

ELLEN WALLACE / HANS-PETER SIFFERT

WINE TOURISM, APRÈS-BUZZ

Canton Vaud is the second-largest Swiss wine area and home to Chateau de Chillon, the most visited Swiss tourist site. The canton may soon approve 2.5 million Swiss francs to develop wine tourism.



A discovery center for
Lavaux wines and its terraced
vineyards, registered as a
UNESCO World Heritage Site



Chateau de Chillon, the most visited Swiss tourist site



Hiking trail from Rivaz to St-Saphorin



Outdoor café in the historic center of Morges



Vintage train terroir dining at Vufflens-le-Château

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A couple coming to Switzerland from the Netherlands decides to add on a few days to their planned hiking trip to explore wineries near Lake Geneva. A rich, efficient web site tells them to look for the Vaud wine tourism label. Behind the standards is a charter. Anyone with the label must have regular opening hours, a cash machine, a well-maintained web site in German as well as French (English is a plus) and staff who speak at least one other language. The pair quickly organize their trip: a charming B&B, trains up to wine villages, a mini-course in local wines, dinner on a balcony hanging over Lake Geneva, a side trip by bicycle to an area they’ve just heard of for the first time.

Fantasy en route to reality

If this sounds like a fantasy, it’s only half that: the story belongs in 2019, or possibly a bit earlier, but it’s a fair description of what wine-lovers should soon be able to do in Vaud. Yann Stucki, who heads canton Vaud’s CHF 2.5 million wine tourism project that got underway

in late 2012, says political authorities decided early on that a large field of players must be actively involved from the start. “It’s taken that long to get all the approvals, but once we have a charter these groups will be able to communicate it easily to their members,” who are the businesses that will want to ask for the official label. The nine bodies involved include the cantonal tourism and agriculture offices, restaurant industry groups and others. Stucki’s first task, working with them, was to create an inventory of what exists. He likes to show a multi-layered set of maps he’s created. It is impressive for the sheer density of hotels, small inns, restaurants with at least 15 Gault-Millau points, country inns, major tourist attractions, tourist rail lines, hotel schools, lake steamships, ski slopes, golf courses, music festivals, wineries to visit of course and much, much more.

The maps also make it clear what’s missing. “We need to repair our ‘holes’,” Stucki says. Vaud is a wine tourist’s paradise, but organ-

izing visits takes time and effort –there is no guarantee that the wine guide who’s just sold you an expensive day trip knows what he is talking about. Not everyone wants to rely on TripAdvisor alone before they shell out cash in a foreign place. “Our idea is to encourage excellence,” says Stucki. “There’s no point in [us] spending money if we haven’t created a great product.” Many wineries don’t have web sites or have too little information, it’s hard for visitors to find information in languages other than French, and there is little coordination among the players, from wine fairs to jazz concerts.

A blueprint for other cantons

The second phase should kick in soon, with plans to create a charter and label as top priorities. “We want to take advantage of existing energy, efforts – to highlight what we already have” and then make it better, says Stucki. The project’s scope, cost and acceptance are being watched closely, for what works and what doesn’t in Vaud could serve as a blueprint for

Switzerland’s five other wine regions (Valais, Geneva, Three Lakes, German-speaking Switzerland and Ticino). Smaller cantons, including Geneva, are wondering where they will find funds to keep pace. Denis de Beausoleil, who directs the wine office for Opage, the cantonal agricultural office, is pleased to be able to show off the 70 new educational multi-language oak wine trail markers that are his canton’s latest wine tourism effort. The canton’s budget may not stretch much further.

Sébastien Fabbi, director of Swiss Wine Promotion, the national wine marketing board, says that Vaud’s plan is more complex than projects in the rest of the country, but it fits into the framework of a larger plan to organize wine tourism nationwide. Vaud decided to go its own way because of the complexity of its project, he says, but its experience will help develop a national charter and wine tourism label. That will, in turn, help feed debates already underway about a European or international label.

Not everyone is happy about developing wine tourism this way; one young producer who is keen to build his cellar’s business complains that after a year Vaud has little that is concrete, to show. He would like to know, now, what the label will require so he can start to plan accordingly. But he, like other producers interviewed about the new project, are essentially behind it as a crucial step to market their wines in the tough new world of 21st century wine.

