

# Optimism for wine tourism in the Western Cape

Michael Ratcliffe, chairperson of the Stellenbosch Wine Routes board has expressed strong optimism regarding the future of wine tourism in the Western Cape. Speaking ahead of the eighth annual Wine Tourism Conference, Ratcliffe shares his positive outlook on the evolving dynamics within the wine industry.



Source: Supplied

Michael Ratcliffe, chairperson of the Stellenbosch Wine Routes board has expressed strong optimism regarding the future of wine tourism in the Western Cape. Speaking ahead of the eighth annual Wine Tourism Conference, Ratcliffe shares his positive outlook on the evolving dynamics within the wine industry.

"The wine industry is in a state of improvement. It is building credibility and a premium positioning. I'd say 50% of producers are making money and the top 10% have never had it so good.

"The reality is the world needs more wine brands, not more wine. So, we're on the right track as far as that is concerned. Now, the wine tourism sector needs to catch up. Currently, we're like a dog chasing a car. Once the dog's caught up to the car, something needs to happen!" Ratcliffe stated.



## 2024 Wine Tourism Conference to explore strategies for profitable growth

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The conference, set for 30 May at Lanzerac in Stellenbosch, will centre on "The Business Case for Wine Tourism", this year's theme. It promises to bring together an impressive lineup of international and local speakers aimed at enhancing the sector's profitability. Ratcliffe, among the key speakers, will provide insights into how the wine tourism sector can align with the industry's growth.

Calling on the local wine tourism industry to skilfully mine existing opportunities with greater finesse and inventiveness, Ratcliffe says: "The US is our fastest-growing source market, with multiple airlines offering direct flight connections from the US to Cape Town daily.

"The new Cape Winelands Airport will just add to the game, but only in 2027 at the earliest. Not to mention the opportunity the continued arrival of international cruise liners brings.

"Just recently, we had two major luxury liners - the Queen Mary 2 and Queen Victoria - docking at Cape Town harbour simultaneously, creating an immense influx, and putting strain on many city and wineland establishments. This is a massive opportunity, but needs to be managed."



### Cape Winelands Airport unveils development plans, features

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To maximise the impact of "the feet, who are already right here" he says there must be greater collaboration and premiumisation. "I truly believe if we band together, we can achieve more. Collective marketing can be powerful, and efficient. Sure, go ahead and highlight the unique aspects of your region and various offerings. But do so as a proud representative of 'brand South Africa'.

"Wine tourism needs to be deliberate, intentional and strategic. And that includes embracing digital by having a clean and up-to-date database, as well as online booking and shopping facilities."

## Strategic enhancements in wine tourism

About Stellenbosch Wine Routes, he says: "We've looked at the facts, and we know we can't cater to mass tourists, so mirroring the industry, we've chosen to premiumise. Our Vision 2030 strategy embraces value over volume. Imagine other regions like Elgin, Worcester and Hermanus doing the same in a collaborative effort."

He also emphasises that opportunities exist beyond the Cape's high season. "Our winter brings an influx of well-heeled US safari tourists, not to mention Middle Eastern travellers from Dubai and Abu Dhabi desperate to avoid the heat. Why not host them in the Winelands before or after their safaris? We have nothing to complain about. The opportunity is presented on a silver platter. We just need to be able to provide a world-class and well-thought-out product and leave an indelible mark."



Source: Supplied

Ratcliffe, who believes in on-the-job training and mentoring, advises others to follow suit, upskilling staff themselves and providing personnel with appropriate training and context. “Share your strategy and imperatives with them. Communicate and incentivise them. And bring in ‘secret shoppers’ to ensure high standards are maintained.”

US wine tourism and marketing supremo Paul Wagner has been marshalled as the headline speaker. Other speakers include Australian Peter McAtamney, who heads Wine Business Solutions (Australia); Mike Ratcliffe, chairperson of Stellenbosch Wine Routes; Mark Wilkinson, director of the Cape Winelands Airport; Kevin Campbell of Delta Air Lines; Francois Rautenbach, formerly of Singita, a group of luxury lodges across Africa; Eric Matkovich, founder of leading US wine importer Cape Ardor; and Xania van der Merwe, a seasoned wine marketer and customer experience manager.

Sponsored by Wesgro, Delta Air Lines, Stellenbosch Wine Route and South Africa Wine, [the day-long event](#) is being convened by tourism and hospitality specialist, Margi Biggs.

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