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INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH GRANT

Final Report – September 2025

The Effect of “Pay What You Want” on Wine Valuations



Great Wine
Capitals

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The Effect of “Pay What You Want” on Wine Valuations

Executive Summary

Research overview

This study represents the first empirical investigation of Pay What You Want (PWYW) pricing in wine tourism across three Great Wine Capitals locations. With premium wine regions facing visitor volume declines and rising tasting fees, the research addresses critical industry challenges around pricing sustainability and customer value alignment.

Research question

Can Pay What You Want pricing—where customers determine their own payment after experiencing wine tourism services—provide a viable alternative to traditional fixed pricing while maintaining revenue and enhancing customer satisfaction?

Methodology

Multi-National Field Experiment conducted at wineries across three distinguished Great Wine Capitals locations:

- Bordeaux, France
 - *Château la Tour Blanche*
- Lausanne, Switzerland
 - *Domaine Bovy*
- San Francisco-Napa Valley, USA
 - *Black Stallion Estate Winery*

Experimental design: Comparison of three pricing conditions:

1. Traditional fixed pricing
2. Pay What You Want – with price information
3. Pay What You Want – without price information

Target participants: Walk-in wine tourists (individual-level analysis intended)



Implementation challenges and adaptations

Operational realities encountered:

- Mixed walk-in and reservation customers (deviated from walk-in only protocol)
- Group visitors (2-4 people) completing single questionnaires instead of individual surveys
- Digital information accessibility compromising "no price information" conditions
- Difficulty tracking individual payments and purchases within groups
- Seasonal variations: busy operations at two sites, calm period at one site
- Staff priority conflicts between research protocols and normal operations
- Cross-regional pricing context variations affecting customer baseline expectations

Key findings and implications

Implementation insights:

Research revealed fundamental challenges in conducting controlled pricing experiments within authentic wine tourism environments, highlighting tensions between experimental rigor and operational reality.

Methodological contributions:

- First documentation of PWYW implementation challenges in experiential tourism settings
- Evidence of group visitor behavior patterns affecting individual-level research designs
- Cross-cultural variations in research protocol adherence and customer response
- Operational requirements framework for successful PWYW pricing implementation

Industry relevance:

Evidence suggests competitor-based pricing dysfunction in premium markets, with systematic price escalation disconnected from customer value delivery contributing to market sustainability challenges. This research provides timely evidence for an industry seeking innovative solutions to pricing and visitation challenges. While data collection proved more complex than anticipated, the study offers both practical insights about PWYW implementation and methodological guidance for future wine tourism research.



Introduction



Part 1 – Introduction

Introduction

The global wine industry currently faces unprecedented challenges. These include evolving consumer preferences, intensified competitive pressures, and complex economic and environmental constraints. Within this dynamic operational environment, wineries are increasingly pursuing diversified revenue strategies and enhanced direct-to-consumer engagement approaches to ensure long-term sustainability and competitive positioning (Martínez-Falcó et al., 2024).

Wine tourism has emerged as a strategic solution for wineries addressing these challenges. Rather than limiting operations to wine sales alone, wineries can provide engaging and memorable on-site experiences. This approach enables them to develop deeper consumer relationships, enhance brand loyalty, and generate substantial direct revenue streams.

The fundamental objectives of wine tourism experiences encompass dual imperatives: maximizing both customer satisfaction and organizational revenue generation (Sellers & Nicolau, 2023). Nevertheless, establishing appropriate pricing mechanisms for these experiences presents considerable operational complexity. Gergaud and Livat's (2024) research identified correlations between wineries' pricing strategies for wine tourism and their product pricing structures. However, they did not examine perceived visitor value or assess pricing fairness from the consumer perspective.

Many wineries have implemented admission fee structures to compensate for resources allocated to visitor hosting. They also use these fees to address concerns regarding consumers engaging in tastings without subsequent purchases. Although designed to secure revenue and regulate visitor behavior, traditional fixed-pricing strategies are recognized as potentially limiting overall demand for wine tourism experiences. This particularly affects price-sensitive consumers or those uncertain about anticipated value delivery.

The urgency of addressing these pricing challenges has become increasingly apparent through recent industry developments. Current market data from the Community Benchmark survey of 550+ American wineries indicates that tasting room visitation declined 7.5% in 2024. The negative trends continued in early 2025, with declines of 10.5% in February, 6.1% in March, and 10.1% in April. These declining visitation patterns coincide with substantial increases in tasting fees. According to the 2024 Silicon Valley Bank Direct-to-Consumer Report, average tasting costs have reached \$75 for regular tastings and \$138 for reserve experiences in Napa County. Sonoma County averages \$43 for regular and \$81 for reserve tastings—significantly higher than other wine regions such as Oregon (\$33 regular, \$61 reserve).



Part 1 – Introduction

The Boisset Collection's recent decision to offer complimentary tastings on Thursdays and Sundays at Raymond Vineyards and DeLoach Vineyards represents a direct response to these market pressures. This strategy explicitly targets younger demographics who may be deterred by traditional pricing structures. As industry observer Tom Wark noted, this strategy addresses the perception that going to wine country is expensive. Visitors potentially spend \$225 per day at three Napa tasting rooms or \$126 in Sonoma before purchasing any wine.

Beyond the US, recent research sponsored by Great Wine Capitals demonstrates visitor dissatisfaction with wine tourism experience pricing. Producers themselves appear to lack comprehensive understanding of appropriate pricing methodologies for their tourism offerings. Combined with the evident industry movement toward pricing experimentation, this evidence raises fundamental questions. Is the fixed admission fees the best approach? Or should we consider alternatives such as innovative value-based pricing strategies?

This research represents the first empirical investigation of a novel alternative pricing strategy within wine tourism contexts: Pay What You Want (PWYW) pricing. Under PWYW implementation, visitors determine their own compensation for wine tourism experiences following completion of the service encounter.

This approach enables visitors to establish payments reflecting their personal perceived value assessments and individual financial circumstances.

Drawing upon established pricing literature principles, particularly regarding perceived value and fairness perceptions, PWYW pricing is theoretically positioned to maximize visitor value perception and overall experience satisfaction (Narwal & Nayak, 2020; Ofir, 2024).

Given the current industry imperative to identify pricing solutions, PWYW represents a potentially transformative alternative. It can simultaneously address declining visitation while maintaining revenue sustainability, offering advantages over both traditional fixed-fee models and emerging complimentary access strategies.

