

Ithaca 2018 Abstract Submission

Title

Investigating the challenges and opportunities for wine tourism in Florida: A multi-stakeholder approach

I want to submit an abstract for:

Conference Presentation

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Keywords

wine tourism, Florida tourism, Florida wine, experiential tourism, wine marketing, purchasing behavior

Research Question

What are the various stakeholders' attitudes and opinions regarding Florida wines and wine tourism, and what challenges and opportunities do they present for the development of wine tourism in Florida?

Methods

On-site and online surveys were developed for Florida winery owners/staff, Florida wine tourists and potential tourists, and residents living near wineries. CFA and SEM are used to analyze the data.

Results

Florida wines face challenges, including lack of clear brand identity, and poor promotion, distribution, and perceived quality. Opportunities exist to further develop the wine tourism image and experience in Florida.

Abstract

Wine tourism has attracted the attention of both practitioners and academics since the 1990s due to its potential for sustainable economic and social development of destinations (Hall & Mitchell, 2000). Although some researchers warn about the costs of wine tourism that also apply to any type of tourism (e.g., Skinner, 2000), the majority of attention has been on its potential benefits to the community (e.g., Dodd, 1995; Hall & Mitchell, 2000).

Naturally, wine tourism has received more attention in places where the terroir enables the growing of *Vitis Vinifera* wine grapes, e.g., California. Even though other regions, such as Florida, do not have the climatic conditions to become major wine tourism destination, they may nonetheless possess high potential for wine tourism to add diversity to the tourism product. Florida currently has 30 state-certified farm wineries, which must be open to the public for tours, tastings and sales for a minimum of 30 hours per week (Florida Department of Agriculture, and Consumer Services, n.d.) and a number of major wine festivals and events. Besides traditional grape wines, Florida wineries produce wines from the native varieties of the *Vitis Rotundifolia* (also known as

Muscadine) grape species, as well as from other locally grown fruits such as blueberries, pineapples, and mangos. Wine was first made from Muscadine grapes at Fort Caroline, present-day Jacksonville, by French Huguenots in 1564 (Brown, 2015), thereby making Florida the first wine producing state in the United States. Given Florida's popularity as a tourist destination both domestically and internationally, it already has the necessary elements to develop a unique brand with wine tourism experiences alongside its other better known sun, sand, sea and attraction tourism products. Such development will not only increase the diversity of the state's tourism offering, but will also provide the opportunity for cultural, heritage, and rural tourism development in areas where economic regeneration is much needed.

However, the potential of wine tourism will not be actualized unless the winescape in relation to consumer experience, motivation and decision-making is understood. The purpose of the current study is to investigate the attributes of the Florida winescape from different tourism paradigms such as rural tourism, slow tourism, culinary tourism, consumer experience tourism, agritourism, ecotourism and heritage tourism. Different attributes of winescape may play varying levels of importance in tourists' motivations and decisions to choose to visit wineries and their experiences with the wineries they visit.

The current study surveys the major stakeholders (including potential wine tourists) in order to define Florida's important winescape attributes from different tourism paradigms, in relation to tourist motivation, decision-making and visit experience.

Methods:

Four stakeholder surveys were developed for the following populations: Florida winery owners/staff; residents living in close proximity to a Florida winery; Florida wine tourists; and potential Florida wine tourists. The surveys were constructed based on qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews with Florida winery owners, as well as the adaptation of a number of scales including servicescape, winescape, wine tourist typology, and incorporating multiple tourist paradigms.

The surveys are designed to investigate perceptions of Florida wines and expectations of wine tourism experiences in general compared to those offered in Florida, consumer (both current and potential visitors) perceptions about wine tourism opportunities offered in Florida, specific winescape attributes of Florida in relation to tourist motivation, decision-making and visit experience of wineries, and Florida wine tourist typology. An on-site survey with actual consumers of Florida wineries and wine festivals is being conducted to collect data about visitors' perceptions of wine tourism in Florida as opposed to other well-known wine tourism destinations such as California. An online survey is being conducted to collect data about potential visitors' perceptions of wines and wine tourism in Florida.

Surveys to winery owners/staff allow for the identification of differences in perceptions (or "disconnects") between providers of the wine tourism experiences and consumers of wine tourism experiences, while resident surveys highlight attitudes and opinions of those who live close to wineries open to the public. CFA and SEM are used to analyze the data.

Results:

Preliminary indications show that Florida wines face a number of challenges, including lack of clear brand identity, and poor promotion, distribution, and perceived quality. This, in turn, impacts tourists, who are generally unaware of the existence of Florida wines and wine tourism offerings. Some resistance to the expansion of wine tourism destinations by residents living in close proximity to wineries has also been noted.

Discussion:

Opportunities exist for Florida wineries to work together to create a cohesive brand image, to develop regional wine trails, to upgrade the wine tourism experience, and to raise the image of non-Vinifera grape wines and other fruit wines. Florida's Muscadine and fruit wines should not be seen as competing with Vitis Vinifera wines, but may be offered to Florida's diverse tourist population as an interesting local alternative.

The findings of this study have important implications for Florida's wineries, which are eager to increase their tourist numbers, as well as for the diversification of the state's tourism product as an alternative to its traditional sea, sun, sand and attraction offerings.

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