

ASIA : RISING DOMESTIC CONSUMPTION SPURS NEW INTEREST IN LOCAL PRODUCTION

With wine consumption in Asia outstripping the pace of growth elsewhere in the world, the potential to develop a local wine industry is compelling. **Sumedh Singh Mandla**, the current chair of the Asian Wine Producers Association, presented the new face of Asian wines.

The AWWA, which was established in 2013 at the Hong Kong International Wine and Spirits Festival, is designed to bring together premium wine producers from across Asia and promote awareness of its members' products throughout the global wine community. There are currently two criteria for membership: producers must make 100% grape wine; and the grapes must be at least 80% locally grown. Whether quality standards are introduced at a later date is still up for debate but the emergence of new wine growing regions in Asia has prompted the

need for a collective organisation. Sumedh Singh Mandla, who is also CEO of Grover Zampa Vineyards in India, identified 13 distinct wine producing regions across the continent, spearheaded by Japan, China and India. The latter two mostly focus on their sizeable, and growing, home markets but despite this domestic predisposition, significant possibilities exist for export growth.

Sumedh Singh Mandla also highlighted the potential to develop East Asian wines under the 'New Latitude' label, mostly in regions that historically produced opium. Despite the challenges posed by tropical climates, wine production outside the traditional latitudes can be successful, he claimed. His statement is borne out by the achievements of producer regions such as India, Japan, Thailand and Indonesia.

Asian cuisine as a vector for raising awareness

Despite a centuries' old wine producing culture, India has only produced modern wines since the 1980s. Present-day wine production centres mainly on Nashik and Karnataka with most of production concentrated in the west and south-west of the country.

Although India boasts 100,000 hectares of vineyards, only 2% are dedicated to wine grapes, underscoring the potential for growth. As with many burgeoning wine industries, French varietals were originally selected but now grapes from elsewhere are grown, including four native varieties used mostly in mid-range products. Domestic consumption has a strong red focus (61%) followed by 33.8% white and producers export to 30 countries.

As is the general rule across Asia, traditional wines and spirits along with beer dominate the market in Indonesia. Here, Bali is home to five wine producers, three of which import their juice and two of which belong to AWWA.

Wine production is more embedded in Japanese culture where wines have historically been produced in Yamanashi. Despite sometimes extreme weather conditions, the country is home to over 230 wine producers who grow the greatest variety of grapes in Asia. The second-oldest wine producer on the continent, Japan has the highest per capita consumption in East Asia (4 litres). Only 30% of wine consumed is domestically grown, making Japan the second-largest wine importer in Asia.

Farther south, in Thailand, national wine production also accounts for 30% of consumption. The country's 12 wineries form a young, but high-quality industry that still lacks awareness but is promoted through wine bars. AWWA aims to generate greater attention for the continent's wines and use Asian cuisine pairings to promote local products, region-wide and globally.