To empirically assess PWYW impacts on both customer satisfaction and winery revenue generation, this study implements a multinational field experiment. The research is conducted at collaborating wineries within three Great Wine Capitals Global Network members: Bordeaux (France), Lausanne (Switzerland), and San Francisco – Napa Valley (USA). The research utilizes authentic winery operational environments to enhance external validity of findings. This comparative methodology across established Old World and New World wine regions provides comprehensive insights into PWYW applicability across diverse wine tourism contexts.



Part 1 – Introduction

Research aim



The aim of this research is to provide Great Wine Capitals wineries with a new perspective on pricing the wine tourism experience, enabling them to maximize customer satisfaction, engagement and loyalty while in the meantime increase their long-term revenue. This study aims to have a positive impact for the network, thanks to the provision of complementary knowledge for its members.

Background, significance and practical implications of the research

The wine industry is one of the most fragmented ones. Many structures are limited in size. When developing a wine tourism activity, a number of winemakers are looking for the optimal revenue model. Should they charge for the wine tasting to avoid wasting their time with visitors who may not end up buying their wine? Or should they view wine tourism as a marketing tool useful to build their brand and offer the tasting for free, hoping that the visitors will end up buying more wine?

Exploring an alternative pricing option that can enable wineries in wine tourism regions such as Great Wine Capitals to improve visitor satisfaction, engagement and loyalty is particularly relevant in the current global context. Revenue management is another key issue in an increasingly competitive environment, the empirical exploration of this value-based pricing can offer wineries opportunities to identify the perceived value of their wine tourism offer and to increase revenues in the long run.

In a global context of declining consumption, where wine producers are struggling to attract new consumers, especially among younger generations (Ohana-Levi & Netzer, 2023) wine tourism is both an entry point for new wine consumers and a lever for building loyalty among existing consumers. In various cultural industries (restaurant, entertainment, music...) Pay What You Want (PWYW) has been identified as a profitable alternative to fixed pricing and as a good option for market penetration (Greiff & Egbert, 2018).

To the best of our knowledge, experiment is the first of its kind to test PWYW in real wine tourism context. It should provide professional stakeholders with a better understanding of pricing dynamics, enabling them to maximize consumers engagement and loyalty while maximizing long-term profits based on a fair-pricing approach. The provision of a protocol will enable industry professionals to replicate the experiment in their wineries to evaluate the value perception of their offer by the visitors.



Great Wine Capitals

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Part 1 – Introduction

Project leader

Magalie DUBOIS

Is an Associate Professor at Burgundy School of Business. She holds a PhD in (wine) Economics from the University of Bordeaux. Since 2024, she has been in charge of the Wine Tourism specialization of the Bachelor in Management at Burgundy School of Business (Dijon, France). She is also actively involved in the development of academic knowledge on wine tourism.



Local academic partners

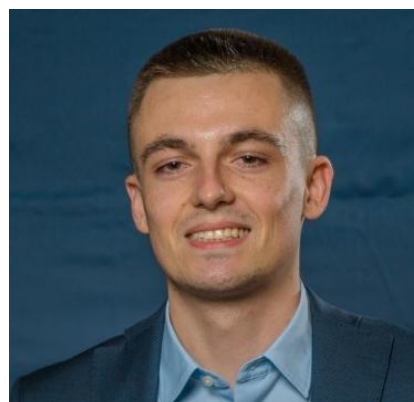
San Francisco – Napa Valley

InHaeng JUNG is an Assistant Professor at Sonoma State University's Wine Business Institute



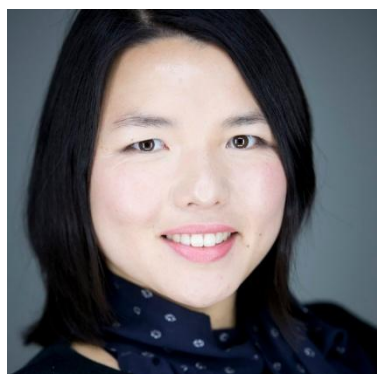
Lausanne

Antoine PINEDE is a researcher at the Haute Ecole de Gestion de Genève



Bordeaux

Claire LAMOUREUX is an Assistant Professor at Bordeaux Sciences Agro (and recipient of 2023-2024 GWC Research Grant)





Great Wine Capitals

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Part 1 – Introduction

Partner wineries and tasting rooms managers

San Francisco – Napa Valley

Julie GOODWIN

Black Stallion Estate Winery



Lausanne

Alexandra BOVY

Domaine Bovy



Bordeaux

Camille COL

Château la Tour Blanche





02

“Pay What You Want”
pricing: application to wine
tourism



Part 2 – “Pay What You Want” pricing: application to wine tourism

“Pay What You Want” pricing: application to wine tourism



Understanding “Pay What You Want” (PWYW) pricing

Pay What You Want represents a dynamic pricing strategy where consumers determine the final price for a product or service, typically after consumption. Rather than establishing fixed prices, businesses place trust and control in consumers' hands, allowing them to pay what they believe the experience was worth (Greiff & Egbert, 2018).

This approach constitutes a significant departure from conventional pricing models and requires substantial trust between service providers and their customers. The strategy places considerable responsibility on consumers to determine appropriate compensation based on their perceived value of the experience.

Theoretical foundations of PWYW payment behavior

The effectiveness of PWYW pricing is grounded in several economic, psychological, and social factors (Narwal & Nayak, 2020).

Research has identified key mechanisms that influence consumer payment decisions under this model:

Fairness and reciprocity principles:

When businesses demonstrate trust by allowing customer price determination, consumers often feel obligated to reciprocate with fair compensation. This reciprocal behavior stems from established social norms around fairness and the desire to avoid taking advantage of trusting service providers (Bolton et al., 2003; Chung, 2017).

Perceived value assessment:

Consumer payments are closely linked to their subjective evaluation of the experience's worth (Zeithaml, 1988). This alignment between price and personal value perception can enhance satisfaction levels, as consumers pay amounts that directly reflect their individual assessment of the service received.

Social and reputational considerations:

Payment decisions are influenced by social expectations and the desire to maintain a positive reputation, particularly in contexts where payment behavior may be observed by others.

Anchoring effects and information provision:

The presence or absence of suggested prices or cost information significantly influences payment behavior (Yen et al., 2024).



Part 2 – “Pay What You Want” pricing: application to wine tourism

For hedonic products and experiential services, the absence of suggested pricing can lead to higher perceived quality and increased PWYW payments (Weisstein et al., 2019). Additionally, the timing of payment decisions affects consumer payment amounts (Kc et al., 2023).

Empirical evidence across industries

PWYW implementation has been examined across diverse sectors including restaurants, theaters, software, online content, and retail establishments (see Güzel et al., 2025 for a comprehensive literature review and Vizuite-Luciano et al., 2023 for bibliometric analysis).

