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MASTER THESIS

WINE & GASTRONOMY TOURISM CONNECTING PEOPLE

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to analyze Wine & Gastronomy Tourism as a powerful tool for a destination in developing relationships between visitors and locals; and how these connections impact the destination itself and the way people travel. To develop this study, the author has participated in an internship at Culture Discovery Vacations. This tour operator was selected as a case study due to its vast experience in Wine & Gastronomy Tours in Italy, an ideal destination for this subject. The research is divided into two sections. First, a theoretical analysis of the concepts involved in Wine & Gastronomy Tourism. Second, an experiential analysis based on the internship experience. It involves a complete description of the characteristics of Culture Discovery Vacations culinary tours aiming to understand how they successfully represent the hypothesis of this thesis. The information was collected during the internship through participation and observation. Additionally, interviews and a questionnaire were conducted to obtain primary data from both locals and visitors, to better understand the impact of the tours. As a result, the combination of both the conceptual and experiential analysis has shown how Wine & Gastronomy Tourism is indeed a powerful tool for developing deeper local-visitor relationships. However, the author has concluded, that it is a tool, and therefore it cannot stand on its own. It is the shared values of the people behind the experience that gives authenticity to these connections.

KEYWORDS: Wine & Gastronomy Tourism; Italian Culinary Tours: Culture Discovery Vacations; Friends & Family Travel Style.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BCC: Basque **C**ulinary **C**enter

CDV: Culture **D**iscovery **V**acations

CEO: Chief **E**xecutive **O**fficer

CFO: Chief **F**inancial **O**fficer

CMO: Chief **M**arketing **O**fficer

COO: Chief **O**perating **O**fficer

CVO: Chief **V**isionary **O**fficer

IT: Information **T**echnology

UNWTO: United **N**ations **W**orld **T**ourism **O**rganization

WFTA: World **F**ood **T**ravel **A**ssociation

MFTE: Memorable **F**ood **T**ourism **E**xperience

UNESCO: United **N**ations **E**ducational, **S**cientific and **C**ultural **O**rganization

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a tool for better understanding a destination's culture, it creates opportunities for sharing and exchanging ideas, and is a driver for economic and social development. Wine and Gastronomy are cultural assets, full of tradition and identity. Wine & Gastronomy Tourism creates moments of exchange and true cultural and human value, new opportunities, and development. Do Wine & Gastronomy Tours promote a deeper connection with a destination and its community? Are travelers immersed in a more authentic experience than in conventional tours? This thesis aims to better understand how a company specialized in this niche can have a notorious impact on connecting people through food and wine. With this in mind, my Master's Thesis internship took place at Culture Discovery Vacations, an experienced tour operator that specializes in culinary tours in Italy and Portugal. This company will be the case study for the development of this thesis.

As for its structure, the document first defines the concept of Wine & Gastronomy Tourism, the main activities it implies, and its benefits. Continued by a presentation of Culture Discovery Vacations (CDV) culinary tours, its structure, and key components. Then, it will analyze, how the main characteristics of these tours differentiate Culture Discovery Vacations and make it an example of a successful case of Wine & Gastronomy Tourism linking locals and visitors. Finally, I will present the information collected from primary sources, these being the observation and participation in the company's operations; the conduction of interviews with its main stakeholders; and the results of a questionnaire to a sample of CDV travelers. The article ends with a discussion of results and a conclusion.

1.1 **Italy, the Ideal Destination**

When selecting a destination for the development of my Wine & Gastronomy Tourism internship, Italy was a clear choice. Every region of Italy has its own cultural identity, each one featuring its gastronomic delicacies. Although characterized by unique and distinctive traits, Italian cuisine is the expression of valued and diversified cultural traditions. In Italy, food is more than a physiological need, it is a source of pride and family tradition. Culinary traditions have been handed down from generation to generation and have become real national symbols.

Favored by a geographical position of excellence along the Mediterranean Sea that provides the country with natural rich products, the Mediterranean diet is considered one of the healthiest in the world. Made in Italy products represent the excellence of Italian food and wine production, one of the most exported globally and appealing for tourism.

Italy is the European leader with the most significant number of food and wine products with Protected Origin and Protected Indication status. Often, these productions reflect the knowledge, traditions, uses, and customs of the people who live there and who have consolidated over time. Its cultural value has been recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), to the point of having inserted some landscapes and customs related to wine and gastronomy in their world heritage recognition list. Italy, along with France, has the largest number, 5 in November 2021. These are «Piedmont wine landscapes: Langhe-Roero and Monferrato» and the «Colline del Prosecco di Conegliano e Valdobbiadene» among the material goods; the "Mediterranean diet», the «Cultivation of the Pantelleria vine» and «The art of the Neapolitan Pizza maker» among the immaterial (Garibaldi, 2021).

Wine and olive oil are among the most representative products of Italian food heritage. Besides its productive value for the national economy, and its leading role in the national diet, these constitute two great points of attraction for international tourism. Italy is one of the major wine regions worldwide, being the largest wine producer in the world (49,1 MHL) and the third wine consumer with 24,5 MHL (OIV, 2021). In 2019 wine tourists generated an income of 2.650 million euros with over 15 million tourists and excursionists (Garibaldi, 2021). Olive oil, on the other hand, is still under development and recently gaining visibility.

1.2 **Culture Discovery Vacations**

Culture Discovery Vacations (CDV) is a tour operator that specializes in culinary vacations in Italy and Northern Portugal. It was founded in 2006 by Michael and Paola Kovnick, an American-Italian couple that split their residence between The United States and Italy. After many years of receiving friends and family from the United States in their Italian home, they decided to create a company that would re-create this experience, to offer a tourism product that would showcase the "true Italian lifestyle".

When they had friends visiting, they would share their day-to-day, take them to the beautiful towns nearby, dine at their favorite restaurants and cook meals together at their home. The comments from their friends were always positive and rewarding, they had found a unique sense of home and wanted to return the following year. In addition to this, their hometown, Soriano nel Cimino started receiving tourists, and being one of the few English speakers, Michael and Paola found themselves unofficially acting as tour guides of the area and inviting visitors to their home to share a meal and showing them around. This was the beginning of Culture Discovery Vacations.

The vacations offered by CDV are meant to be an authentic experience among friends, where travelers can discover the local culture in its truest sense, fully embrace the diversity of the destination they are visiting, achieve a sense of belonging and build long-lasting friendships with both locals and fellow travelers. “We believe that the most enriching form of travel is to help travelers out of their comfort zone and preconceived notions of a place they are visiting. Our vision is to create a worldwide network of vacation offerings that are "vacation-of-a-lifetime" experiences, in which when the vacation ends, each guest has a true sense of belonging and new friends abroad.” (Culture Discovery Vacations, 2022, n. Our Vision and Mission).

Initially, tours were only in Soriano nel Cimino, a small town in the province of Viterbo, in the upper Lazio region. Its strategic location, just an hour's drive from Rome, and its proximity to some of the most emblematic towns of Umbria and Tuscany made it an ideal destination for central Italy tourism. They created an itinerary including visits to the most iconic historical and cultural sights in the area, such as Assisi and Orvieto; visits to family-run wineries and oil mills in famous surrounding wine regions such as Montepulciano and Montalcino; meals in private homes of their friends and family and home cooking classes in their private villa. The argument behind the entire vacation is to feel at a second home, a different travel style where visitors would not be tourists but guests, part of the family. Over the years they partnered with many local providers, including members of their own families to develop all the operations of the tours themselves. “If this is our hometown, and close friends and family were coming to visit us here… Where would we go? What would we do there, to whom would we introduce them, **and what would we eat?”** (Culture Discovery Vacations, 2022, n. Our Vision and Mission).

Culture Discovery Vacations has had steady growth since the beginning. New locations in Italy were incorporated, following the same culture and philosophy of the original itinerary in Soriano nel Cimino (See Annex I – CDV 2023 Tour Calendar & Locations). In 2019, CDV formed a new partnership with Wild Douro T.M., a Portuguese tour operator, and started offering an itinerary in Northern Portugal based in the town of Viana do Castelo. CDV currently offers tours in eight locations in Italy and one in Portugal and its team is always scouting new possible locations to expand.

Their current target market is English speakers; from the United States and Canada the vast majority, followed by South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand; middle to high income, aged above 45 years old.

The company is now owned by four managing partners: Rocky Cohen, currently the CEO and in charge of managing all bookings, and customer support before, during, and after the tour;

Daniele Pintaudi, COO in charge of all operations, logistics, and work schedules, vendors, suppliers, and partners; Michael Kovnick who acts as Chairman and CVO as well as the person in charge of IT, Paola Kovnick, as co-Chair and CFO. Because it is a family business, Carla and Sergio, Paola's siblings are as well part of the operations team. Sergio is the driver and in charge of transportation and Carla manages all the logistics and coordination of the Soriano tours as well as the cooking classes. She is also a co-owner with Daniele of Splendido Vacations.

Splendido Vacations is the Italian tour operator that Culture Discovery Vacations founded to run all operations in Italy. The principal officers and partners in the organization are Carla Ciari and Daniele Pintaudi. Splendido acts as its business entity, solely and separately from Culture Discovery Vacations. However, it is considered to be part of the CDV family and acts as an operator for all CDV tours in Italy. It is based in Soriano nel Cimino, and it works with local partners and is an active promoter of tourism in the region. Carla is responsible for operations and accounting. Carla's son, Luca, assists Carla as well as handles additional business-related responsibilities. Daniele is responsible for maintaining CDV – Splendido management and developing new projects for future business and strategic partners for Splendido.

1.3 **The Internship**

The internship took place in Soriano nel Cimino. It was divided into two main areas of work: Guest Support and Hosting. During the first two months, I worked in the back-of-the-house, meaning I assisted with guests' inquiries, bookings, communication and pre-tour organization and logistics. My work was guided mainly by Rocky, but I occasionally collaborated with Michael and Daniele as well. In the month of April, when the season was approaching, I started training to participate as a second host in the tours taking place in Soriano. During the months of May and June I was actively involved in the tours, with the prospect of adding other locations in the future. All my comments and personal observations are based on my experience in the tours taking place in Soriano. Other locations may have differences that I have not experienced by the time this thesis was presented.

2. CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

Touristic products that involve wine and food create moments of sharing where visitors take part in the way of life and traditions of local people. A meal or just a glass of wine sets the stage for a conversation where stories are shared and people learn about each other.

2.1 **Defining Wine & Gastronomy Tourism**

Wine Tourism and Gastronomy Tourism are usually referred to as two separate concepts, not entirely independent one from the other, the first is a sub-category of the latter. From the perspective of this research, following the presentation of the individual definitions and their relationship, we will refer to a single concept englobing both: Wine & Gastronomy Tourism. The reason for this is to highlight wine as a key component of the analysis due to the important role it plays in these tours. Not to mention how much it influences travelers' decision to visit Italy, one of the leading wine destinations in the world. Furthermore, Wine Tourism has been declared a fundamental element of Gastronomy Tourism by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) in the Georgia Declaration on Wine Tourism in 2016.

