to best exploit this knowledge resource to benefit our region.

The tasting component is where I believe Hawke's Bay indeed left its mark on the other regions. Knowing many of the regions, I was surprised that many did not show premium examples of their wine. When other delegates, government officials and media from the various nations involved came to our table expecting Sauvignon Blanc and were greeted with Chardonnay, Syrah and Bordeaux Reds, they were surprised. The genuinely satisfying part was watching the astonishment at the quality of the wines we had on show. We know that Hawke's Bay is a world-class wine region, and it was very rewarding to convert the calibre of attendees who were there as well.

The final day of the AGM was a conference day, covering topics from tourism, marketing, viticulture, technology, and more. I took quite a few notes on the day, which I am happy to share with members who would like to get in touch - but for those of you who have Cellar Doors and tourism operations, I thought I would share some key takeaways from the conference day:

Innovation in Wine Tourism

- Focus on your region – what you make – in your language; do not compare yourself to other regions.
- Showing the effort that goes into wine production – pushes cellar door sales up. People are willing to pay a premium when they better understand the work that goes into the production of a bottle of wine.
- Showcase other facets of the region tied to wine – ie food production. Consumers are looking for an experience – blending these all together helps.
- Spending time walking vineyards – not done enough by many wineries (we focus on cellar door and winery for visitor experience, but do not get people walking in the vineyard). This is an experience for consumers.
- More focus on the wine production side – people find this more interesting than you would think.
- Associate vineyard walks with other local products, gastronomy and wine.
- Serving amazing bread + cheese with tastings – something guests do not expect as a pleasant surprise. This generosity can also convert further sales.
- Invite people to come during harvest to also share in the other amazing produce that is being harvested at that time. Most crops are coming in around the same window of time, so the richest story-telling opportunity for a region each year. It is hard to provide a robust tourism offering during harvest, but it is what most fascinates consumers.
- Involve your staff in multiple facets of the business to make them better storytellers.
- Make people emotional – tell stories with emotion.

There are a few more developments that have come off the back of the AGM, which we will announce shortly and an exciting partnership with a global wine education platform which will greatly increase awareness of Hawke's Bay wines abroad.

For growers and producers, please feel free to familiarise yourselves with the other Great Wine Capitals and share any questions/contact requests you may have of some of the other regions. Many of the issues we are facing here are affecting other regions in the network, and there could be valuable insights to be shared across borders.

David Peabody
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