Research findings demonstrate mixed but often favorable outcomes. While individual transaction amounts may be lower than comparable fixed prices, businesses frequently experience increased overall revenue through higher demand, increased volume, or the attraction of customers who would not purchase at fixed prices (Isaac et al., 2015).

Additional benefits include:

- Enhanced customer acquisition and retention
- Improved customer loyalty and word-of-mouth marketing
- Access to previously price-sensitive market segments
- Potential for increased overall profitability despite lower individual payments

Multiple factors moderate PWYW outcomes, including product/service characteristics, provider-customer relationships, customer demographics (gender, income level), and social context (Christopher & Machado, 2019; Kim et al., 2014; Kunter, 2015; Lu et al., 2021; Santana & Morwitz, 2021).



PWYW in tourism and hospitality contexts

While extensive research exists across various sectors, PWYW applications within tourism and hospitality remain more limited, though growing (Hu & Wan, 2025; Yang et al., 2023). The majority of PWYW research has focused on products with low marginal costs or brief service interactions, whereas tourism and hospitality often involve complex experiences with significant operational requirements.



Studies examining tourism applications (guided tours, museums, cultural attractions) have identified several factors influencing consumer payment decisions (Al-Moustafa et al., 2023; Bitsch et al., 2020; Boonsiritomachai & Sud-on, 2023; Kukla Gryz et al., 2022; Natter & Kaufmann, 2015; Yang et al., 2024):

Experience quality:

Higher quality experiences generate correspondingly higher payments

Operational fairness:

Consumer perceptions of fair business practices positively influence payment amounts

Emotional engagement:

Stronger emotional connections to service providers or destinations increase payment levels

Cultural variation:

Cross-cultural research indicates significant variation in payment behaviors across different national and cultural groups. Cultural norms regarding voluntary payments, such as established tipping practices in the United States compared to European contexts, create different cognitive frameworks that influence PWYW engagement



Wine tourism: a unique context for PWYW implementation

Wine tourism presents distinctive characteristics that differentiate it from previously studied PWYW applications:

- *Hybrid product-service offering:* Wine tourism combines tangible products (wine tasting and consumption) with experiential services (tours, ambiance, educational content, and hospitality interactions).
- *Direct-to-consumer sales integration:* Unlike many tourism experiences, cellar door visits typically provide direct opportunities for additional wine purchases, creating multiple revenue streams within a single customer interaction.
- *Brand development function:* These experiences serve important marketing functions for wine brands, making value calculations more complex than simple service transactions.
- *Emotional connection potential:* Wine tourism often generates strong emotional connections to place, narrative, and brand that may significantly influence payment behavior patterns.



Research Gap and Contribution

The wine industry increasingly rely on tourism and experiential aspect of the business. Yet, despite extensive PWYW research across multiple sectors, no studies have specifically examined its application within wine tourism contexts.

Previous wine tourism pricing research has focused exclusively on traditional fixed-price models and their effects on visitor volumes and revenue generation (Gergaud & Livat, 2024). Simultaneously, existing PWYW research has not addressed the unique operational environment of wineries that integrate service provision, product tasting, and brand immersion experiences.

This research addresses this significant gap by providing the first empirical investigation of PWYW pricing implementation in wine tourism settings. The study examines:

- Consumer payment behavior under various PWYW conditions
- Consumer satisfaction levels compared to traditional pricing models
- Perceived value assessments across different pricing structures

- Cross-cultural variations in PWYW responses across major wine tourism regions
- Consumer purchase behavior in conjunction of their valuation of the experience

Implications for wine tourism operations

Understanding PWYW pricing applications could provide wine tourism operators with:

- Enhanced customer acquisition strategies, particularly for price-sensitive market segments
- Improved customer satisfaction through price-value alignment
- Strengthened emotional connections with visitors
- Competitive differentiation from traditional pricing approaches
- Potential revenue optimization despite individual payment variations

This research contributes essential knowledge for wine tourism operators seeking innovative pricing strategies in increasingly competitive markets, while advancing theoretical understanding of PWYW applications in complex experiential service contexts.



Field experiment methodology



Methodology

Research design

This field experiment employs a natural setting approach to maximize external validity while maintaining experimental control. The study utilizes a between-subjects design comparing three pricing conditions across authentic wine tourism operations at three different wine regions, with data collected by establishment staff during normal business operations without direct researcher intervention.

The experimental protocol received approval from the Burgundy School of Business (Dijon, France) ethics committee (CERBSB2022-18).

Site selection and participants

Data collection (target n=360) was conducted across three strategically selected Great Wine Capitals establishments representing distinct operational models:

- Lausanne, Switzerland - Domaine Bovy
- Bordeaux, France - Château la Tour Blanche
- San Francisco-Napa Valley, USA - Black Stallion Estate Winery

Each site targeted 120 participants (40 per treatment) across treatment conditions, accommodating individuals, couples, and groups of maximum four people. Participants included both walk-in customers and those with reservations (without prepayment), reflecting natural operational conditions.

Experimental conditions

- Treatment 0 (Control): *Fixed price with information*
Participants received wine tourism experiences with predetermined pricing communicated at booking or arrival. Following the tasting experience, participants completed evaluation questionnaires and paid standard price.
- Treatment 1: *Pay-What-You-Want with price anchor*
Participants received identical wine tourism experiences but were informed that stated prices served as reference points only, with final payment amounts determined by customer preference after experience completion. The reference price provided an anchoring effect while allowing payment flexibility.
- Treatment 2: *Pay-What-You-Want without Price Information*
Participants, limited to walk-in customers only, experienced wine tourism services without prior price disclosure. Following experience completion and evaluation, participants determined payment amounts without any price anchoring or reference information.



Methodology

Treatment	Price information	Price structure	Target total number of participants
0	Price information	Standard price at the end of the experience	120
1	Price information	PWYW at the end of the experience	120
2	No price information	PWYW at the end of the experience	120

Data collection procedures

Establishment staff offered voluntary participation to the visitors, at the end of the wine experience they checked the completion of the questionnaire (see Appendix A) and reported group composition. Data captured included:

- Sociodemographics
- Experience evaluation ratings for wines and overall tourism experience
- Price fairness perception
- Final payment amounts across all treatment conditions (including tip)
- Purchase behavior documentation through sales receipt copies

Implementation adaptations

Field conditions required several protocol adaptations from the original experimental design:

- Mixed walk-in and reservation (without prepayment) customers across treatments (deviation from walk-in only protocol)
- Group completion of individual questionnaires due to natural social dynamics

- Seasonal operational variations affecting implementation consistency
- Staff training variations impacting protocol adherence quality

These adaptations reflect the inherent tensions between experimental control and authentic commercial operational environments, providing valuable insights into real-world implementation requirements for PWYW pricing mechanisms in wine tourism contexts.

