Key drivers of success for wine tourism in Burgundy: Comparison between Côte d'Or & Beaujolais

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According to the OIV (2013), France is the world’s top tourist destination, with 83 million foreign tourists in 2012. Strangely, wine tourism in France is clearly under-developed as mentioned by the ‘Dubrule Report’ (Dubrule, 2007); there is a lack of cooperation between the hospitality and the wine industry; a lack of knowledge about the wine tourist profile; a lack of professionalism in welcoming wine tourists; a lack of coordination within the private sector. "Atout France" (2010) underlines that the typical wine tourist in France is affluent and influential. This suggests that wine tourism in Côte d'Or and in Beaujolais is clearly under-developed but there is a huge potential to exploit it.

The purpose of this research is to explore the assets and weaknesses of both sub-regions in order to suggest some improvements to the wine tourism offer. Data collection is based on a series of in-depth interviews with key wine tourism stakeholders (Beaujolais: 7; Côte d'Or: 11).

The findings suggest that the key assets of Côte d'Or are: an awareness of famous wine appellations and producers and gastronomy, location, high-profile wine events, a great choice of tour options and some dynamic private initiatives. However, the region also has some weaknesses: no international airport in Burgundy, the “elitist” image of its wines, a complex system of appellations and the difficulty of having a wine-tasting at a producer. Further, there is no mass-market wine tourism site.

Like in Côte d'Or, wine tourism in Beaujolais is under-exploited, though the region holds many strengths: beautiful landscape, strategic location near Lyon, great gastronomy, rich architecture and improving wine quality. As drawbacks, we can notice: a lack of top-class
accommodation, a lack of research on the profile of wine tourists, no regional organization developing wine tourism. The image of Beaujolais Nouveau as easy-to-drink, low-quality wines has also probably damaged its reputation.

For both sub-regions, wine tourism activities are limited due to a lack of staff, a lack of time (small family businesses are busy with the production of wines), a lack of expertise in the hospitality industry and a lack of command of foreign languages. Further, some small wineries mainly see wine tourism just as an alternative distribution channel and only start a wine tourism activity with that objective.

As a conclusion, Beaujolais may have an even bigger wine tourism potential than Côte d'Or, the difference being that Beaujolais wines are more difficult to sell than Côte d'Or wines, so they are more open to wine tourism. In the past, Beaujolais wines were as prestigious as those of the Côte d'Or [Catalogue Nicolas, 1937]. Wine tourism could remedy the poor image of an appellation as it can lead tourists to discover a region and then its wines. While discovering a beautiful region with many assets, tourists may change their perception of Beaujolais wines.

On the other hand, Côte d'Or should invest more in infrastructure given the amount of visitors they welcome every year in order to better meet their expectations.
References


Atout France 2010 - Qualitative Survey on the French wine tourist profile
