***Ignored* or *adored*: families with children as a wine tourism market?**

**keywords:** tourist experience, family tourism, wine tourism, family-friendly, child-friendly

**Background**

Family tourism is a large market which comprises travels by family groups of at least one child and one adult caregiver (Carr, 2011; Schänzel, Smith, & Weaver, 2005). It is considered a crucial segment for tourism supply’s Pandemic recovery, since people would prefer travelling in small groups to non-crowded destinations (Ivanova, Ivanov, & Ivanov, 2020).

Families are even reported as a potential and sometimes neglected market for wine tourism, which is traditionally known as an adult-centred segment (Cho, Bonn, & Brymer, 2017; Gu & Huang, 2019; Sigala, 2018). Actually, despite apparent contradictions between wine tourism experiences and child-friendly tourist activities, the rural environment and the wine production culture are a potential resource for educational and entertaining activities for and with children (Cho et al., 2017; Sigala, 2018), potentially increasing parents’ interest in wine tourism (Cohen & Ben-Nun, 2009).

**Purpose of the study**

Therefore, this study aims at identifying how family/child-friendly wine tourism attractions cater to families with children, providing a classification of these attractions in terms of their approach to families and children and connection to wine, with an emphasis on type of experience, location, attributes and facilities provided. Results are expected to contribute to elucidating possibilities for hosting families with children, suggesting a framework of family-friendly wine tourism supply with diverse degrees of child-friendliness and most typical experience designs.

**Methodology**

This study is based on exploratory documentary research. From systematic online searches in English, Portuguese and Spanish, 138 webpages were identified referring to 566 wine attractions, that in some level are recommended for families with children or at least host them. To ensure data representativeness and meaningfulness, the main analysis considered only the 84 wineries, vineyards, wine farms and other wine attractions mentioned at least two times, with active official website and a page on Trip Advisor. The official websites of the 84 attractions were examined, being the relevant information registered in a spreadsheet. Based on content analysis procedures, the experiences and facilities provided were analysed and classified leading to the development of a ‘family-friendly wine tourism experience’ framework.

**Results (250 words)**

Most of the wine attractions identified are located in New-World countries (78.6%), especially in the U.S. (44.1%), followed by South Africa (16.7%) and Australia (11.9%).

The majority (83.4%) offers *child-suitable* facilities, such as outdoor spaces – gardens, vineyards – and sports structures and equipment. However, only 20.3% provide *child-centred* facilities, i.e., specially designed for children or very sought-after by them, like playgrounds, kids clubs, little farms.

From a total of 360 experiences offered, only 85 are mentioned as *allowed, recommended* or *designed* for families. The 39 *child-allowed* experiences present discounts or gratuities, but no adaptation to children (e.g. tastings or tours). The 27 experiences *recommended* for families are those described as appropriate for children and adults at the same time (e.g. picnics, garden tours, bike trails). Finally, the 18 experiences *designed* for families are specially developed to attend children needs. Most of them (63,1%%) combine elements from wine or grape production to culture and rural aspects, like games in the vineyards, juice tastings and creative workshops with corks.

The 84 wine attractions suggest different levels of family-friendliness: from places where children are *ignored*, i.e., attractions that do not provide a facility or experience for children, to the ones where they are adored, i.e., places that not only permit or welcome them, but provide child-centred experiences and facilities.

Results suggest that the wine attractions recognised as family-friendly present at least one of the following attributes: a child-centred facility; a facility suitable for children; experiences allowed, suitable or designed for children and their families.

**Conclusion**

Despite the apparent controversies between wine tourism and family tourism, some agents of the wine tourism sector already provide facilities and experiences for this public, showing their potential for wine destinations. However, the understanding of families’ needs and desires still seems to be superficial, as attractions are often identified as *family-friendly* due to the simple presence of an outdoor space or a discount for children. Notwithstanding, there are some wine attractions that not only welcome children, but also host families with child-centred facilities and experiences, combining wine production elements with rural and cultural aspects in educational and entertaining activities.

**Research implications and limitations**

This study is an exploratory research, based on online information provided by wine attractions’ official websites. Therefore, it can be considered only a first approach to the study of family wine tourism supply. However, due to its originality, it brings significant insights for comprehending this market. Besides, the results reinforce the relevance of further studies on the preferences and experiences of family tourists, as a way to better understand these tourists and provide subsidies for innovation in wine destinations.

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