Due to the implementation challenges encountered during the quantitative data collection phase, additional qualitative information was gathered from the three participating tasting room managers. They were aimed to better understand the specific operational difficulties experienced during protocol implementation, identify the underlying reasons for these challenges, and develop practical recommendations for future PWYW pricing research and implementation.



Wineries and participants



Part 4 – Wineries & Participants

Wineries selection process

The recruitment process successfully identified three establishments that met the study's stringent operational requirements through systematic screening. This achievement represents a significant methodological accomplishment given the structural constraints of the wine tourism industry.

Industry selection challenges

The majority of premium wineries operate under reservation-only models that eliminate walk-in customer traffic essential for pricing experiments. Additionally, most establishments demonstrate understandable reluctance to participate in revenue-affecting research during operational periods. It requires significant reining of commitment, potentially jeopardizing consistency of their service (and in case of US interfering tipping system that staff depends on). These industry characteristics created a highly selective recruitment environment requiring extensive outreach efforts.

Strategic recruitment approach

Each regional academic partner utilized established industry networks to conduct comprehensive screening processes. The recruitment effort involved dozens of initial contact emails followed by detailed phone consultations to assess operational compatibility and management commitment to research participation.



This intensive process was necessary to identify the rare establishments possessing the essential combination of:

- Walk-in customer traffic sufficient for meaningful sample sizes
- Operational flexibility to accommodate research protocols
- Management willingness to engage in pricing innovation research
- Staff capacity to implement PWYW pricing mechanisms during normal operations

Timeline optimization

The research launch was strategically adjusted from April to May 2025 to align with partner operational calendars and seasonal customer flow patterns. This timing accommodation ensured optimal implementation conditions and demonstrated the collaborative nature of successful industry-academic partnerships.

The targeted selection approach prioritizes research depth and operational validity over broad statistical representativeness.

Partner wineries

Winery	Surface (Ha)	Bottles produced in 2024	Started wine tourism in	Model	Number of visitors (2024)	% DTC Sales (2024)	Annual turnover (2024)
Black Stallion Estate Winery <i>San Francisco – Napa Valley</i>	4.5	144,000	2010	Paid tasting since the beginning	29,000	25%	\$ 2.11M ²
Château la Tour Blanche <i>Bordeaux</i>	36	35,000	2010	Paid tasting since the beginning	5,000	46%	€ 1M
Domaine Bovy <i>Lausanne</i>	11	50,000 ³	1996	Paid tasting since the beginning	15,000	33%	CHF 1.2M

² Tasting room only

³ And an additional 100,000 private label

Wine Tourism Experiences

Winery	Wine Tourism Experience and price	Tasted Wines
Black Stallion Estate Winery <i>San Francisco – Napa Valley</i>	\$45 (€38) Seated tasting of 4 wines	2023 Limited Release Sauvignon Blanc, Napa Valley
		2021 Unfiltered Chardonnay, Napa Valley
		2021 Malbec, Napa Valley
		2021 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley
Château la Tour Blanche <i>Bordeaux</i>	€16 Visit and tasting of 3 wines	Léonie de La Tour Blanche Grand Blanc
		Les Charmilles de La Tour Blanche
		Grand Cru Château La Tour Blanche
Domaine Bovy <i>Lausanne</i>	CHF18 (€19) Visit and tasting of 4 wines	St-Saphorin AOC Lavaux 2024 (Chasselas)
		St-Saphorin Vieilles Vignes AOC Lavaux 2024 (Chasselas)
		Oeil de Perdrix AOC Vaud 2024 (Rosé de Pinot Noir)
		St-Saphorin Pinot Noir AOC Lavaux 2023 (Pinot Noir)



05

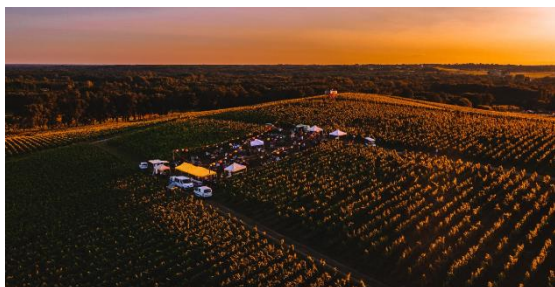
Implementation challenges
and
field experiment insights



Part 5 – Implementation challenges and field experiment insights

Implementation challenges

While implementation challenges affected data collection efficiency and reduced the achieved sample size relative to initial projections, the study generated valuable insights into operational requirements and customer response patterns for PWYW pricing mechanisms in wine tourism contexts. Nevertheless, stakeholder interviews provides a foundation for understanding implementation barriers and refinement opportunities for future research.



Time constraints

All three establishments reported significant operational stress when implementing research protocols during high-visitor periods.

Alexandra Bovy (Domaine Bovy) noted: "This created stress during high traffic periods and people were not receptive". "We lacked time for requests to fill out forms and lacked time to check that everyone had filled out theirs."

Château la Tour Blanche faced comparable time constraints, with Camille Col reporting insufficient time between customer visits for proper questionnaire administration, limiting protocol adherence during peak operational periods.

Similarly, Black Stallion's tasting room manager Julie Goodwin observed: "when we had busy days, very, very, few of our tastings seem to qualify."

These observations suggest that customer research in wine tourism settings requires careful timing considerations, with off-peak periods potentially offering better conditions for protocol adherence and data quality.

Staff engagement

Staff attitudes toward the research protocols varied within and across establishments, affecting data collection quality.

Observations from Black Stallion suggest a potential relationship between staff enthusiasm and customer payment behavior. Julie emphasized the critical nature of staff buy-in: "the people that provided the best surveys understood what it was and...they agreed and they wanted it to be successful...."



Implementation challenges

One particularly enthusiastic staff member exemplified optimal implementation: "she loved it. She thought it was brilliant and she enjoyed it...the tastings that she conducted were the ones that tended to suggest that they should pay more than the tasting was originally going to be charged." This demonstrates a direct correlation between staff engagement and customer payment behavior. Staff engagement emerges as a critical variable affecting data quality in commercial field research settings, suggesting the need for more robust training protocols or dedicated research staff.

Group dynamics vs. individual response design

The research design assumed individual responses, but wine tourism typically involves social groups.