The following theoretical review will focus on the concepts of Wine Tourism and Gastronomy Tourism and how they connect, and what are the main activities identified as components of this specific niche of tourism.

2.1.1 Wine Tourism

Wine Tourism is a concept that has been vastly analyzed by academia. Hall (2000) defines wine tourism as "visitation to vineyards, wineries, wine festivals and wine shows for which grape wine tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of a grape wine region are the prime motivating factors for visitors". Though simplistic as a definition, it enumerates the main activities which link wine, the product, to tourism, the service. Sigala (2019) emphasizes the fact that Wine Tourism goes beyond selling the product and offering a visit to the cellar doors, it relates to the people behind it, to the socio-cultural and economic space where it is developed. In wine destinations marketing, the wine experience takes the leading role, and its people provide the elements for the destination's differentiation. Several other authors have developed a definition for wine tourism, Getz (2000) underlines its potential for regional development to provide a competitive advantage to regions and analyzes wine tourism from a business perspective. Williams & Kelly (2001), on the other hand, define it from the perspective of the experience, as the accomplishment of a series of unique environmental, gastronomic and cultural, regional, and local experiences. When a winery opens its doors to visitors, it becomes a holistic experience with cognitive, social, hedonist, and emotional elements. It is a multidimensional experience, wine tourists want to be involved in the activities of the winery beyond just tasting, they expect to interact with others, learn and discover the historic and cultural landscape of the region (Compés López and Szolnoki, 2021). The European Charter of Wine Tourism (2016) introduced a more recent definition of wine tourism as a multidimensional system resulting from the interaction of the subsystems Territory, Tourism, and Wine Culture, insisting thus clearly on the deep interconnection between the product, the

people, and the land. It is noticeable how it emphasizes how wine territories should give maximum priority to sustainable development principles. The subject of sustainability has become a topic of interest for wine tourism institutions and academical bodies in the last years.

Wine Tourism fosters sustainable tourism practices, it is a source of economic and social benefits for a destination and an opportunity for underdeveloped and rural areas to enhance their community's value. It is an integral part of cultural tourism, a promoter of both tangible and intangible heritage and a destination's culture and lifestyle (UNWTO, 2016).

Wine tourism presents an opportunity where the very different worlds of wine and tourism merge, the production, and the service work together, the union of the tangible and intangible. It has created a new competitive advantage for wineries and wine regions to increase their income where the knowledge and skill in tourism can make a difference. Furthermore, by opening the cellar doors to visitors, winemakers are presented with the opportunity to share their stories, show their hard work and craftsmanship and enhance the value of wine as a consumer product, and interact directly with their customers. From a visitor's perspective, it is knowing the why behind the product, and the historic and cultural background of the wine they are consuming. It creates an experiential memory related to the product and a personal connection between the winemaker and the wine consumer.

The past three decades have experienced a trend towards developing wine tourism as a discipline, produced vast academic research on the field, and emphasized the differentiation of this specific niche of beverage tourism. Many would even argue that wine-related tourism research predates gastronomy tourism academia. It is however undeniable that Wine Tourism is a sub-category of Gastronomy Tourism. Firstly, by basic deduction, gastronomy is the science and art of eating and drinking that examines the relationship between culture and food (Polat, 2022), and therefore wine, as a beverage is an element within gastronomy. Furthermore, the UNWTO (2019, p. 44) defines Wine Tourism as a sub-type of Gastronomy Tourism before describing what activities it involves.

2.1.2 Gastronomy Tourism

Referred to also as Food, Culinary, Gourmet, Epicurean Tourism. It is however the concept of Gastronomy that best assembles with Tourism, as it presents a wider spectrum and conveys not only food and beverage consumption and production but also its cultural and social background. Defined as an inter-disciplinary knowledge, gastronomy studies how the entire process behind foods and beverages affects mental and social wellbeing (UNWTO and BCC, 2019).

Gastronomy Tourism is defined by the UNWTO (2019) as “a type of tourism activity which is characterized by the visitor’s experience linked with food and related products and activities while traveling. Along with authentic, traditional, and/or innovative culinary experiences, Gastronomy Tourism may also involve other related activities such as visiting the local producers, participating in food festivals, and attending cooking classes”. According to the World Food Travel Association (WFTA), “Food tourism is the act of traveling for a taste of place to get a sense of place ™” and it benefits communities by bringing awareness of their local culture and increasing local pride, it attracts more respectful and sustainably conscious tourists and has a positive economic impact in destinations (Wolf, 2022). “Food tourism is composed of activities that provide experiences of consumption and appreciation of food and beverages, presented in such a way that values the history, the culture, and the environment of a particular region.” (Food’n Road, 2021).

Consumption of food and beverages is directly influenced by factors such as taste, cost, health care, satisfaction, and convenience that generate a pattern of behavior and a manifestation of human identity. When new destinations are visited, this behavior pattern of tourists changes because food becomes an essential part of the travel experience (Scott and Duncan, 2015). And this is how Gastronomy Tourism arises, due to those tourists who wish to satisfy their hedonistic and cultural appetite in addition to their physiological need to eat. (UNWTO and BCC, 2019). When traveling, mundane yet memorable activities such as food and wine, are elevated to experiential (Sigala and Robinson, 2019).

Gastronomic tourists are interested in the origin of the products they are consuming, the culinary techniques, and the cultural background behind a destination’s cuisine. They are not just interested in the gastronomy itself, however, they find it as a means of socialization, to understand the social context authentically, they are looking for the essence of the place. Gastronomy Tourism empowers local communities as ambassadors of their territory and strengthens their identity and sense of belonging. As a result, they care and therefore maintain the authenticity of the place. Destinations that see gastronomy as culture, that despite globalization, preserve their traditions and continue to pass them from generation to generation, are destinations that stand out as culinary destinations and are continuously improving and innovating while being truthful to their culinary heritage (UNWTO and BCC, 2019).

2.1.3 Experiences

Wine & Gastronomy Tourism or referred to by some authors as *enogastrotourism* may manifest itself in diverse activities associated with food and wine, below we will outline the main ones.

These are touristic activities that place culinary traditions as a pillar of regional identity and cultural heritage and value the relationship between food and society (Food'n Road, 2021).

Market Experience

Visiting local markets is an experience that can be guided or made independently. In many cases, it is a complementary activity to a cooking class.

The markets are the entry point to a destination's gastronomy. In most cultures, the local market whether it is in a fixed building, or weekly set up in a specific public space (square, street, park, etc.), is the main source of shopping for locals. The market is the place where people buy their ingredients, where they interact, it creates a connection between the urban and the rural community. Visitors can learn about the biodiversity and main agricultural activities of a country, meet the producers, and learn about the local seasonal products. Markets can also be the environment for street food or casual dining. Additionally, they are a key component in rebuilding local food economies.

Food Tour

A food or culinary tour is a professionally guided tour of the local food and beverage scene in a destination, to better understand its history and culture through its gastronomy. It includes tasting local ingredients and dishes, and it can be related to a specific theme or neighborhood. It usually takes 2 to 4 hours, and it involves visiting several establishments, depending on the theme and the style of the tour these can be restaurants, street food vendors, markets, bars, caffés, or shops. They are usually done on foot but nowadays there are food tours by bicycle, Segway, tuk-tuk, boat, and other means of transportation. This experience is an enriching activity for any visit to a destination as it allows visitors to learn and understand the culture and history of a place through its cuisine.

Cooking Class

Cooking classes in tourism can cater to different publics, they can be professional or aimed at amateurs, for groups or with individual counters, in an academy or a private home. Sometimes they include a visit to a market, to a local producer, or to the house's vegetable garden or small farm to obtain the ingredients. Also, cooking classes can be a demonstration or interactive, and in most cases, the results of the class are then shared among the participants. Cooking classes can also be themed, to a specific local ingredient, dish, or cuisine.

Wine Tasting

Tastings can be conducted in the context of a winery visit, or independently. Most tastings are guided either by a representative of the winery or a knowledgeable wine professional. They are a tool for better understanding the regional wine and learning about its characteristics, the nuances, and the story behind the winemaking.

A horizontal wine tasting involves the comparison of different wines from the same year, it emphasizes the differences between the wines. A vertical tasting is the comparison of different vintages of the same wine, so the influence of each year is tasted. Tastings can be blind, meaning that the consumers do not know which is the product until after they have tasted it and therefore not be biased by the brand, winemaker, grape variety, year, or other influencing factors.

Other Tastings

Tastings are not exclusive to wine, despite it being the most popular type of tasting. Other beverages have tastings, such as beer, whisky, cognac, tequila, coffee, and others. Food products such as chocolate, olive oil, cheese, and even spices have tastings as well. Any food or beverage product can have a tasting session. The purpose is always the same, to introduce and better understand the product by tasting more than one sample and comparing its differences, all with the guidance of a knowledgeable person. Tastings are an interactive learning tool and an introduction to the product of a region and its history.

Winery or Producer Visit

Visiting wineries and producers takes place in rural areas, therefore it is also considered part of rural tourism or agritourism. Visits in most cases include a guided tour of the facilities where the production process is explained to the visitor and the main materials and goods are presented. These visits can be conducted by the producer directly or by a professional guide that knows and understand the production process very well. In most cases, visits include a tasting of the product and the opportunity to purchase. Beyond food tasting, tourists perceive local products as a vehicle to get closer to a destination’s identity (Carvalho, Kastenholz and Carneiro, 2021).

Other activities such as artisanal product workshops, food and beverage festivals, food and beverage museums, or themed dining experiences are part of Wine & Gastronomy Tourism. The main characteristic they share is that the product itself, whether it’s a dish, a wine, an

ingredient, or a food product, brings the visitor closer to the destination's traditions, culture, and way of life.

A study conducted by researchers Stone et al., on Memorable Food Tourism Experiences (MFTEs) explored what travelers think is the reason why gastronomy tourism experiences in particular are memorable. The results suggest that this happens due to a combination of several factors: *sensory connections*, food and drink activities engage more senses than other travel activities*; emotional connections*, these experiences can provide positive emotions such as pleasure and happiness; *social and interpersonal connections,* they take place in social environments and are associated with building and strengthening social bonds*; reflective emotions*, people may encounter these foods later in life and it would trigger reflections on the previous experience. Positive memories of enjoying local foods enhance visitors' place attachment (2022).

3. CULTURE DISCOVERY VACATIONS TOURS

Culture Discovery Vacations follows a certain set of characteristics for all their culinary tours, or as they refer to it "a formula. Cooking classes, excursions to famous sites as well as hidden treasures, immersion into the local culture, unique hands-on experiences, small groups, dinners in private homes with locals.... all tied together by what we had always done: Those that come would be treated like friends and family, not customers.... but in the truest sense" (Culture Discovery Vacations, 2022, n. About Us). To achieve this homogeneity and have a criterion for the creation of future itineraries, all tours meet these same characteristics. The following description will divide these into organizational structure and travel style differential.

3.1 **Organizational Structure**

All tours follow the same structure and logistically have very similar operations. It is the Operations Manager, Daniele, who coordinates all itineraries, manages the relationships with suppliers and partners, organizes, and supervises the staff schedules and assignments. We will enumerate the main characteristics of the tours from the organizational structure point of view.

