

California Travel & Tourism Commission and Wine Institute Form Historic Partnership to Promote Culinary Travel

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Building on California's allure as America's 'Capital of Culinary Travel,' the California Wine Institute and the California Travel and Tourism Commission (CTTC) have entered into an historic partnership to promote the state's wine and cuisine offerings to the fast-growing travel segment of culinary connoisseurs -- and those who aspire to be.

In honor of September's designation by Governor Schwarzenegger as California Wine Month, the two organizations announced the partnership at a media luncheon today in Sacramento. The cornerstone of the five-year partnership is a national TV campaign featuring Governor Schwarzenegger and wine and culinary celebrities promoting California's rich bounty of wine and food, scheduled for launch this winter.

"We believe this partnership represents an unprecedented opportunity to enhance the California wine industry's standing by communicating our contributions to the state's economy, lifestyle, tourism and environment to consumers, the trade and public policy leaders," said Robert P. (Bobby) Koch, president & CEO of the Wine Institute. "California's wine families have established an industry that is an important part of the landscape and culture of this great state."

California is America's largest wine producer with nearly 2,300 wineries and 90 percent of U.S. wine production. Winegrowing regions are located throughout the state, which is the fourth largest wine producer in the world, behind only France, Italy and Spain. California also has nine of the top 10 U.S. agricultural counties, which grow a diverse assortment of fresh produce that many fine chefs demand in California's 80,000 restaurants and eateries.

"California is the most visited state in the U.S. for food and wine-related activities," said CTTC Executive Director Caroline Beteta. "Wine and food have moved from being a mere vacation activity to a significant part of the aspirational California lifestyle, becoming a driver to visitors choosing a destination."

According to the Travel Industry Association, 17 percent of American leisure travelers, or 27.3 million people, have engaged in culinary or wine-related activities while traveling. These travelers are well-educated and more affluent than other U.S. travelers. They cross most age groups, and take 6.8 domestic and international trips per year, 15 percent more than the average U.S. leisure traveler. These travelers range from those who deliberately select trips and destinations due to food or wine-related activities, to "accidental" travelers who participate in such activities simply because they are abundantly available.

Recent national focus group studies conducted by CTTC indicate that culinary travelers are an important segment for tourism because these travelers are:

Active Travelers -- more likely to participate in cultural activities, enjoy spa visits, visit state/natural parks and historic sites, and participate in outdoor activities,

Highly Experiential -- want new experiences, discoveries and things beyond the norm. To them, having fun is the whole point of life,

Indulgers -- want the ultimate culinary, luxury, pampering experiences,

Aspirational -- want to experience the good life, have the resources to do so, and will stretch themselves to get a piece of it. They are heavy readers of food and wine lifestyle publications and websites,

Curious -- they want to see California and experience it for themselves, and

Trendsetters -- they are confident leaders and like outrageous people and things.

When talking to this group of consumers, CTTC found that California stands apart from other U.S. culinary destinations because of the state's unique combination of climate, geography and topography, and is one of the top agricultural producers with more 350 different crops. Visitors can experience a more personal connection to the food they are eating. Known for its diverse, eclectic and innovative cuisine, the state is also an epicenter to the sustainable wine and food movement -- an approach to farming and production that minimizes impact on the environment and wildlife, is healthy for workers and consumers and enhances rural communities.

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