The three wineries reported frequent instances where groups completed single questionnaires rather than individual responses. Alexandra Boy noted: "We gave one sheet per participant, some only filled out one, Sometimes, due to stress, we didn't pay attention to the questionnaires and found blank sheets of paper on the tables."

Julie Goodwin observed similar patterns: "It was interesting how many times we had a couple and one person did it and they both contributed. That was very common."



Digital information accessibility challenge

Implementation revealed expected challenges with maintaining experimental conditions in the digital age. Camille Col from Château la Tour Blanche noted that even in Treatment 2 (PWYW without price information), most visitors had likely encountered pricing information online before arrival, potentially compromising the "no price information" condition.

This digital accessibility challenge represents a fundamental methodological constraint for contemporary hospitality research, where customer pre-visit information gathering may undermine controlled experimental conditions.

Cross-regional pricing context effects

The three study locations revealed significant regional variations in wine tourism pricing that fundamentally affected customer response patterns.



Part 5 – Implementation challenges and field experiment insights

Implementation challenges

Black Stallion's \$45 standard tasting fee, while positioned as relatively affordable within Napa Valley's premium market, represented a substantial expense for European visitors accustomed to different regional pricing structures.

Julie Goodwin provided detailed analysis of customer response variations: "we hear it daily...This is incredibly enjoyable...they love the wine...This is so much better than the last place I went where I paid twice as much" from experienced regional visitors, while first-time European visitors were often surprised "they're not thinking of the attention, the education, but people that had been to other wineries, they looked at it differently."

This pricing context variation might have created different baseline expectations across visitor segments, with regional tourism experience emerging as a significant moderating variable in customer value perception.



Sample qualification

The study encountered significant practical challenges in participant qualification due to the operational realities of premium wine tourism. At Black Stallion, "a larger percentage of our wine club members and wine industry people, they did not qualify...We could not include them. So it was harder to qualify the guest with our current tasting program."

This qualification challenge stemmed from the fact that wine club members receive complimentary tastings and therefore don't engage in payment transactions, making them ineligible for pricing behavior research. This operational reality significantly reduced the pool of potential participants without representing a research design flaw, but rather reflecting the structure of premium wine tourism business models.

Field experiment insights

The original research design planned comparative analysis of treatment effects across the three pricing conditions (fixed price, PWYW with price anchor, PWYW without price information) to determine the effectiveness of Pay-What-You-Want pricing mechanisms in wine tourism contexts. Additionally, the study aimed to examine whether treatment effects varied between the three Great Wine Capitals wineries, providing insights into regional or operational factors influencing PWYW pricing success.

However, implementation challenges resulted in incomplete datasets that preclude intended treatment comparisons and cross-establishment analysis. This section presents exploratory findings from the partial quantitative data collected, providing initial insights into customer behavior under PWYW pricing conditions in wine tourism settings.

	Control group Average payment	PWYW with price information Average payment	PWYW without price information Average payment
Black Stallion Estate Winery	\$45 (n=31)	\$33 (n=27)	\$35 (n=45)
Château la Tour Blanche	€16 (n=15)	(n=0)	€21 (n=12)
Domaine Bovy	CHF18 (n=23)	CHF23 (n=17)	CHF20 (n=27)

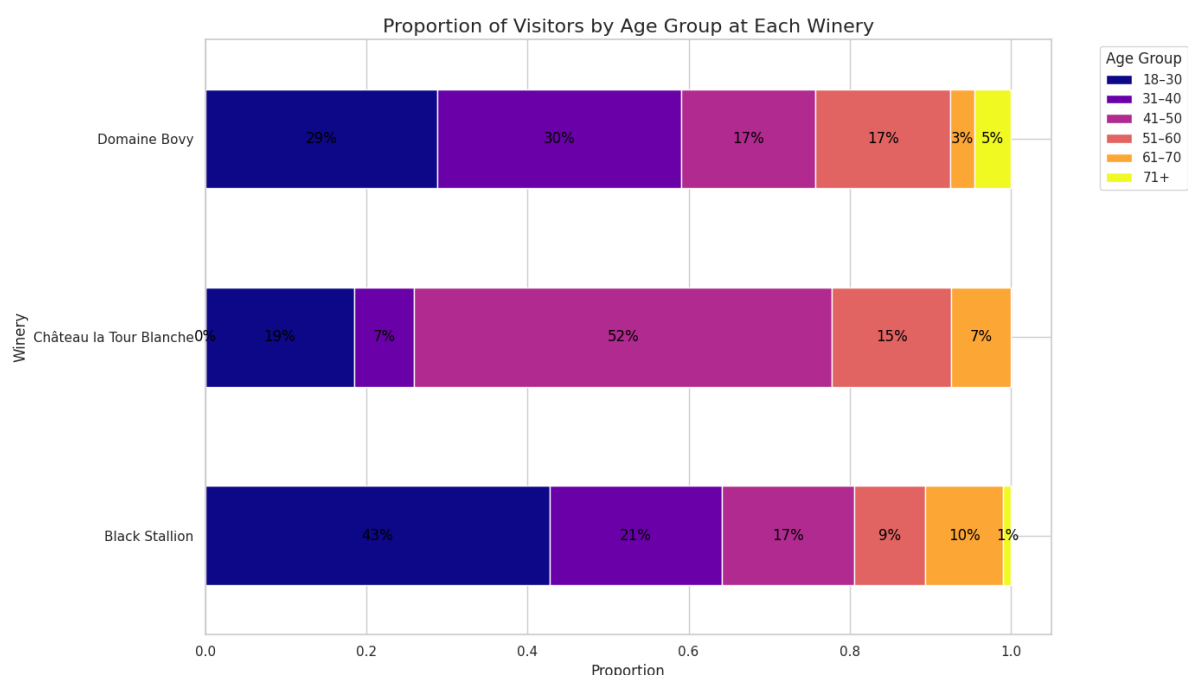


Field experiment insights

Respondent demographics

The three participating wineries attracted distinctly different visitor demographics during the study period. Domaine Bovy demonstrated a relatively balanced age distribution with strong representation among younger visitors, as 59% of respondents were aged 18-40, while the remaining visitors were distributed across older age categories. Château la Tour Blanche exhibited the oldest visitor profile, with 52% of respondents in the 41-50 age group and only 26% under 40 years old.

In contrast, Black Stallion attracted the youngest customer base, with 64% of visitors aged 18-40 and particularly strong representation in the 18-30 category (43%). These demographic variations across wineries provide important context for interpreting customer responses to PWYW pricing mechanisms, as age cohorts may demonstrate different attitudes toward innovative pricing approaches and value perception in wine tourism experiences.