3.1.1 Location

The locations are selected under the same criteria to fit the purpose of the tour. They need to be accessible in terms of transportation and geographically well situated for excursions to attractive destinations. Additionally, the towns/cities cannot be mass tourism destinations, but

instead display the true everyday lifestyle of locals. Locations need to be strategic in the sense that they offer a diverse set of activities, a balance of cooking, dining, sightseeing, and “off the beaten path” in one itinerary. Finally, but not least important, they must be charming, beautiful, and safe for the visitors.

3.1.2 Duration

Almost all tours are one week, exactly 8 days - 7 nights. The first day is always the arrival, so it is a day with fewer activities and aimed for the guests to settle and rest from their flights, the main activity is the orientation meeting and welcome dinner where there is an overview of the week’s itinerary. The week is then organized with 2 full-day excursions and 4 half-day excursions combined with other activities of which at least 3 will be cooking classes.

The only exception is the tour “Sicily, The Motherland - Wine, Cooking, Culture & Adventure - 12 Amazing Days from Coast to Coast!” which as the name explains is a longer vacation that lasts 12 days – 11 nights.

3.1.3 Accommodation

In each of the different locations, the accommodation styles vary, the only constant is that they are locally owned and their owners and staff share the CDV philosophy to make the guests feel like it is their second home. They can be private village homes, small boutique hotels, or even entire private villas in some locations. Accommodation partners are chosen very carefully and constantly audited to keep the quality standards of the company, “every choice of our accommodations is uniquely chosen based on our very high standards, and always a place WE want to stay.” (Culture Discovery Vacations, 2022, n. What Sets Us Apart)

Another noticeable characteristic is that the accommodation is the same for the entire week, it does not change, all excursions are accessible to be done in one day or less. The tour “Sicily, The Motherland - Wine, Cooking, Culture & Adventure - 12 Amazing Days from Coast to Coast!” is once again an exception due to it being a longer vacation, this itinerary consists of three different accommodation locations.

3.1.4 Transportation

During the tour, the group maintains the same means of transportation, which is either a bus or minivan depending on the number of people. The driver is also the same person accompanying the group for the entire week, on rare occasions when due to Italian laws the driver needs to have rest time that does not match the itinerary, there would be a change of drivers. Additionally, the driver is considered as part of the hosting, he or she will also accompany the group on excursions and meals to promote the interaction and a friendly

atmosphere. Moreover, all tours include a shuttle pick-up and drop-off at the nearest main airport and train station, at the beginning and end of the tour.

3.1.5 Hosting

All groups are accompanied by a tour leader, CDV refers to them as hosts. The hosts are responsible for the group during the entire tour, from the moment they arrive at the airport or train station until the drop off on the last day. The role of the host is not only to make sure the schedule is followed but to be a companion, a local representative, and one more member of the vacation group. Hosts are encouraged to interact and participate as much as possible in all activities, to be proactive and friendly, to assist guests on any matter, and to make guests feel comfortable and among family. Hosts are expected to know the area, the traditions, and the food and wine of the region. However, these are not the main characteristics according to the CDV Managers, the most important are the attitude, the personality that the host conveys, and the sharing of the company's philosophy and values. "Instead of talking about the history of a particular building, the tendency was more to talk about our connection to where we were. We were sharing our experience with our friends and family." (Culture Discovery Vacations, 2022, n. About Our Team)

3.1.6 All-Inclusive

All CDV tours are all-inclusive. This means that all meals (including wine), excursions, transportation, transfers to and from the airport, and accommodation are included in the price paid for the vacation. Even the third-party tips, meaning the tips for staff at restaurants, wineries, tour guides, etc. (all non-CDV staff). Among the not included items are airfare, travel insurance, hotel room upgrades, payment for damages to the accommodation facilities, personal shopping, and tipping (CDV staff). This item and the arguments behind this travel style will be further discussed in the next section.

3.1.7 Booking & Cancellation

The only means for booking is the website, exceptionally guests can book by phone if they cannot access it. When guests select the tour on the website's Tour Calendar (See Annex I – CDV 2023 Tour Calendar & Locations) and proceed with the booking, an initial 20% deposit will be charged. Once the payment is processed, the guests receive a confirmation email that provides them access to the reservations system where they can access the details of their booking and make changes to their contact information, arrival/departure details, special requests and add comments (See Annex II – Email Communication). Ninety days before the tour starts, the due balance is charged. In case the booking is done within the ninety days before the trip, the full balance is initially charged. Guests will receive an email informing them

this charge will be made, to notify them in case they wish to change the payment method, or if they need to inform their bank about an unusual expense and therefore avoid issues when processing the payment (See Annex II – Email Communication). The main payment method is credit card (Visa, Mastercard, Discover, and American Express) however in cases that the guests wish to pay by bank transfer or PayPal, they can make a special request and be accommodated.

All prices are based on double occupancy unless otherwise noted, a single supplement may apply for only 1 person in the accommodations. All prices are quoted in US Dollars. Discounts are available, such as seasonal rates, early booking, and alumni discounts for returning guests, group discounts are exclusive of the previously mentioned. Discounts are applied on the balance due, never on the booking deposit. Airfare is not included as well as travel insurance, which is highly encouraged.

If the booking is done more than 180 days before the start date of the tour, the deposits are refundable within 50 days of booking. All further payments are non-refundable once they have been charged.

3.2 **Travel Style Differential**

Traveling with CDV is a memorable experience. Guests “become the sight” as they integrate into the lifestyle instead of being just spectators. The balance between people, place, and experience has been achieved in a unique way that differentiates CDV tours from any other.

3.2.1 The Place

The locations where the tours take place, as before mentioned, are strategically chosen. A particularity that makes them different and therefore attractive, is that they are *off the beaten path* and not yet developed touristic destinations. For example, in the Italian region of Toscana, the accommodation is based in Radda instead of Firenze or Siena; in the Sicily island vacation, the main location is the island of Favignana instead of Salina, Stromboli, or Lipari; in Northern Portugal, the location is not Porto, but Viana do Castelo. These unusual destinations have a local charm that gets sometimes lost in well-known touristic spots. CDV chooses them because they allow the guests to experience a more authentic way of life and be fully immersed in the culture.

3.2.2 The Experience

All-Inclusive

“So it had to always be all-inclusive because we would never ask a friend to pick up a tab.” (Culture Discovery Vacations, 2022, n. About Us). The most common companies that offer all-inclusive experiences such as resorts or cruise ships do not include alcoholic beverages on their packages, CDV includes the wine in every meal. Wine is an essential asset in Italian gastronomic culture. When guests book, they pay one final price for the entire vacation. This way, guests are at ease and much more comfortable, because they do not have to worry about paying or what restaurant to go to, they place their trust in CDV to make the right choices to have the best possible experience. The main goal is to take guests to places where locals go to have their meals, to farm-to-table establishments with traditional local dishes. “At the end of the day, if we did not knock your socks off with the food & wine, we failed. You are in Italy, and we are going to make sure you have meals you will never forget” (Culture Discovery Vacations, 2022, n. A Different Kind of Tour Company).

Full Immersion

During the cooking classes, visits to a winery, a ceramics factory, or any local producer, participation is actively encouraged. An interactive approach, where guests are involved in the activities and are not just mere spectators. The most memorable experiences are those we co-create when we are involved in a way that we better understand the activity itself and feel we have contributed ourselves to the process. The cooking classes are the best example, they have a hands-on approach, and all guests have the tools to cook during the entire class, learn from the person teaching the class, and put into practice the skills demonstrated to better understand the procedure and be able to recreate it. Additionally, the results are shared in a celebratory group meal.

Active participation occurs when the consumer is allowed to be partially responsible for creating his/ her experience, assuming the role of experience creator and revealing interest in learning and interacting with others and with the experience environment (Carvalho, Kastenholz and Carneiro, 2021). Several authors have researched the importance of co-creation, a concept that in tourism implies that tourists assume a central role in the development of the experience. For example, in many wineries during harvest season, visitors participate in the winemaking process whether it is by harvesting grapes in the vineyards or doing punch down during the fermentation process. Co-creation offers great potential for promoting more involving Wine & Gastronomy Tourism experiences and encouraging travelers' involvement stimulates multiple interactions with the place and the people (Carvalho,

Kastenholz and Carneiro, 2021). “We introduce you to amazing local people that share their hospitality and life experience with you, and we go to great lengths to involve you, hand on, in the culture of the place. If the locals are harvesting, you will harvest. If the locals are fishing, you will fish with them. If the locals make an amazing cheese, you will make the amazing cheese.”(Culture Discovery Vacations, 2022, n. What Sets Us Apart).

3.2.3 The People

Friends & Family

Inspired by their friends and family visits for the creation of Culture Discovery Vacations, this is their travel style and the experience they want to provide to every guest. Firstly, they are not considered tourists, travelers, visitors, customers, or clients, they are guests. They are not tour leaders or guides, they are hosts. This terminology is of great importance to the company as it represents the kind of relationship they want to build, the breaking of barriers, and the sensation of being “part of the family”. Hosts are not allowed to receive any kind of reward from vendors or suppliers for their recommendations, the company has a very strict policy of not accepting this and therefore all recommendations come from their own experience and what they would recommend to a friend. Furthermore, the meals and the cooking are not high cuisines but home-cooked style, promoting a more casual and familiar environment. Groups are small, the maximum number of guests per vacation group is 17 to 18 depending on the location, therefore all guests get the opportunity to interact with each other and develop friendships.

The Team

One of the main characteristics that distinguish the way that Culture Discovery Vacations works, is the focus on the people. Not only many of the members of the staff are actual family members of the managers, but most have also developed long-lasting friendships. When scouting a new location, or visiting possible vendors or partners, the decisive factor is the people that will work with CDV. As a company with a unique travel style, its partners need to share their philosophy and values, and quality standards and have a similar way of working or adapt well to it. This is of high importance, to embrace the culture of CDV to transmit the same in all locations.

4. EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

During the internship experience, three activities to contribute to the research for this thesis were conducted: interviews, a questionnaire, and observation. These provided useful

information on how the members of Culture Discovery Vacations and their guests perceive Wine & Gastronomy Tourism. Additionally, my personal experience working was useful to better understand the influence of Wine & Gastronomy Tourism in connecting visitors and locals by not only observing but actively participating in CDV culinary tours.

4.1 **Interviews**

Two kinds of interviews were conducted. The first one was a set of interviews with the executive managers and owners of Culture Discovery Vacations: Daniele, Rocky, Michael, and Paola. The second set of interviews was directed to the CDV staff and partners.

4.1.1 Management

These interviews involved in-depth questions adapted to the different roles each manager plays in the company. Only three questions were repeated to all managers, these were the following:

1) Why culinary tours instead of conventional? Why is Food & Wine a focus? What do you think is the differential?
2) What is the influence these tours have on locals? Economic, social, and cultural exchange.
3) If you have to say 3 words to describe CDV, what would those be?

