

# Wineries & vineyards spell magic for Indian vacationers

Gouri Agtey Athale  
PUNE

**T**HE wineries of California's Napa Valley attract some 4.7 million visitors every year. Sonoma, a neighbouring county, attracts far fewer wine tourists, but both represent a category of tourism that spells big bucks for the vineyards and wineries.

It is something wineries located close to Nashik, a five hour drive from either Mumbai or Pune, are seeking to replicate. After all, Sonoma comprises a 17-mile stretch with 40 wineries, while the better known Napa Valley has 43,000 acres of planted vineyards, home to over 340 wineries.

The Nashik region is the closest approximation to this—Just the best known area, Dindori, houses 25 wineries and more coming, including, Diageo and Seagrams among the biggies. Several political and industry majors are also buying land in the region, with plans to set up wineries. Neighbouring Dindori are the areas of Gangapur, home to Sula, which started the wine tourism business, and Niphad and Pimpalgaon, also known for their grapes hence their wines.

The district is gearing up for wine tourism. In fact, the Niphad-based Vintage Wines' director, Yatin Patil, said they have begun doing it already. "We have tied up with a tour operator, and will start the tours in the coming season, by which time our wine bar will also be ready. We have started to work it out and our guest-rooms will be done in the second phase, in another couple of years," he said.

Meanwhile, a website details a

two-day itinerary for wine tourism, covering the Sula Vineyards, at Gangapur, and Vintage Wines at Niphad. Overnight stay is in Nashik, and the two day stay has been priced at Rs 6,000 per head. Included in this is transportation to and fro, several meals, guided tours of the two wineries, complimentary wine at the vineyard and discounted prices on wine bought at the winery.

Ranjit Dhuru, Aftek System's chairman and managing director and chairman-CEO, Chateau D' Ori Winery Pvt Ltd—



another addition to India's growing league of technocrats-turned-vintners—pointed to the significance of the last point.

"Wine sales in consequence to a visit to the winery are very profitable, they are almost as much as F&B sales," he said. By one estimate, a successful wine tour can lead to sales of as much as Rs 25 lakh per month at the winery. One reason is that often limited batches are retailed at just two locations—fine dine restaurants or at the winery. Then, there is the

additional revenue coming from sale of ancillaries like corkscrews, decanters, glasses for different wines—the curio shop business.

Mr Dhuru added that for the new world wine-making countries like the US, Australia and now India, wine tourism is an additional revenue stream. In the mature, traditional wine making regions of Europe, notably France and Italy, a visit to the vineyard, winery and wine tasting are all complimentary. "Among the traditional wine making countries of Europe, all you do is take an appointment and go to the winery. There are no fees. The newer countries have taken the route of turning this into a revenue centre and it is turning out to be profitable, even as they educate consumers, dispel myths about wine making and build brands," Mr Dhuru said.

Keeping this revenue model in mind, wine makers are trying to get the Indian Railways' Deccan Odyssey to include Nashik as a wine stop on its tour through the region. The other step, Mr Dhuru said, is to have a Wine Board which would classify and set standards for wine. This would ensure that wine makers maintain their standard and retain their classification.

While Sula kicked off the wine tourism move, none of the others are lagging far behind. Mr Dhuru's Chateau D' Ori will have a tasting room built on the hillside, offering a panoramic view and in a couple of years, a "small, 20-room luxury hotel which could be managed by a big name chain, as an exclusive getaway." Some of the wineries are not even talking of tie-ups with hotels, since the business hotels in Nashik, like the Taj, are already sending bus loads of their guests to these wineries.

[gouri.athale@timesgroup.com](mailto:gouri.athale@timesgroup.com)