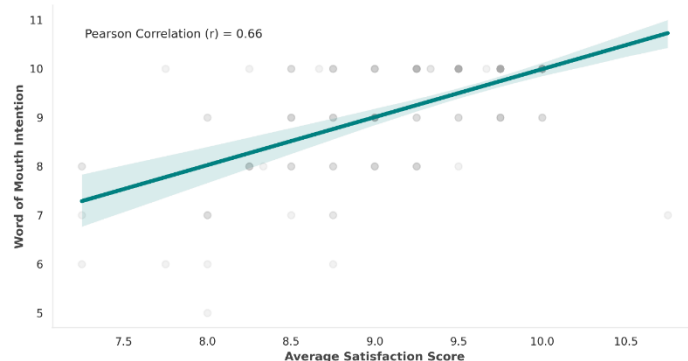




Field experiment insights

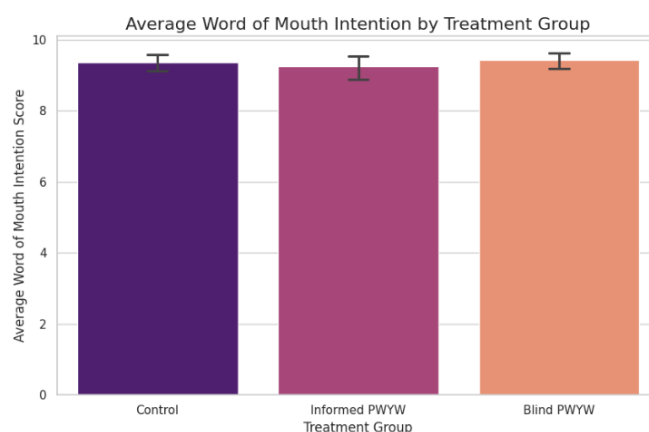
Satisfaction and advocacy relationship

The correlation analysis reveals a strong positive relationship between overall satisfaction and word-of-mouth intention (Pearson $r = 0.66$), confirming that higher satisfaction levels are strongly linked to increased willingness to recommend the winery. This correlation underscores the critical importance of customer experience quality in generating advocacy behavior.



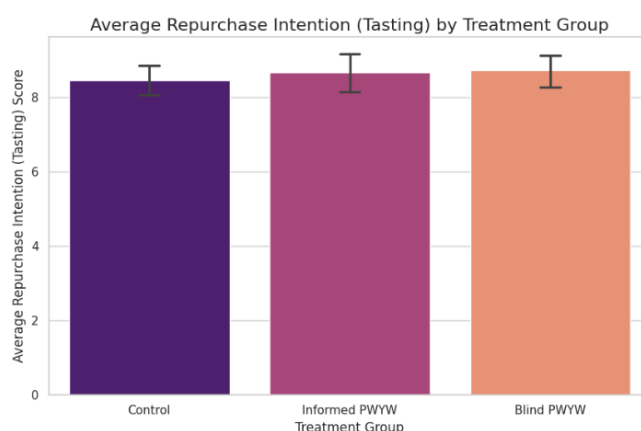
Word-of-mouth advocacy patterns

The word-of-mouth intention analysis shows the Blind PWYW achieving the highest advocacy intention (average 9.42), followed closely by the Control Group (9.36), while Informed PWYW scored slightly lower (9.25). Notably, all treatment groups achieved high word-of-mouth scores above 9.0, indicating strong advocacy intentions across all pricing conditions.



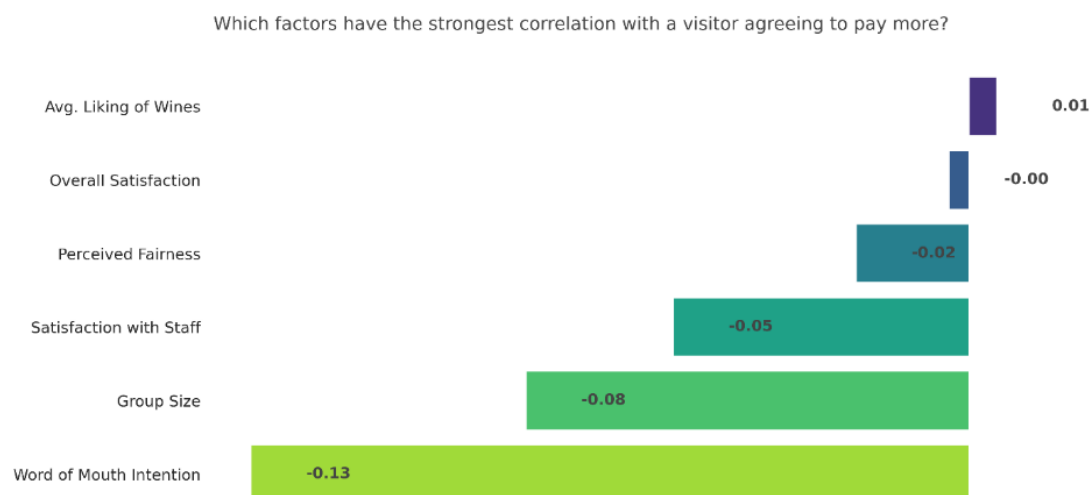
Revisit intention

Both PWYW treatment conditions showed marginally higher average revisit intention scores compared to the control group, with Blind PWYW achieving the highest score (8.72), followed by Informed PWYW (8.66), while the Control group scored lowest (8.45). This pattern indicates that when customers are given the opportunity to pay what they want, they demonstrate slightly increased intention to return for future tasting experiences.





Field experiment insights



Factors influencing payment behavior

The correlation analysis examining factors associated with customer willingness to pay more under PWYW conditions reveals counterintuitive patterns, with most satisfaction measures showing weak negative correlations with payment amounts: Word of Mouth intention (-0.13), Group size (-0.08), Satisfaction with staff (-0.05), and Perceived fairness (-0.02). Only average liking of wines shows minimal positive correlation (0.01).

Potential Explanations

These unexpected findings may reflect several dynamics specific to PWYW contexts. Highly satisfied customers may feel they received full value for their experience and see no need for premium payments, while moderately satisfied customers might pay more to compensate for perceived shortcomings or to signal appreciation despite mixed experiences.

Customers most willing to recommend the winery may consider their advocacy as sufficient contribution, whereas those paying more might compensate through monetary rather than social promotion.

The negative correlation with group size likely reflects practical coordination challenges and varied individual willingness to pay within groups, while solo visitors can make payment decisions more freely.

These correlations are notably weak (all below 0.15) and should be interpreted cautiously given incomplete data collection and small sample sizes.