The first question aims to explain the argument behind the choice of Wine & Gastronomy Tourism over another niche of tourism. To understand why the company decided to focus on this sector and how important it is. The second question is specific to their point of view on how Wine & Gastronomy Tours interacts with local communities and how as a company they have seen the changes over the years and the impact they've had. The response to the third question will be a part of a word cloud of descriptors of CDV.

The founders, Michael and Paola, had the original idea for the creation of Culture Discovery Vacations and their main role today is to make sure the vision and original values of the company are represented in all the itineraries. Therefore, their interview was oriented toward a visionary's perspective of Wine & Gastronomy Tourism and how as a company they adapt to the trends of tourism and the expansion to new destinations.

The COO, Daniele, manages the organization of daily operations and is in charge of recruiting, training, and assigning all the staff. For that reason, the interview had a focus on people, the main human resources qualifications, and the qualities for the selection of partners.

Rocky as a CEO is in charge of managing bookings, all direct communications with guests, and actively participating in tours. Thus, the interview was aimed at understanding the booking motivations and his perspective on how guests interact with locals.

4.1.2 Staff & Local Partners

These interviews all had the same three questions, to achieve a diverse set of responses on the subject of this research. These were the questions asked:

1) Why do you think food and wine are important in these tours?
2) Do you think CDV tours had or have had an impact on the local community? If yes, how?
3) If you have to say 3 words to describe CDV, what would those be?

The first question aims to understand the role wine and gastronomy play from the point of view of those involved in providing it. How they perceive the influence it has and the added value to the touristic experience. The second question addresses the impact of Wine & Gastronomy Tourism in local communities, specifically in this case study and being the interviewees' locals themselves. The third question, which was also asked to the management has been formulated to create a word cloud with the main descriptors of CDV to better understand how the company is perceived by its members.

4.2 **Questionnaire**

The questionnaire was conducted to CDV alumni, a term used by the company to describe travelers that have participated in at least one vacation with them. It is a survey of fourteen questions on Wine & Gastronomy Tourism. The purpose is to obtain data from the traveler's perspective on how their experience has influenced their traveling style and how they interacted with locals during the tours.

The questionnaire was distributed via email to a quota sample of guests that traveled with Culture Discovery Vacations in 2021 and May 2022. It was not shared on social media to guarantee the respondents would be only CDV alumni.

The complete questionnaire is available in Annex III – Questionnaire for CDV Guests together with a link to Google Forms. The survey consists of a total of 14 questions created with the Google Forms software. All responses were anonymous, however, the first three questions define the target market, by use of demographic questions. Additionally, the twelfth question complements this by defining the frequency of travel with CDV.

The following questions dig deeper into the Wine & Gastronomy Tourism experiences. The fourth question is inspired by the Likert Scale to determine the importance of Wine and Gastronomy in the respondents' travels. Next, the list of the main experiences in Wine & Gastronomy Tourism (2.1.3 Experiences) is displayed with a multi-select multiple-choice picture question (number 5). The following multiple-choice question intends to identify the main influencing factors that determine the success of one of these experiences. This question (number 6) helps to identify the motivations and expectations of travelers. Question seven is a dichotomous inquiry to define if the traveler has only experienced these specific tours with CDV.

The next section approaches the subject of engagement. Question eight is also inspired by the Likert Scale to delve into the subject of this thesis and understand the connection with locals during the CDV culinary tours. Questions nine and ten relate to the influence the experience has once they return to their homes. Number eleven is a rating question on a statement on the relationship between Wine & Gastronomy Tourism and sustainability.

Finally, a single-select multiple-choice picture question (number 13) with no purpose but for entertainment, still on a subject related to Italian gastronomy. The survey is then concluded with a comment box open-ended question (number 14) to collect additional feedback, with an open format so the respondent can answer based on personal experience.

4.3 **Personal Observations**

The internship experience was divided into two areas of activity: Guest Support and Hosting Tours. During the first three months of working at Culture Discovery Vacations, I mainly worked on Guest Support with Rocky, the CEO, and learned about the operative and organizational structure from Daniele, the COO. The season for tours started on April 30th, 2022, therefore the last two weeks of April and the months of May and June were mainly dedicated to hosting training and active participation in the tours.

4.3.1 Guest Support

I was given a company email, access to the reservations system, the cloud, social media accounts, and the main email (info@culturediscovery.com). My role was to learn and actively support Rocky in all activities regarding guests' inquiries and information requests. Additionally, after further training in the reservations system, I was assigned with sending the main communications for the upcoming tours. Before the beginning of the tour guests receive several emails with important information for the tour (See 3.1.7 Booking & Cancellation), I was in charge of sending the Expectations Letter that details several aspects for guests to take into account when traveling to each specific location; the Covid Updated Information Letter

with the latest measures and restrictions as well as links to the official government sources; Host Introduction Letter; Shuttle Confirmation Request; among others (See Annex II – Email Communication). Furthermore, I was trained on how to navigate the basics of the Reservations System to access booking information, tour details, shuttle requests, and staff assignments. Today CDV is updating its website and reservations system with new software developed by Michael called *CDV Basecamp* (See Annex IV- CDV Basecamp).

From a back-of-the-house perspective, I learned about the details behind the tours, and the inquiries made by the guests opened my curiosity into details or aspects that otherwise I may have not noticed. By actively participating in this department, I strengthened my communication and organizational skills, learned and practiced how to handle complaints and feedback as well as improved my time management.

4.3.2 Hosting Tours

Before the start of the season, I was given training on the main logistics of the tours, the destinations, guests' profiles, needs, schedules, and organization.

Working at the Splendido Vacations office, I was based in Soriano, and therefore "Wine & Cooking Under the Tuscan & Umbrian Sun" was the main tour I was involved in. In this location, the accommodation is private homes around the town, which are managed by the staff at Splendido. Some of the homes are owned by CDV and some are rented from private local owners, they are all located within walking distance from the main square, and they all meet the same quality standards.

Pre-Tour Activities

The week before the beginning of the tour, all the homes are thoroughly cleaned by a professional team. My job, together with Elena and Carla from the Splendido team, was to check and arrange the set-up of all the homes before the guests arrive. We verified the following items:

- All the rooms are provided with linen, towels, and toiletries according to the number of guests expected in each home.
- The kitchen is set up with coffee, both for the filter and the Italian traditional coffee maker which require different grindings; various teas; sugar and sweetener; cleaning supplies such as detergent, towels, sponges, and cloths; in the fridge, there is orange juice and water as well as a box of sandwiches which are bought the morning of the tour from the local bakery.
- The Air-conditioning and the Wi-Fi are working.

- The main table in the dining room is set up with: One copy of the detailed itinerary for each guest; an introduction to Soriano with general information and useful recommendations; a set of *breakfast cards* per guest; a bottle of wine; a wine glass per guest and corkscrew; a CDV sunflower ceramic souvenir spoon rest; a tray of pastries bought the morning of the tour from the local bakery; a bowl of fresh fruit; and a vase with fresh flowers.

The hosts receive the week before the working materials they would need, such as luggage tags for the pick-up, a list of arrival and departure information, a work schedule, and an expenses report to complete at the end of the tour. Each host has a company card for expenses.

During the Tour

I shadowed the host during the tours and participated in all the activities and meals with the group. These are my main personal observations:

- **The host is part of the group.** The host is always present, from the moment that the guests arrive at the airport or local train station, he/she is the first person they meet. The host shares the experience as a local but also as part of the group, participating in all the activities and sharing all meals. He/she sets the tone for an ambiance of fun, good conviviality, and bonding.

- **Relaxed with a tight schedule.** The itinerary is full, everyday follows a tight schedule of activities from the morning until late in the evening. However, the travel style is relaxed, and the host makes the best of each moment, so the guests do not feel rushed or stressed in any way. It is a remarkable quality that increases the guest's satisfaction and enjoyment while maintaining an organized structure.

- **Stories over History.** It is not so much a matter of facts or information but sharing experiences. With the easy access we have to information today, it does not make sense for the host to focus on dates and facts, despite being knowledgeable and able to respond to specific inquiries. The host, as well as the partners in the different places visited (wineries for example), share their anecdotes and stories so the visitors would better understand the history of the place from their perspective.

- **Authentic engagement.** It goes beyond a weekly vacation, there is a bond of friendship within the group and with the locals. During my internship, I experienced first-

hand this engagement with the following example: The United States requires a covid-19 test to enter the country so all guests need to get tested before traveling. We had one guest that tested positive and had to stay for an extra week in isolation. During that week, when the tour was over, the CDV team took care of her. We found her accommodation, offered assistance with re-booking her flights, provided her with food and anything she needed, and checked every day with her how she was feeling. We were there every step of the way until she was recovered and allowed to travel home, just as someone would do with their own family.

I had the CDV experience both from the guests' and the staff's perspectives. I met the different partners, participated in the cooking classes, tasted the wines, and shared the meals. It was an enriching experience where I enhanced my knowledge of Italian wine, gastronomy, and culture as well as sharpened my Italian language skills. Additionally, I improved my communication, guidance, and leadership skills. I was embedded with the CDV philosophy, and it helped me to better understand the way they work.

See Annex V - Wine & Cooking Under the Tuscan & Umbrian Sun for details on the itinerary and items described above.

5. RESULTS

5.1 **Results of the Interviews**

Wine & Gastronomy

The first question was “Why culinary tours instead of conventional? Why is Food & Wine a focus?” to understand the role wine and gastronomy play in the tours, their influence, and their importance.

One answer was common in all interviewees, as the tours started in Italy there was no doubt this would be an important factor because wine and food play a key role in the life of Italians. Many cultures are defined by their gastronomy, Italy is one of the most well-known examples. A typical Italian is constantly thinking about what, when with whom they will be eating their next meal and works for this purpose. Kids grow up having bread with tomato and olive oil for a snack or even bread dipped in wine. According to Unione Italiana Food (2019), the second-largest food association in Europe, Italians dedicate almost 30% of their time to activities related to food, such as cooking, shopping, or going to restaurants. They consider food to be a means for socialization and conviviality.

When people travel, they want to experience the authenticity of a destination, a glimpse of the local lifestyle, the local culture. As per Rocky, food is something people can relate to, wine and food go “hand in hand” and are both essential parts of the Italian culture. Michael explains: “When I am sitting at the table with your family, that is where I will better understand you and see the world the way you see it. Through a meal, I will learn your story, that thing that makes you, you. The biggest connections with people are over a table.” Wine & Gastronomy Tourism activities complement the sightseeing because they are immersive experiences in the Italian culture. It is through the sharing of meals that the group comes together, and connections are created. Rocky also mentions how influential the cooking classes are for integration, not only for incorporating Italian culture but also for the culture within the group: “they are a great ice breaker, a great way for people to get to know each other”. Food and wine make people feel at ease and feel more confident to share personal stories and talk about themselves.

