

Western Cape wine tourism taps into big data, grows SA travel industry

According to Margi Biggs, convenor of the annual Business of Wine and Food Tourism, wine tourists in the Western Cape are increasingly opting for guided tours with a growing preference for tailor-made itineraries to suit their specific interests.

Sourcing her information from Wesgro's recent **Wine & Food Tourism Study**, Biggs believes that greater insights into travellers' needs will unlock further growth in this fast-expanding sector of South Africa's travel industry.



Margi Biggs

"Wesgro research shows a year-on-year growth in wine tourism of 16% in 2017, thanks to the rising reputation of the Western Cape's wines, the region's increasingly innovative offerings, as well as its varied and exciting customised cellar door experiences.

"But as an industry, we've only tapped the surface. There is still so much more potential to be unleashed, particularly now that we have access to big data and the deep learnings its analysis can bring. With a more nuanced understanding of consumer preferences, their spending and other behavioural patterns, it becomes easier to address their needs and to do so in a way that is far more customised. I think we can expect the advent of big data to have a dramatic impact on our industry."

Big data and local wine tourism

With this in mind, Biggs has secured US-based big data wine specialist Cathy Huyghe as this year's headline speaker for the Business of Wine and Food Tourism conference, which takes place on 17 October 2018 at Spier in Stellenbosch. This will be the first visit to South Africa for Huyghe, who is also a wine columnist for Forbes.



Spier Wine Farm - Lunch at the 2017 conference

Other speakers at this year's conference include Marisah Nieuwoudt, who is the wine tourism manager for VinPro, which represents the country's 3,500 South African wine producers, cellars and industry stakeholders; Brittany Hawkins, CEO of Explore Sideways which focuses on immersive food wine and cultural experiences for tourists in the Western Cape; and Spicer de Villiers, who owns A Single Thread, a boutique communications agency that is active in local wine.

The [conference programme](#) will cover such topics as sustainability, food and dining trends, as well as innovative product development.

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