Field experiment insights

Treatment responses distribution

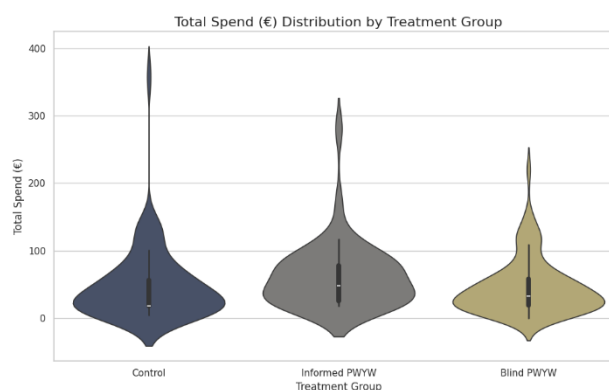
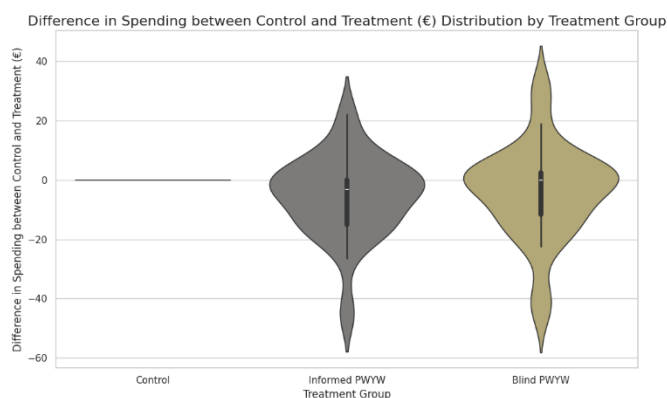
Both Informed (treatment 1) and Blind PWYW (treatment 2) conditions demonstrate wide payment distributions, with customers paying between approximately €45 below and €35-45 above the control group baseline. This substantial spread indicates that PWYW pricing generates highly polarized customer responses, with some visitors paying generous premiums while others contribute significantly less than standard pricing would yield.

The similar distribution shapes between Informed and Blind PWYW suggest that providing price anchoring information does not fundamentally alter payment variability patterns.

Total spending pattern

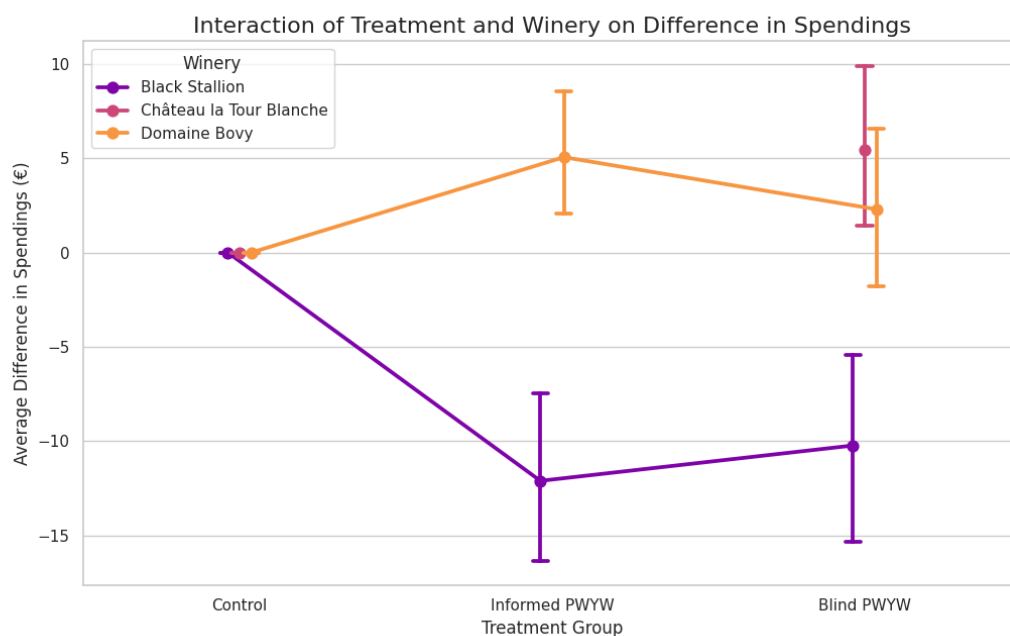
The higher mean spending under both PWYW conditions indicates that alternative pricing may stimulate increased customer engagement and purchasing behavior beyond the immediate tasting experience. Customers empowered to determine their own tasting payment may feel more invested in the experience and more inclined to make additional purchases.

This finding suggests that while individual tasting payments under PWYW showed high variability, the overall economic impact may be positive through increased total customer spending





Field experiment insights



Spending differences

The spending difference analysis reveals contrasting patterns in customer responses to PWYW pricing mechanisms across the three participating wineries. The European wineries demonstrated positive customer payment behavior under PWYW conditions.

Domaine Bovy exhibited positive customer response under both PWYW treatments, with visitors paying on average CHF5 above baseline under Informed PWYW and CHF2 above under Blind PWYW.

Château la Tour Blanche, despite implementation challenges that prevented data collection under Informed PWYW conditions, showed positive customer response under Blind PWYW with an average of €5 above baseline spending.

These apparent regional differences must be interpreted cautiously given the incomplete data collection and varying implementation success across wineries. The contrasting patterns could reflect winery-specific factors, customer demographics, seasonal timing, implementation quality, or other contextual variables rather than systematic regional market characteristics. The small sample sizes and limited data collection prevent definitive conclusions about broader market responses to PWYW pricing mechanisms.



Practical implications



Practical implications



Revenue optimization tool

PWYW pricing can be considered as a tool for optimizing revenue during traditionally slower periods rather than replacing peak-season pricing strategy. It could be used during shoulder seasons to maintain customer engagement and generate revenue when traditional pricing might result in lower visitation.

Customer acquisition through risk reduction

PWYW removes the financial barrier that prevents price-sensitive customers from entering wineries. Traditional fixed fees create upfront commitment before quality assessment. PWYW transfers this risk from customer to winery, potentially expanding the customer base to include visitors who would otherwise avoid wine tourism due to cost uncertainty.

Total revenue enhancement

When customers assess value based on delivered experience, they demonstrate greater engagement and willingness to purchase wines and other products, translating tasting fee flexibility into broader spending behavior.

Relationship Building

Customer loyalty metrics improved under PWYW conditions. Both word-of-mouth and revisit intentions were higher under PWYW treatments compared to fixed pricing, indicating that pricing empowerment maintains customer relationships while potentially strengthening behavioral intentions toward the establishment.