The term *culinary* was innovative at the time CDV started and it was mainly for marketing purposes. However, the company has always defined food and wine as important aspects of their tours. Today, this niche of tourism has become very popular, though the way that food and wine are experienced with CDV is different. They do not offer just cooking and meals, they participate and interact with the people behind it. Additionally, Daniele mentions that Portugal at first was challenging because, despite its diverse and rich wine and gastronomy, it is not internationally renowned besides Port wine. However, it was the local team at Wild Douro T.M. that presented a set of unique experiences with local people that showcase the richness of Portuguese culinary culture, such as a cooking class in the back kitchen of a traditional bakery with the owners, and visits to family-owned small wineries in the Douro Valley.

Furthermore, many of the interviewees mentioned the influence of Italian culinary culture in other countries of the world in the form of restaurants or even what today can be considered global food products such as pasta, pizza, and ice cream. Many travelers from the United States come to Italy to explore their family heritage, descendants of generations of Italian immigrants that nowadays still uphold the traditions, especially around a table.

I also asked about food and wine knowledge for their staff’s training. It is important to be informative, know about local products, and give useful recommendations. However, the focus is not on technical facts, but on sharing personal stories, what are the traditions among their families, and the foods they ate during their childhood. It is also relevant to adapt to the audience, to be able to answer guests with different levels of knowledge.

According to Rocky, over 65% of the booking motivation for first-time travelers is wine and gastronomy. Because many are referrals, it is an estimation, but he mentioned that when there is word-of-mouth, this aspect of the experience is always transmitted.

Local Influence

The second subject discussed was the influence of the CDV culinary tours on the local communities. Firstly, all agreed that they indeed have positively influenced the locals.

From the economic point of view, the influence of Culture Discovery Vacations is clear, it generates employment and is a source of income for local businesses. The company tries as much as possible to contribute to the local economy. Due to the type of location, being places with not much previous tourism income, CDV opens the door for a new set of business opportunities for many. For example, a small family-run olive oil mill that receives visitors for the first time with CDV will develop the infrastructure and knowledge for other visitors in the future. Daniele refers to this positive change with several examples and adds: “The local community grows thanks to our job, mainly the economy when we base the tour there. We share our know-how, we show them that is possible to have tourism, we teach them how to do cooking classes, we teach them to work differently and we open their eyes.”

In addition to this, receiving international visitors opens opportunities for small-town communities. It internationalizes them, they become more multi-cultural by interacting with people from different backgrounds. All the locals that participate in the activities of the tours, such as partners or those assisting during the cooking classes live the cultural exchange and improve their communication skills. Michael added: “Locals realize how special their traditions and way of life is, they start to appreciate their culture.” When visitors interact with locals, it is a cross-cultural experience even without speaking the same language, both parties are interested in learning about each other.

All About People

During the interviews, all commented on the importance of the people they work with and their shared values. Paola mentioned how it is a key aspect of their working relationships with partners, vendors, suppliers, and staff in general to understand the way CDV works and its philosophy. “We understand that others may change the way they work but if it doesn’t fit anymore, we move on, we are not committed to a company or a business.” They value people above income, they have closed off profitable destinations because they were not in line with their way of working. Daniele added that partners can be trained, and they can adapt and learn about the CDV style of work, but the attitude is key and people always come first. For

example, when selecting an accommodation, the owners' and staff's attitude will be more important than the amenities of the establishment, always still meeting the quality standards. The same for hosting, the knowledge needs to be there, but the attitude is what makes the difference with a regular tour guide.

New Horizons

The CDV team is always looking for new projects, always innovating, and searching for new opportunities. Nowadays they are working on a possible partnership with a cruise ship company to offer a new "land and sea" product with the distinctive CDV travel style always in mind. They are constantly scouting new locations, mainly in Europe for logistical reasons, but are open to other destinations as well. "There will always be cooking. In Italy because wine and cooking are at the heart of the culture, but if we go to a different country, we might focus more on beer for example…" says Michael, and adds how at the end of the day, the most important aspect is that the experience is authentic, immersive, and give guests a feeling of belonging.

CDV in 3 words

A total of 15 interviewees were asked to describe Culture Discovery Vacations in 3 words. The word cloud presented in Figure 1 shows how the words *Family, Food,* and *Fun* were the most popular terms to describe their interpretation of CDV.



Figure 1: CDV in 3 words.
Word cloud presenting the result of an interview to CDV managers, staff and partners asking to describe CDV in three words. Created with WordArt.com

5.2 **Results of the Questionnaire**

The survey received a total of 89 responses from CDV alumni.

Target Market

The responses received help better define the main demographic characteristics of the CDV alumni. Respondents were from the United States (92,1%) and Canada (7,9%). Following the guidelines of the American Marketing Association (2020) on generational marketing, the majority of the respondents can be identified as Baby Boomers (69,7%), followed by Generation X (16,9%) and the Silent Generation (11,2%). They are frequent travelers, 23,6% travel internationally several times a year, 36% every year, and 34,8% every other year. And 69% have either traveled several times with CDV (43,8%) or have the intent to return (25,9%).

Wine & Gastronomy Tourism

Almost 70% of the respondents consider that gastronomy and wine play an important role in their travels and have an influence when they select a destination. The remaining 30% answered that it is an aspect somewhat important that they consider as part of the experience.

From the list of activities that can be considered the main Wine & Gastronomy Tourism experiences, only 6,7% of the respondents have never participated in any of them besides when traveling with Culture Discovery Vacations. It is noticeable that over 83% answered that CDV was their first culinary vacation, however, most of them participated in at least one of these activities independently from their CDV tour. A possible interpretation would be that CDV as their first culinary experience inspired them to do more food-and-wine-related activities later on. Figure 2 reflects the percentage of travelers that participated in each category, where Wine Tasting outstands with 76 respondents, followed by the Market Experience with 69.

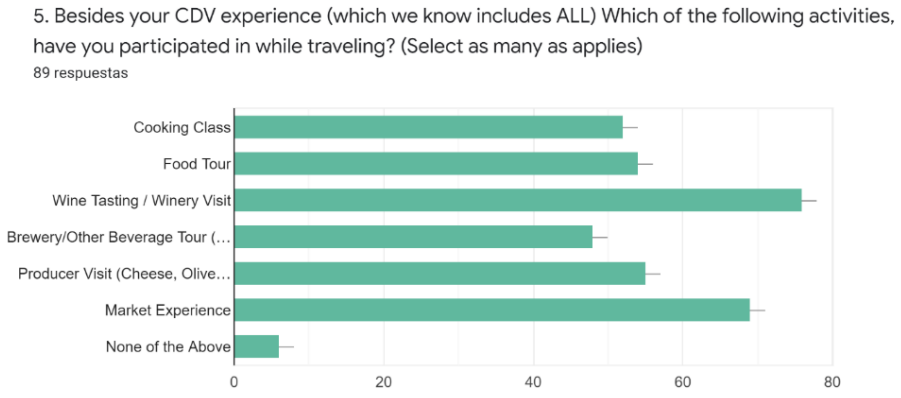


Figure 2: Wine & Gastronomy Tourism Activities.
Response to Question 5 of the CDV Guests' questionnaire on Wine & Gastronomy Travel Experiences. They had to select what Wine & Gastronomy Tourism activities they had participated in without CDV.
Graph from Google Forms, own creation.

The main characteristics travelers search for when participating in Wine & Gastronomy Tourism experiences are authenticity (85,4%), that is local (80,9%), and meeting the people behind it (77,5%). On the other hand, the least important aspects are that they are high-level gourmet (15,7%) and aesthetically appealing for social media posts (19,1%).

Engagement

When asked about their engagement with the local community in comparison with other travel experiences, 92% of the respondents agree that the level of engagement was higher or much higher (40%).

The gastronomic experience remains memorable when they return home either by the purchase of products or ingredients (79,8%), by re-creating the dishes prepared during the vacation (85,4%), or just by sharing their experience with friends and family (92,1%). Additionally, 65% of the respondents share their knowledge related to gastronomy (dishes, restaurants, experiences) with future travelers.

Regarding sustainability, the answers were mostly (69,7%) in agreement with the statement "Meeting local people influences my traveling decisions towards more sustainable choices", however only 26 people considered sustainability as an important characteristic of their gastronomic experience.

Finally, the comment box open-ended question to collect additional feedback on their Culture Discovery Vacations experience received 68 answers. A word cloud was created, as it can be observed in Figure 3, the words *Family, Food, Experience, People,* and *Cooking* were the most repeated.



Figure 3: Guest's CDV Experience.
Word cloud presenting the main descriptors from the answers to question 14 of the CDV Guests' questionnaire on Wine & Gastronomy Travel Experiences. They were asked to share a memorable experience from their last CDV vacation. Created with WordArt.com

It is interesting to notice that even though it was presented in a different format and phrasing, it occurred that managers, staff, partners, and guests, all described Culture Discovery Vacations using the words *Family, Food* and *People*.

6. CONCLUSIONS

At the beginning of this essay we asked ourselves, do Wine & Gastronomy Tours promote a deeper connection with a destination and its community? Are travelers immersed in a more authentic experience than in conventional tours? This thesis has presented a company that is successfully developing Wine & Gastronomy Tourism activities that connect people.

First of all, the conceptual analysis of Wine & Gastronomy Tourism showed how several authors have been studying and arguing its value to connect the place, the people, and the product. Wine & Gastronomy Tourism fosters multi-sensorial experiences, that not only enhance the value of local products but also of local traditions, historical and cultural traits, and local lifestyle (Carvalho et al., 2021). The experience created by Culture Discovery Vacations provides all of the above and generates a deep understanding of the authentic Italian culture. These travel experiences become memorable because they take place in social environments that promote cultural exchange and strengthen social bonds.

The experiential analysis has shown how the CDV team understands the importance of wine and gastronomy as a means to develop relationships with travelers and present local culture. It is through the act of sharing that we learn about each other. All guests have agreed that the culinary experience has enhanced their engagement with the local community exponentially compared with other travel experiences. Additionally, the vacation becomes memorable through its wine and food, being by the purchase of these products to take home or by sharing their acquired cooking skills with friends and family.

Culture Discovery Vacations is an example of success in creating authentic bonds between travelers and a destination's community. Even though it is a key factor, it is not only due to the wine and gastronomy, it is a combination of characteristics that accompany the wine and the gastronomy that make the experience as a whole. The small groups, the sense of identity, the immersive activities and value co-creation, and the unique friends and family travel style. It is the perfect balance between place, people, and experience.

Wine & Gastronomy Tourism cannot achieve deeper connections between visitors and locals on its own, it needs to be in a context where the people behind it share the same values and

intention to promote this relationship. A destination can enhance its attractiveness by promoting its local cuisine and terroir, however, to have a successful Wine & Gastronomy Tourism offer it depends on its people. It is the people behind the experience that have the power to create a more authentic and therefore more valuable connection both for the traveler and the local.

