

# WINE TOURISM AS THE KEY TO BUILDING UP A SUCCESSFUL WINE BUSINESS

CONFERENCES

Sarah Jane Evans  
Rajeev Samant

14

2016 BRWSC 北京·房山 国际葡萄酒大赛  
2016 BEIJING FUNHILL INTERNATIONAL WINE & SPIRIT COMPETITION

Wine tourism has been a buzz concept in the wine industry for several years now but often fails to deliver the all-round experience visitors are keen to partake in. Master of Wine **Sarah Jane Evans** and **Rajeev Samant**, founder and CEO of Sula Vineyards in India, provided a pragmatic approach to a business that can yield substantial rewards, when properly executed.

Wine tourism has emerged as a very effective tool for overcoming the intimidating aspects of wine appreciation, provided the experience is authentic and the welcome sincere and tailored to individual needs. Crossovers with complementary products and industries such as local cuisine and crafts help broaden the experience and create the all-important, long-lasting memories that will in turn lay the

groundwork for customer loyalty. Sarah Jane Evans MW offered a host of tips to would-be wine tourism providers including the need to supply food, to cater for all types of guests including children, to keep the experience intimate irrespective of visitor numbers, to offer a range of distinctive experiences as wine buying itself is not top priority, and to remember practical aids such as signposts. In return, wine tourism offers higher margins, quicker returns and the chance to try out new packaging and styles without the obstacles of conventional distribution channels. But it only works if the best conditions are offered – a smoke-free tasting room, freshly-opened bottles, right serving temperature etc – trained staff provide a good experience and visitors know where to buy the wines after the visit.

## Sula pioneers the wine tourism experience in India

Award-winning Sula Vineyards has already put this advice into practice and welcomed 230,000 guests in 2015. Its CEO Rajeev Samant recommended visits to pioneering wine tourism facilities across the world to seek ideas and adapt the best examples to one's own winery. Located 3 ½ hours from Mumbai, Sula offers a multi-pronged experience ranging from winery tours and winemaker tastings, to hotel accommodation, restaurants, bottle and gift shops and even an amphitheatre for bespoke events. These include the now famous Sula Fest which began with 200 friends and family and now attracts thousands of visitors annually. The event illustrates savvy use of social media whereby limited but free access to the internet allows Sula to collect contact details for its client base. The company now boasts 25,000 followers on Instagram and estimates its PR and marketing savings from astute use of social media in the range of \$1 million. Minimal entry fees of \$3 for

tastings also contribute to cost-effectiveness and help pay for the infrastructure required to develop wine tourism. The fees also enhance the value of wine tasting, claimed Rajeev Samant, who stressed the importance of the winery setting – at Sula the surrounding vineyards are farmed organically and foliage is managed so as to create the best effect. In a country where huge chunks of the population live in large cities, the attraction of vineyards and wineries provides considerable scope for development. And Rajeev Samant is not likely to be passing up those opportunities.

