

Wine tourism and wine trends in 2024: A detailed outlook

By [Elmarie Rabe](#)

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The wine industry in 2024 stands at the threshold of a transformative era, with remarkable shifts in consumer preferences, a deepening commitment to sustainability, and a revolution in cutting-edge technology. As the chairperson of the SA Wine Routes Forum and manager of Stellenbosch Wine Routes, I am excited to share our insights into the evolving landscape of wine tourism and the latest trends. This outlook may serve as a comprehensive guide for both enthusiasts and industry professionals.



Source: Supplied

Emerging trends in wine

- 1. Premiumisation:** Affluent wine drinkers are increasingly looking for high-quality wines, leading to a trend of premiumisation in the on-trade. Trade enterprises that focus on premium wines are seeing positive outcomes, as consumers are more likely to recommend experiences where they perceive the wine quality to be high. Strategies such as offering a diverse range of premium wines by the glass and price laddering are becoming crucial.
- 2. Low and no-alcohol wines:** Reflecting an increasingly consumption-aware society, the low and no-alcohol wine sector is growing, especially in major markets like the US, UK, and Europe. This trend addresses the preferences of especially sober lifestyle adopters.
- 3. Preference for white wines:** A notable pivot towards white wines is occurring internationally, driven by changing consumer tastes and global warming. Globally, traditional red wine regions are adapting by focusing more on white wine production, reflecting a broader industry response to climate change.

4. **Regenerative agriculture:** Sustainability continues to be a significant focus, with regenerative agriculture practices becoming more prevalent in vineyards. These practices include cover cropping, composting, and biodiversity preservation. While contributing to healthier vineyards and better-quality grapes this also aligns with the environmental values of consumers, particularly Millennials and Gen Z.
5. **Sustainability in packaging:** Alongside production practices, there's a growing focus on sustainable packaging solutions in the wine industry. This includes the use of recycled materials, lighter bottles, and alternative packaging like cans, which appeal to environmentally conscious consumers and reduce shipping costs.
6. **Popularity of RTD and canned wines:** Canned wines are growing increasingly popular, especially among younger generations and outdoor enthusiasts. Their convenience, single-serve portions, and environmental advantages make them a practical choice for modern consumers.
7. **The rise of maker wine brands:** There's a growing trend towards smaller, boutique, or 'maker' wine brands. These brands are often characterised by their unique stories, limited production, and artisanal methods. They appeal to consumers looking for authentic, exclusive wine experiences and often leverage direct-to-consumer channels for distribution.



Source: Supplied

Wine tourism: A focus on experience and sustainability

1. **Local and authentic experiences:** Wine tourism is increasingly focused on authentic, local experiences. Travellers are gravitating towards smaller, family-run wineries that offer a taste of local culture and traditions, coupled with a farm-to-table culinary experience. This trend is about more than just wine; it's about community engagement, ethical perceptions and enhancing the overall experience by connecting more deeply with the local environment and its inhabitants.
2. **Emphasis on tactile, personal experiences:** Recent years have seen a shift from contactless services to a growing appreciation for personal, tactile experiences in hotels and travel destinations. This year, expect a return to more traditional, human-centric hospitality experiences.

3. **Technological innovations:** At the same time, advanced technologies, including AI, are enhancing the wine tourism experience. These innovations provide personalized recommendations, interactive tastings, and more, merging tradition with modernity.

4. **Affordable luxury:** Amid economic adjustments, consumers are shifting towards more affordable luxury wine tourism experiences and wines. This presents an opportunity for South African producers to focus on high-quality, value-oriented wines, especially at the cellar door.

5. **Rewarding consumer loyalty:** In response to tightening consumer budgets, there's a trend towards rewarding loyalty in the wine industry. Wine clubs, pop-up tastings, and exclusive tasting events are becoming more common, offering consumers a sense of community and value for money. This approach is particularly relevant to the on-trade looking to deepen ties with a local customer base.

6. **Sustainability beyond accreditation:** As the effects of the climate crisis become more evident, consumers are seeking more than just sustainability accreditation from wine brands. They want clear communication about the progress made towards sustainability goals and the impact on the local environment and community. This trend indicates a shift towards more transparent and accountable sustainability practices in the wine industry.

7. **Increased use of wine in mixology:** Wineries are collaborating with mixologists to develop wine-based cocktails, leveraging these creations on social media and in partnerships with local restaurants. This trend not only diversifies the wine experience but also offers a new way to engage consumers, particularly during the holiday season.

In 2024, the wine industry encapsulates a dynamic fusion of traditional practices and modern innovations. As we navigate through changing consumer preferences, environmental challenges, and technological advancements, our industry is evolving to offer a diverse and responsible wine experience. These trends are not just shaping the industry; they are opening exciting avenues for exploration, enjoyment, and engagement for wine enthusiasts and professionals alike.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Elmarie Rabe, SA Wine Routes Forum Chairperson & Stellenbosch Wine Routes Manager

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