As a world-traveler, I have personally experienced the importance of creating authentic and valuable relationships with locals and how they affect my own perception of a destination and its culture. My most memorable travel experiences are related to the people I met or who I traveled with. As a future graduate in Wine Tourism, I can say that the most valuable Wine & Gastronomy Tourism experiences are those that become memorable. I have learned the importance of storytelling, and that the message transmitted be authentic. I have had the opportunity to visit many wineries and food producers over the past two years and I have learned that we remember the people and the experience over the product. I will never forget the wonderful port wine that one of our professors shared with us from his own production and the personal story behind it; or the Segway tour in a winery in Bordeaux where our guide was the actual viticulturist, went above and beyond to make the most of our visit and had as much fun as we did, even though he didn't speak any English; or my harvest experience in Jerez, where every lunch was a family feast with a Spanish grandmother cooking for all of us… Working with Culture Discovery Vacations has shown me how important it is to value the people behind the product or service. How when we work in an environment of conviviality, when we care and create authentic relationships, we work in a different and better way. I found a place where I will continue to grow as a Wine & Gastronomy Tourism professional; where I will continue my education; where I will continue to meet new people and create long-lasting relationships. I have become a member of the CDV family.

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8. ANNEXES

8.1 **Annex I – CDV 2023 Tour Calendar & Locations**

The following is an example of some of the dates and locations presented in the 2023 Tour Calendar. To view the full list follow this link: https://www.culturediscovery.com/calendar-cooking-wine-culture-vacations/



8.2 **Annex II – Email Communications**

The following are examples of the emails sent to guests before their vacation:

Confirmation Email (first two pages only)

8/6/22, 01:10 Gmail - Culture Discovery Vacation Confirmation

Gmail

Culture Discovery Vacation Confirmation

Culture Discovery Vacations <info@culturediscovery.com> 10 de febrero de 2022, 17:03
Para: mm.burjel@gmail.com

culturediscovery vacations

Vacation Confirmation

Ciao Ciao Maggie!

Thank You, for your reservation with Culture Discovery Vacations. We are happy to say that it is now confirmed! Please let us know if there's anything we can help with along the way...

We'll be looking forward to meeting you in Soriano!

Rocky and the CDV Team

Please read the following important information carefully and save this e-mail for future reference.

Your booking has been confirmed and blocked off for you. Here are the details:

Reservation Details

Reservation Number 36682
Registered Guests Magdalena Burjel - mm.burjel@gmail.com
Vacation Number 695
Itinerary Name Wine & Cooking Under the Tuscan and Umbrian Sun
Accommodations Reserved BellAria - Maggie: For Soriano - We typically assign the accommodations at the time of booking - but we may change this as lately, we've been having to replace some of the homes that we have at our disposal -
Start Date Jun 17, 2023
End Date Jun 24, 2023

Deposit & Payment Details

Inv	Date	Description	Amount	Due	Paid?
42563	Feb 10, 2022	Magdalena Burjel: Tour 695 - Jun, 17, 2023 - 20% Deposit of Base Price	$899.00	Feb 10, 2022	Maggie - **This would say YES normally as we don't send the confirmation until we have the deposits paid.**
42564	Feb 10, 2022	Magdalena Burjel: Tour 695 - Jun, 17, 2023 - Balance Due including $350.00 Single Supplement	$3,946.00	Mar 19, 2023	**NO**

https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?ik=7e53641 2c08&view=pt&search=all&permmsgid=msg-f%3A1724392654608580114&simpl=msg-f%3A17243... 1/10

8/6/22, 01:10 Gmail - Culture Discovery Vacation Confirmation

*Please note that the deposit and/or balance due amounts may be offset to avoid a fraud alert with the credit card processing bank when they receive duplicate charge amounts. The total balance of the amounts remains equal.

If you paid your deposit with a credit card, we will automatically charge that card with the balance on the due date. If that card has expired by that time, or you paid by check, we will call you to make new arrangements.

Guest Details and Arrival Details

We received enough information from you in order to get your reservation confirmed, but we need more as soon as possible. This is a group program, so we all want to get to know each other better before we meet. We also need to know if you have any allergies we should know about, emergency contact information, etc.

Some of the things we still need to know are unique to each guest. For example, 3 people may be traveling together, but arrive on different flights. Because of this, each guest has their own unique login on our website where they can provide us this information.

Your Personal Login(s)

Click the links below to provide information for each guest:

Log in as Magdalena Burjel

Remember: Even when multiple people are traveling on the same booking, *each individual person has their own login*, and we need this information from everyone.

Travel Documents

Some guests ask us if they will receive "Travel Documents" in the mail. We don't do "Travel Documents". That is the kind of thing reserved for big and impersonal airlines and cruise ships. When we meet, we will be expecting ***you***, not a ticket or boarding pass. We sincerely hope this is one of the reasons you chose us.

Meeting Point Information

Well, actually, there will be some sort of travel documents. One of the e-mails you will get from us when we are close to our start date will include meeting information, contact numbers, instructions on what to do in case you miss your flights, etc. We will ask you to print that out and take it with you in your carry-on baggage so that you will have no trouble meeting up with us. We will not be able to send that information to you until we know your travel plans. Please keep us informed of any changes to your travel information, so if you are flying in on our start date, be sure to login to our "My Trips" website with the links above and give us your flight info as soon as you possibly can. If you are going to already be in Italy, login so that we will know where you will be coming from on our start date so we know to expect you at our train station pickup.

If even one person fails to give us this information in a timely manner, we will be forced to wait until we can reach them and find out before being able to send this crucial email.

Train Tickets

If you will be extending your trip either before or after your time with us, it is likely that you will be taking trains in Italy. We suggest that you purchase train tickets in advance from our website. There are two major train services in Italy. The oldest train service is called Trenitalia. This has regional service as well as high-speed rail service between the major cities. There is also Italo. Italo trains offer high-speed rail service only and are between the major cities. Both services have excellent resources online from which you can purchase tickets. When purchasing tickets on the high-speed trains, the earlier you order, the more often you can find better pricing. Regional service on Trenitalia may only post fares or options to purchase tickets about 7 days in advance only. Here are the links to both of those websites: Trenitalia and Italo. If you are using Italo for high-speed rail then switching to Trenitalia for regional service, pay close attention to the arrival and departure times as they can overlap or have long wait periods in-between. Another thing to consider if you have connecting trains to catch is to leave yourself about 20 minutes or more as trains can get delayed and you may need time to get your bearings at the next stop.

However, some rail lines won't require advance purchase. A good example of this is travel between Rome and our pickup/drop off at the Orte train station. You will not need to get these tickets in advance, because it is a commuter line. You will simply be able to buy your tickets at an automated kiosk once at the station.

https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?ik=7e53641 2c08&view=pt&search=all&permmsgid=msg-f%3A1724392654608580114&simpl=msg-f%3A17243... 2/10

"*We will charge your balance" Email*

8/6/22, 01:09 Mail - Maggie Burjel - Outlook

Balance Will Be Charged Soon

Culture Discovery Vacations <info@culturediscovery.com>
Sat 3/5/2022 3:11 PM
To: Maggie Burjel <maggie@culturediscovery.com>

culturediscovery vacations

We're About To Charge The Balance For Your Vacation



In a few days we will be charging the balance for your vacation with us. We just wanted to give you a little heads up to let you know the charge will be showing up shortly.

What you need to do

If Your credit card number has not changed from the one you used to pay your deposit
You don't need to do anything. We will automatically use that credit card unless you tell us otherwise.

If you would like to use a DIFFERENT credit card than the one you used for your deposit
Please look at your confirmation e-mail for the login details for your reservation. If you log in to the reservation, you will see a link that allows you to change the credit card we have on file for you.

** You may wish to call your bank and let them know that a large amount will be charged to your card soon for each person, otherwise the payment may be declined.*

If you have already paid your balance...Thank You! And kindly disregard this email. :)

We'll be seeing you soon!

Ciao Ciao!,

-The CDV Team

If you are looking to extend your trip in Italy or Portugal, let us help you make everything line up perfectly and organize it all for you. Just send an email to extensions@culturediscovery.com and let us know what you are interested in.



Looking for an ocean or river cruise to combine with your vacation, or just anytime, anywhere? We can help in the CDV way, and get the best prices out there as well. Just send an email to info@cdvcruises.com and let us know what you are interested in.



www.culturediscovery.com

Gmail

Magdalena Burjel <mm.burjel@gmail.com>

About your trip with Culture Discovery Vacations

Culture Discovery Vacations <info@culturediscovery.com> 11 de febrero de 2022, 17:05
Para: mm.burjel@gmail.com

This is the one we send out about 60 Days prior to the vacation date.

Getting in the right frame of mind for your time with us in Soriano

Ciao! This letter is one of several you will be getting between now and the time of our trip together that gives you an idea what your trip with us will be like.

Please read this entire letter and let it all soak in. It will make all the difference for your trip with us. It will be the difference between an amazing experience that may very well change how you see travel ad something that is merely a 'good' vacation. Our main goal is for this to be the best vacation of your life, and since we are so different than other traditional travel experiences, we like to let our guests know how we do things, why we do them that way, and what to expect.

*Additionally, if others are coming with you, please be **sure** that they read it as well.*

The purpose of this letter

Most of our guests are attracted to us because of the sense of family that we are all about. But some were more attracted to the idea of a cooking vacation, and others simply see us as a trip to Italy. We are, in fact, all of these. But our core value is the sense of family, and that can only be done if we operate very much outside of the box most people are accustomed to when traveling.

The vast majority of our guests completely embrace the true Italian culture, and have read a great deal of our website, so they know what to expect to some degree. However, we occasionally have a guest that has different expectations when they arrive.

We are very different from what most are accustomed to, and we believe this is what makes the experience with us so special. The more information you have, the better.

On average, only one out of a hundred or so guests we meet came with different expectations from what we are all about, but we still want to improve that number as much as possible. The content of our website along with this letter hopefully helps assure that our guests know what to expect before arriving.

What we are all about, how we are different, and why

You see it all over our website. Family, Family, Family. This is not a marketing term for us. It is the way we operate. It may sound like just a word to some, but it is what makes us so different and special. We remove a level of professionalism from what we do to create a more fluid and immersive experience. Nobody we are aware of operates the way we do, and this has been integral to our success. While other "tour" companies treat their guests as "paying customers", we treat them like "visiting family". Think of the difference between a group of friends coming to your house for dinner, and how you would interact with them. Then think of a group going to a restaurant, and how the experience is different. Now think of a group taking a professional tour of your hometown, then think of how the experience would be different if you were to take them out in your own home town. THIS is the difference. The reason we do it like friends and family is that we understand that the sense of belonging one gets when they are the guest of a local friend is significantly more enriching than merely seeing the sights and eating out.

Our guests get out what they put in

Almost everyone responds well to the family feel of what we do, but it can feel counter-intuitive for some being that we don't know each other yet. For example, our cooking classes are like a group of friends cooking together, and the person teaching is "sharing" knowledge and recipes. We are not "instructing a class of pupils". When we have a lunch or dinner after class, it is more like a party in which some of the guests participate in serving, clearing the table, etc. The same way a party at your home might be. It will not have a restaurant feel. If a guest sits down and waits to be served, then stands up after dinner and says "I am ready to go home now" while everyone else is having a great time chatting with one another, they will have have missed out on what makes Italian culture so amazing. More importantly, it can have a negative effect on those that came for this type of experience. Yes, they will have had a wonderful dinner, and we will all be gracious, but by not letting go, they will have robbed themselves of the very thing that causes so many of our guests to leave in tears. In other words, if our guests let go and let it happen, it will be something amazing.

