

## **Wine tourism, a constantly growing activity**

Tourism has come to be one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world, experiencing average annual growth of more than 6% over the past sixty years.

Currently, the business turnover of tourism equals or exceeds that of oil exports, food products or automobiles, thus positioning itself as one of the main sources of revenue for many developing countries. It is for this reason that, in our country, the public sector and the private sector support the strengthening of tourism as a tool for economic growth and the generation of local resources.

The contribution of tourism to economic activity worldwide is estimated at about 5%. Its contribution to employment tends to be slightly higher in relative terms and is estimated at between 6% and 7% of the total number of jobs worldwide (direct and indirect).

Wine tourism is a consolidated reality in several countries, generally, in those that occupy the top positions in tourism and wine production. In recent years, it has developed as a complementary means for creating jobs and generating wealth in emerging destinations. The creation of new destinations to compete with traditional sun and beach destinations makes it possible to increase incomes in inland areas and prevent the migration of the population from rural areas.

In the Province of Mendoza, which accounts for 70% of national production and about 85% of the bottled wine sales, we have in recent years spearheaded wine tourism development projects that link the public and private actors of both the tourism and wine sectors. Mendoza produces more than seventy percent of the country's wine and it has a strong identity related with wine. Its wine serves as a brand and draws attention to its origin. This means that on every bottle of Mendoza wine we sell to the world, the origin is stated on the label, constituting an invitation to visit our region.

In Mendoza, we believe it is important to encourage intersectoral collaboration among wineries, tourism providers and governments, from a systemic perspective, and to promote the linking of the different actors of the wine tourism process. For us, it is essential to promote the entrepreneurial attitude of micro and small entrepreneurs not only in the wine industry but also in tourism, gastronomy and all those who are involved in this activity, so that they can carry out their own projects and offer experiences that reflect the identity of our wine regions.

The goal of the wine provinces, led by Mendoza, is to position wine tourism in such a way so as to contribute to the growth of tourism and wine marketing, because behind every bottle of wine, there is a producer, a family. Wine tourism has allowed producing provinces to win a space in Argentine tourism that they previously did not have. This made it possible to generate genuine employment and wealth by conducting a policy in which the state and the private sector are together. We work every day towards making Argentina touristically identified with wine. Wine tourism is based on the extraordinary presence of vineyards and wineries, with all the magic and history that surrounds wine.

It was almost 20 years ago that we started to develop the *Caminos del Vino* wine routes in Mendoza, and when Mendoza wineries began to open up to tourism. From the beginning of the last decade, we were able to unite the public and private sectors under a single strategy. We understood that the old concept of visiting a winery was outdated. Establishing a development strategy for the wine routes required not only considering the visit to the winery or wine establishment, but also building an integrated product based on its own identity, with elements such as culture, heritage, history, landscape and local customs.

Today, Argentina has many entrepreneurs and destinations offering attractions related to wine tourism. We also see that the national Ministry of Tourism considers it a priority product for both domestic

and international tourists. The high potential of Argentina and Mendoza as a destination for the development of wine tourism prompted President Macri and my provincial government of Mendoza to declare it as a priority in conjunction with the private sector.

Thanks to the growth of our country's wines, the destination has won markets by positioning itself through quality, the diversity of its products and the joint efforts of the public and private sectors.

Today we are happy to see that over 200 wineries have opened up to tourism and more than 50 wineries have restaurants, with some also offering accommodation. We have wineries with top-notch hotels, inns and lodgings.

In the Province of Mendoza we have positioned wine tourism as the main thematic element of the tourism offerings of Mendoza. Wine helped our province to position itself among the main destinations of Argentina. Mendoza was not one of the most preferred destinations for Argentines, and even less among foreigners. Although the Province promoted the destination, the products offered did not have a leadership position over other competing destinations. With wine tourism leading the way, Mendoza achieved a leadership position from which to generate a potent attraction.

Travelling through these routes, tourists delight in the landscape of manicured vineyards at the foot of the Cordillera and are surprised by the contrasts between industrial winemakers, equipped with leading-edge facilities and technology, and artisanal producers (small cellars tended by the producers themselves), which constitutes a unique experience for tourists.

The wine tourism products on offer make it possible to get to know the processes of planting, harvesting and wine-making, as well as to sample the fresh grapes and the finished wines. This tourism product includes accommodation infrastructure and gastronomy offerings near the vineyards.

Mendoza has been growing and it continues to do so steadily since the beginning of the last decade, with at least twofold growth in all tourism-related indicators and lifting itself up to a strong position in Argentina. There has been growth in supply, with quality products, and increasing interest among foreign visitors. The success of Mendoza has spread to the other producing provinces and today we have a country that boasts a great variety and a wealth of wine tourism offerings.

The results have been very positive. Today, our *Caminos del Vino de Argentina* wine route is visited by about a million and a half tourists, of which two-thirds come to Mendoza and one in four are foreigners, mainly from the United States, Brazil and South America and Europe.

Growth between 2004 and 2015 was more than 200%. In 2004, 62 wineries opened in Argentina, and now the number is more than 200.

As for arrivals of Argentines and foreigners, we can say that 73.5% are domestic visitors and 26.5% are international, mostly from Brazil and the United States.

The success of wine tourism in Argentina is the result of the commitment and joint efforts of all public and private institutions of the tourism and wine sectors, which provided technical and financial support—a fact that set a precedent at the national level. Above all, this success has been due to the beauty and quality of our wine industry.

After having shared views with all the participants these days at this 1st Global Conference on Wine Tourism, I must admit that it was an excellent initiative on the part of the UNWTO and of all those responsible for the decision to hold the first conference on this type of tourism in Georgia. Undoubtedly, 8000 years of wine-making history makes Georgia the “cradle of wine”, as archaeologists have well proclaimed after in-depth study of this wonderful place and its ancient vineyards. Georgia is on UNESCO’s list of intangible cultural heritage

and is synonymous with the genesis of wine, which makes it an ideal launching point for this type of meeting on wine tourism.

This inaugural conference held in this country with so much history and such a wealth of culture and heritage, with its ancient castles and churches, with such hospitable hosts... leads us now to invite you to hold the second conference in a region where "New World wine" is produced, and as Mendoza is one of the select 9 Great Wine Capitals of the world, and naturally, the main wine-making province of Argentina, it would be an honour to host the second conference on wine tourism in 2017.

Holding the conference on wine tourism in the New World next year will once again allow us to share knowledge, experiences and best practices related to wine tourism, which mobilizes so many tourists each year seeking precisely those experiences and those products that will provide them with unforgettable sensations, such as wine and gastronomy. These tourists are increasingly interested in wine tourism, and are visiting traditional wine regions of the Old World, those of the New World, and also remote corners of the world where there is innovation and wine production.