Competitive positioning alternative

Customer-centric pricing strategies can be used as alternatives to competitor-based price escalation. The pricing dysfunction in premium markets suggests opportunities for establishments to differentiate through value-based rather than luxury-positioned pricing approaches.

Success metrics definition

Evaluation should encompass multiple dimensions beyond direct revenue impact, including customer satisfaction maintenance, word-of-mouth generation, purchase behavior changes, and long-term customer relationship development.



Practical implications

The field experiment provides concrete guidance for wine tourism establishments considering PWYW pricing mechanisms:

Dimension	Guidance
Staff training and management	Prioritize staff enthusiasm and genuine buy-in over mandatory participation
	Develop standardized greeting protocols that introduce the questionnaire early in customer interaction
	Clearly communicate individual participation requirements within group settings
	Address potential conflicts between the implementation of the experiment and existing staff incentives (e.g., wine club recruitment)
Implementation timing	Target off-peak seasons when staff can dedicate proper attention to customer experience
	Introduce the questionnaire at the beginning of experience rather than at the conclusion
Revenue Management	Account for complex customer value expression beyond direct payments (tips, reviews, referrals)
	Develop measurement systems that capture both quantitative payment data and qualitative satisfaction indicators
	Consider seasonal revenue variations when evaluating financial impact
Operational Prerequisites	Ensure adequate staffing levels to maintain service quality during implementation
	Establish clear qualification criteria that account for existing business model constraints
	Create protocols for managing digital information accessibility challenges
	Develop contingency plans for high-traffic periods when protocol adherence may be compromised



07

Conclusions and future
research development



Conclusions and future research developments

This exploratory study provides preliminary evidence that Pay-What-You-Want pricing mechanisms offer viable alternatives to traditional fixed pricing in wine tourism contexts, though implementation success varies significantly by market and operational factors.

The findings suggest that successful PWYW implementation requires specific operational prerequisites including staff enthusiasm, adequate attention capacity, and financial reserves to manage revenue variability. Implementation during peak operational periods consistently failed across establishments, indicating that alternative pricing works best when service quality can be maintained.

For wine tourism establishments, PWYW pricing represents a potential customer acquisition and relationship-building tool rather than a simple fee optimization strategy. The evidence suggests that pricing empowerment may expand market access by removing financial barriers while potentially driving reciprocal purchasing behavior that increases total transaction value.

The most immediate research priority involves completing the originally planned data collection across all participating establishments. The partial dataset obtained provides sufficient evidence of protocol feasibility to justify continued implementation.



Refined methodological approaches should address the operational challenges identified during initial implementation phases.

Beyond completing the current study, future research should expand geographic scope to include additional wine tourism markets, particularly in emerging regions where pricing cultures may differ from established European and North American contexts. Longitudinal studies examining long-term effects of PWYW implementation on customer loyalty, repeat visitation rates, and establishment profitability would provide essential insights into the sustainability of PWYW pricing strategies.

This study establishes that alternative pricing in wine tourism warrants continued investigation, providing both promising initial evidence and realistic assessment of implementation challenges that inform future research and practical applications.



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Part 8 – References

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Appendices



Part 9 – Appendices

Appendix A – Questionnaire (Château la Tour Blanche)

We'd love your feedback!

Please take a moment to answer the following questions about your visit today. This questionnaire is anonymous, and your honest responses are greatly appreciated and will help us enhance the experience for future guests.

WINE TASTING

Please circle the number that best reflects your opinion

WINE 1 – Léonie de La Tour Blanche Grand Blanc

How much did you enjoy this wine?
(0 : didn't like it at all / 10 : liked it a lot)

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

WINE 2 – Les Charmilles de La Tour Blanche

How much did you enjoy this wine?
(0 : didn't like it at all / 10 : liked it a lot)

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

WINE 3 – Grand Cru Château La Tour Blanche

How much did you enjoy this wine?
(0 : didn't like it at all / 10 : liked it a lot)

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

WINE TOURISM EXPERIENCE

Please circle the answer that best reflects your opinion

Is it your first time visiting this winery?

Yes / No

Please rate how much you enjoyed each of the following aspects of your visit today:

(0 = Didn't enjoy it at all / 10 = Enjoyed it very much)

- | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| • The wine | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| • The service provided by the staff | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |



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- The estate (scenery, facilities, atmosphere) 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

- Your overall experience 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How fair do you feel the price you paid for this experience was?

(0: Very unfair / 10: Very fair)

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Would you recommend your friends to visit this winery?

(0 = Definitely not / 10 = Definitely yes)

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Would you plan a future visit to this winery?

(0 = Definitely not / 10 = Definitely yes)

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Would you consider buying wine from this winery in the future (on-site or online)?

(0 = Not at all / 10 = Definitely yes)

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How many wineries did you visit in your lifetime?

☐ It's my first visit ☐ 2-5 ☐ 6-9 ☐ 10-14 ☐ 15+

Estimate your monthly expenditure on wine

☐ Under 25€ ☐ 25€-75€ ☐ 76€-150€ ☐ 151€-250€ ☐ Over 250€

Indicate your postal code

.....

Indicate your Country

.....

How old are you?

☐ 18 – 30
☐ 31 – 40
☐ 41 – 50
☐ 51 – 60
☐ 61 – 70
☐ 71 and more

How do you describe yourself?

☐ Male
☐ Female
☐ Other

Thank you for your cooperation

INFORMATION

To be completed by the staff

INFORMATION

To be completed by the staff

Participant number:

....

Number of visitors:

1 2 3 4

Payment:

0 1 2

Tip given:

\$...

→ Clip a copy of the receipt here

Appendix B – Budget

Great Wine Capital	Action	Amount
San Francisco – Napa Valley	Visit to Black Stallion Estate Winery with InHaeng Jung to follow up on the experiment	€1,200
	Incentive for the tasting room staff	€500
	Digitalization of the results	€150
Bordeaux	Visit to Château la Tour Blanche with Claire Lamoureux to launch the experiment	€400
	Digitalization of the results	€50
Lausanne	Pilot – Union Viticole de Cully	€60
	Visit to Domaine Bovy with Antoine Pinede to launch the experiment	€340
	Digitalization of the results	€50
Total spent to date		€2,750
Dissemination	Travel and participation to the AAWE conference 2026 (Perth, Australia)	€2,500
	Travel to Great Wine Capitals AGM	Covered by the additional budget
Experiment	Projected budget to complete the data collection	2,250€
Total		€7,500





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