Additionally, we feed off of our guests energy. We treat our guests like family, and when they reciprocate that feeling, we can't help but give 110%. It truly becomes something incredible. If, instead, a guest sees us as "a company that provides a tour service", they

are not giving us an open door to truly share our lives through. That forces us into a client/vendor relationship that lacks the warmth and personal connection that we are all about. In other words, we are suddenly placed in "vendor" mode, because our guest is not looking for the "family feel". If that happens, the very thing that separates us from the rest is lost. Sure, the guest will have a good time, but will never know what they missed out on.

To some, this feels counter-intuitive. After all, they paid us, so why are we defining how they should treat us? The simple answer is that how we all interact with one another defines the experience. Should there be a sense that there is a "wall" of business between our guests and us, the experience tends to diminish.

We "LIVE" the culture, we don't "WITNESS" it

We talk about this all over our website, but it is one of those things one often needs to really experience to fully grasp. Many of us come from a "whatever you want whenever you want" culture. The REAL, AUTHENTIC Italy is not like that. In this culture, people feel that there is a proper way to do things, and there is a proper time to do them. The major tourist areas of the country have been forced to adapt to our cultures, but in doing so, they have lost some of their own identity and authenticity. We are "CULTURE DISCOVERY". The magic of what we do is that we immerse our guests in true and authentic Italian culture, not cause the locals adapt to ours. Since we spend much of our time in places that have few tourists, we strive to minimize the social impact of our presence. Most of us come from a "whatever the customer wants, whenever they want it" culture, but here this is actually quite important.

For example, we will ask that our guests refrain from ordering a cappuccino after lunch. Cappuccino is a breakfast only beverage in Italian culture. The restaurants and bars will make it for you later if you ask, but a local would never ask. We'll ask guests not to ask for butter with their bread, ice for many beverages, or to have dinner before 7:30 or 8:00 PM.

We completely understand the notion that some might feel this is their vacation, and they want to do as they please. This is absolutely true, of course. However, we do ask our guests to consider that the vacation we provide is centered on having an authentic cultural experience. That very authenticity can be at odds with what we want. For example, if you want eggs for breakfast, we understand. But to bring everyone somewhere that would offer eggs in the morning would mean that we have to take you (and the rest of the group) outside of the authentic experience, not to mention the fact that in our area there is nowhere to go for breakfast that serves eggs. However, if you have a dietary requirement, you can buy them at the market and cook them before we meet in the morning.

Of course, if a guest insists on some of these things, like the cappuccino at a culturally inappropriate time, we won't force them to abide by the traditions. But we do ask that our guests consider that if we ask for these things, the locals will adapt to us sooner or later, and part of their culture will be lost along the way.

Additionally, our experience is that guests find truly living the culture very rewarding. After all, it is one thing to experience Italy, but it is quite another thing to "live the culture". Millions of people go to Italy every year and see the sights, eat the food, etc. But very few actually live the life. Many people that travel on their own or take tours there think they did, but that usually is not the case.

With us, you will be living like an Italian and traveling like an Italian. Those little things like not having the cappuccino after a meal may seem small, but they do add up to be part of an overall experience that really does enrich lives, making many of our guests feel much more connected to Italy. We see it happen every week.

Those Italian Smokers

Smoking is still quite common in Italy. While it is not allowed at indoor business locations (restaurants, bars, stores, etc.), it is very common outdoors. Restaurants with patio seating will have smokers, and outside business locations, there will be many smokers. While we understand that some people are sensitive to cigarette smoke, the reality is that Italians -- even non-smoking Italians have a high tolerance for smoking, so it is quite common. To ask someone in Italy to stop smoking would never have a positive result. People sensitive to smoke simply move away from it.

Those Late Night Dinners

Much of what our guests experience may seem strange at first, but all of it is what makes Italy so amazing. For example, if you go to a restaurant in the touristy areas of Rome, you can get dinner at 6:00 PM, and you will usually get fast service. But in Italian culture, dinner is never before 7:30 or 8:00 PM, and service is usually quite slow. The reality is at that touristy restaurant in Rome, they offer early dinner service because they are adapting to tourists. The service is fast because they are usually serving the tourists substandard pre-made meals that the locals would never touch in most cases... and they want to get those tourists out of there so the table is available for the local dinner crowd. We may go to a restaurant that has slow service, but that is only so because it is a small family restaurant that is actually making our dinner from scratch back in the kitchen. They won't be turning our table for another group later, and they are not rushing us out. In other words, in Italian culture, dinner is not about eating food and moving on. It is about spending quality time and sharing a meal. It is a social event. That is the culture, so that is how we do it.

Embrace What Makes it Special and Unique

Have you watched "Under the Tuscan Sun"? If not, please rent it, because it really does help get people in the mindset. It wasn't just the breathtaking scenery that made that movie so attractive to people. It is what was happening in the story. It was her interaction with the locals, the oddities of the culture, the contractors that never got their work done, the meals with the neighbors, etc. It was the culture and how she learned to embrace it and become part of it that was so amazing to most people, even if they didn't realize it.

When other tours satisfy all of their guests' creature comforts and make sure everything is perfect based on their preconceived notions, they have to filter out much of that which makes it all so amazing and special. It is a yin & yang thing. In order for one wonderful thing to exist, another seemingly not so wonderful thing must balance it out. If we shield our guests from one, we also rob them of the other.

Host Introduction Letter

Ciao from Maggie & Sophie! Your CDV Hosts

Culture Discovery Vacations <info@culturediscovery.com>
Wed 6/8/2022 1:23 AM
To: Maggie Burjel <maggie@culturediscovery.com>

Ciao! To All Our Arriving Guests!

We'd like to introduce ourselves!

First, I am Maggie and along with Sophie, we will be your hosts during your vacation week with us here in Soriano!

We're looking forward to getting to know you and having a great time together!

This week we have a lot of things planned, so please come prepared to eat, drink and experience the real Italy!

About me: I'm from Uruguay and I very recently joined the CDV family 😊 I have been working in tourism for a long time in different places around the world, from Bolivia to Alaska! For the last two years I've been studying Wine Tourism in Spain, France, Portugal and now Italy. I love cooking and eating! And wine! I am curious, I love learning about culture and history. I think traveling is a powerful tool to learn from each other, make new friends and share amazing moments. Now I have fallen in love with my new Italian life, and I am excited to welcome you and share this wonderful experience!have been working in tourism for a long time in different places around the world, from Bolivia to Alaska! For the last two years I've been studying Wine Tourism in Spain, France, Portugal and now Italy. I love cooking and eating! And wine!

I am curious, I love learning about culture and history. I think traveling is a powerful tool to learn from each other, make new friends and share amazing moments. Now I have fallen in love with my new Italian life, and I am excited to welcome you and share this wonderful experience!

We'll go over some details at our orientation. If you have any questions for me ahead of time, please feel free to shoot me an email at: maggie@culturediscovery.com – If you try to respond to me by replying to this email, I may not receive it.

About Sophie: I am Italian, and I have been working with CDV for over 5 years. I love what I do as I get to share my love of the culture, history our families, friends, food, and adventure with all of you that are coming to see a side of Italy very few ever do.

Either one of us will be the ones to meet you upon your arrival at the airport or train station, however sometimes due to scheduling, one or the other may be meeting up with you once you arrive in Soriano.

If you need to get in touch with either of us, at any time. Here is the local number for Maggie: +39 327 564 6080 And my email is: maggie@culturediscovery.com

Also for Sophie: +39 328 317 8957 Email: sophie@culturediscovery.com

Please contact us directly if you run into any problems while traveling. Please use the email addresses or phone numbers rather than sending a response to this email, as we will not receive it.

We're so glad you will be traveling with us, and we will do our best to make sure that you have the vacation-of-a-lifetime!

Happy Travels and Saluti!

Maggie and Sophie :)

8.3 **Annex III – Questionnaire for CDV Guests**

Link to Google Forms version delivered to the CDV Guests:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScIK1fO4jjJ-6hOa8xGJmHkaic-t5nqAifwuTP1fF2IHoyVdg/viewform?usp=sf_link

Questions:

1. **Please select your nationality**

   United States

   Canada

   United Kingdom

   Australia

   Other:

2. **Please select your age range**

   18 – 30 (Generation Z)

   31 – 42 (Millennials)

   43 – 57 (Generation X)

   58 – 77 (Baby Boomers)

   78 + (Silent Generation)

3. **How often do you travel internationally?** (Please consider a non-pandemic scenario)

   Not usually

   Every 2 – 3 years

   Every year

   2 or + times a year

4. **How important is the gastronomic experience during your vacations?**

   All or most of my vacations are food/wine related

   It is not the main focus of my vacation, but it takes an important role when choosing a destination

   It is just one aspect of the entire experience – important but it doesn't influence my choice of destination

   I do not pay much attention to the food/wine until I'm even there

5. **Besides your CDV experience (which we know includes ALL) Which of the following activities, have you participated in while traveling?** (Select as many as it applies)

   Cooking Class

   Food Tour

   Wine Tasting / Winery Visit

Brewery/Other Beverage Tour (Cider, Whiskey, Tequila, Coffee)

Producer Visit (Cheese, Olive Oil, Chocolate)

Market Experience

6. **When you participate in these activities (Food tour, wine tasting, producer visit, market experience) what would you say are important characteristics about your gastronomic experience?** (select as many as it applies)

The interesting story behind it (Storytelling)

The use of local ingredients/products

That it has many years of tradition

The innovation, being out of my comfort zone

Meeting the people behind it (producer, winemaker, owner, cook)

Learning something new

That is high-level gourmet

It looks beautiful – Instagramable!

The people of my own group

It feels authentic and not touristy

Sustainability Awareness

7. **Was CDV your first experience in a full-on Wine & Gastronomy vacation?**

Yes

No, I've had culinary vacations before CDV

8. **What was your engagement with locals during your CDV Wine & Gastronomy vacation?**

I am not interested in interacting with locals during my travels

I met the same number of locals as on any of my vacations

I had more interactions with locals than I usually do

I had a true exchange of cultures with the locals. I came back with new local friends!

9. **How much do you bring home from your gastronomic experience?** (select as many as it applies)

I share my gastronomic experiences with my friends & family

I buy wine / ingredients to bring home

I look for restaurants at home to re-create the experience

I prepare at home the dishes from my vacation

10. **Do you recommend certain dishes, places, and experiences related with the food to other travelers?**

Those are always my "travel like a local tips" for my friends

I take note of food and restaurants to recommend to future travelers

I mention food the same as other recommendations of things to do at a destination

I always forget about the food I had

11. **Would you agree that meeting local people makes you a more sustainably conscious visitor because you know the people your travel decisions are influencing? Both socially and environmentally?**

    Totally Agree

    Agree

    Neutral

    Disagree

    Totally Disagree

12. **How many times have you traveled with CDV?**

    Only once

    Once and I will probably travel with them again in the future

    Already coming on my next vacation!

    I'm a seasoned alumni – I'm already best friends with Rocky

13. **Just for fun – What is antipasti?**

    A person allergic to pasta

    A person who does not like the drink Pastis

    A dish served as an appetizer

    The pastries served with expresso

14. **If you feel like sharing – What is your most memorable experience from your last CDV vacation?**

8.4 **Annex IV – CDV Basecamp**

The website is a very complete source of information as well as the only booking platform. The full vacation calendar is posted for the ongoing year and the following. It is where visitors can access all the details of the vacation including the itinerary, accommodation, price, available dates, reviews from previous guests, a map of the area the vacation takes place in, frequently asked questions and many details such as the physical intensity or the walking and bus times.

Currently, the website and the entire reservations system are being updated. New software is being created from zero by Michael, one of the managing partners and the creator of the system being used now. The new platform is called *CDV Basecamp* and it will be the digital home base for the entire operation, including the website, reservations, all guest vacation management, the cloud for both internal documents as well as pictures and videos from the tours, information on itineraries, maps, weather, etc. It is expected to have an app version for

tablets and smartphones so guests can use it during their vacations, as well as chat with other guests and share content. The app is meant to be a useful tool for hosts as well, it would allow them to have live flight information for arrivals and departures, guest details such as food restrictions or special occasions, and chat with guests during the vacation. This very extensive project aims to update the tools CDV has today and therefore meet the present and future technological needs of the company. It is expected that the transition to *CDV Basecamp* will begin early next year.

8.5 **Annex V - Wine & Cooking Under the Tuscan & Umbrian Sun**

Itinerary:

Saturday 30: Welcome to Soriano! – Aperitivi and Traditional CDV Welcome Dinner			
	5:00 PM	Soriano	We'll start the evening after everyone has had a chance to get settled into their homes for the week. We will meet at a local establishment for our first informal get-together. We'll head into "The Rocca", the medieval quarter of Soriano to Pizzeria Gigi for some aperitivi and small-bites. We'll get to know one another and talk about the week ahead. IMPORTANT: Bring your passports! We will need to make photocopies!
6:00 PM	6:30 PM	Soriano	After the aperitivi, we'll head over to some local markets to do a little shopping for tomorrow's class. It's very important to do the shopping at this time, as these specialty shops are all closed on Sundays!
6:45 PM	7:30 PM	Soriano	We will walk up to Castello Orsini for a visit.
8:00 PM		Soriano	Welcome Dinner at *Ristorante Il Carolino* - We will have a large full-course meal with all local specialties that will set the tone for the week ahead!
Sunday 1: Cooking Class at Villa Eddarella - Orvieto in Umbria – Dinner in Soriano			
	9:15 AM	Soriano	Traditional Italian breakfast is each day at Caffé Roma in Piazza. They open by 6 am - You are more than welcome to go anytime you'd like. Grab a pastry or croissant (cornetto in this region of Italy) and some coffee, espresso, cappuccino, café latte, tea, juice, etc.. and watch the town start the day! Open seating breakfast is at your leisure every day…The café has free Wi-Fi. We will leave for the Villa at 9:15 AM
9:30 AM	3:30 PM	Villa Eddarella (Soriano)	Cooking Class resulting in lunch at Villa Eddarella – *Appetizer: Farro salad* *1st:* *Pappardelle with fennel pollen ragu sauce* *2nd:* *Tuscan Roasted Chicken* *Side:* *Tuscan Roasted Potatoes* *Dessert:* *Tiramisú*

4:15 PM	6:30 PM	Orvieto	After lunch, we will visit the beautiful hilltop Umbrian town of Orvieto. It is home to one of Italy's most amazing gothic cathedrals! - You will have some free time here to visit the cathedral, stroll the streets amid the numerous hand-crafted artisan shops, clothing and shoe stores as well as inviting café's and bars. If you walk some of the side-streets, you will see an amazing array of Italian doors!
6:30 PM	7:30 PM	Soriano	Back to Soriano for some time to rest before meeting for dinner.
8:00 PM		Soriano	Dinner tonight is at *Ristorante Ai Tre Scalini* in Soriano
Monday 2: Day in Tuscany – Pienza - Lunch in a Tuscan Vineyard – Family-Style Dinner			
8:15 AM	9:30 AM	Soriano	Open- seating breakfast at your leisure at Caffe Roma. This will be a long day, so dress very comfortably. Shoes with good traction are a must. We'll head out at 9:30 AM.
11:15 AM	12:15 PM	Pienza	Our first stop in Tuscany will be in the pristine village of Pienza. You may recognize this town as the backdrop for many Hollywood films. It's also famous for their pecorino cheese. We will stop in one of their cheese shops for a "flight" of the different aged pecorino. Take some time on your own to stroll the town, with many shops and fantastic photo opportunities of the scenic alleyways and the Pienza "Balcony".
12:45 PM	3:00 PM	Montepulciano	As we leave Pienza, we will take a short drive to the rolling hills of Montepulciano, and stop at the vineyards of our extremely dear friends, Enrico, Antonella and their sons, Niccolò and Francesco. They produce what is arguably the best Vino Nobile wine in all of Tuscany. If weather permits, we will have a relaxing lunch *al fresco,* all together on the veranda next to the vineyard. Otherwise, we will have lunch on their patio or indoors right in the middle of their wine production facilities!
3:30 PM	4:15 PM	Montepulciano	After lunch and some relaxation, we will head up into the town of Montepulciano, and stop to visit with a local artisan coppersmith shop to see how he makes his spectacular collection of hand-crafted pieces.
4:30 PM	5:30 PM	Montepulciano	Our next stop is at the Cantina de' Ricci Antica Wine Cellar, home of the world-renowned Vino Nobile wine. This is widely accepted by aficionados as one of the most beautiful wine cellars in the world! When you see it, you will understand why!
7:30 PM		Soriano	We are in for a very special dinner tonight, in an unique, informal and casual setting. We will be hosted by some friends in Soriano at their private family tavern and cantina in "The Rocca" – The Medieval Quarter. This private tavern is a place where their family gets together for special occasions. Like what tonight will be!
Tuesday 3: Cooking Class at Villa Eddarella – Ricotta Cheese Making – Historical Viterbo			
8:30 AM	9:15 AM	Soriano	Open- seating breakfast at your leisure at Caffe Roma. We'll head out at 9:15 AM

9:30 AM	3:30 PM	Soriano	We're back at the Villa Eddarella for our second cooking class. Today we will also be making fresh pecorino and ricotta cheese with a local shepherd! Appetizer: Bruschetta with Stracchino Cheese and Sausage 1st Eggplant Parmesan 2nd: Meatballs with Amatriciana sauce Side: Sautéed Spinach Dessert: Ricotta and Vin Santo tart
3:30 PM	5:00 PM	Soriano	Some time to rest before meet at 5:00 PM
5:30 PM	7:30 PM	Viterbo	We'll visit the nearby town of Viterbo – "The City of Popes" Viterbo boasts beautiful fountains and is home to one of the most well-preserved medieval quarters in all of Europe! It also has a Papal Palace dating from the Middle Ages where the very first "Conclave" took place in the late 13th century. We'll visit these wonderful sites and you'll also have some time on your own to do some shopping, have a gelato or other aperitivi.
8:00 PM		Soriano	For dinner tonight, we will have a catered dinner *al fresco* in the "Papacqua Park" at the foot of Soriano's 16th Century Chigi-Albani Palace.
Wednesday 4: – Tuscany - Brunello Winery – Montalcino Town Center - Dinner in a Castle!			
	9:30 AM	Soriano	Breakfast at your leisure at Caffe' Roma. This will be a long day out, so dress very comfortably. We'll head out at 9:30 AM.
11:30 PM	3:30 PM	Montalcino	We'll stop on the outskirts of Montalcino at a small artisan Brunello winery, La Piombaia. This is one of the last remaining truly artisan wineries that only produces a few thousand bottles per year, all by hand. The perfected craft will be evidenced by their outstanding selection of vintages. Along with their exceptional wines, they take a natural and eco-friendly approach to their winemaking, utilizing local and traditional methods throughout the process, from the vine to the bottle. Our lunch today will be amidst the vineyards along with the winemakers. This will be a very casual *al fresco* picnic-style experience in a traditional setting. You can choose to sit table-side or pack your lunch, grab your wine and a blanket and sit in the vineyard itself in the true Tuscan tradition!
3:45 PM	4:45 PM	Montalcino	After lunch, we will have a little visit in the town of Montalcino, where you can visit some of the beautiful shops and medieval quarter.
6:00 PM	9:30 PM	Proceno	As we leave, we will take another amazing scenic route, The Via Francigena. We will drive eight legs of the Tuscany and Lazio portions of this ancient pilgrim route that spanned from France to the Vatican. We will stop at The Proceno Castle, a pentagonal fortress which includes a main tower and two secondary towers interconnected by walkways and a drawbridge, one of 19 still working in Italy. After our visit, we will head down to a beautiful restaurant that they own on the castle's grounds for our dinner hosted by the countess, herself!

Thursday 5: Umbria! - Deruta Pottery - Assisi - Party at Villa Eddarella!			
At some point during the day, we will review your departures.			
8:00 AM	9:15 AM	Soriano	Breakfast at your leisure at Caffe' Roma. We'll head out at 9:00 AM
10:15 AM	12:00 PM	Deruta	Dating back centuries, Deruta has been known as one of the world's most famous producers of ceramic pottery. We'll visit the family-run Ceramiche Bettini factory. We will have a factory tour, and those that are up to it can try their hand at the potter's wheel. If you are interested in purchasing any pottery or ceramics this week, this is factory direct with incredibly low prices compared to what you will find elsewhere. And, they ship!
12:45 PM	2:30 PM	Assisi	We'll start our visit in Assisi with a wonderful lunch at Osteria Degli Orti – A family – run restaurant that is a favorite amongst the locals. We like it too!
2:45 PM	5:00 PM	Assisi	After lunch, we'll stroll through beautiful and historical Assisi. Home to the Patron Saint of Italy – St. Francis. We'll have several hours to visit some historical sites, such as the Fortress of the Rocca Maggiore, or doing some shopping. But most importantly, to spend time at the "Must-See" Basilica of St. Francis – Leave yourself close to an hour to visit the Basilica. For those that love to shop, this is where you will find some of the best shopping for gifts to bring home. We'll meet up at Bar San Francesco at 4:30 p.m. for some gelato and refreshments before heading back to Soriano.
6:30 PM	7:30 PM	Soriano	Time to rest before meeting at 7:30 PM
7:30 PM		Soriano	Party at the Villa Tonight! – A special evening will be prepared for us by Carla and the CDV Soriano Crew!

Friday 6: - Monster Park - Olive Mill and Winery - Limoncello Class and Pizza Night!			
	9:30 AM	Soriano	Breakfast at your leisure at Caffe' Roma. We leave promptly at 9:30 AM
10:00 AM	11:45 AM	Bomarzo	Parco di Mostri – (Monster Park) – This incredible guided walk through the gardens of a local nobleman takes us back to 16th century Renaissance Italy. We'll find indescribable and surreal sculptures that were designed by a contemporary of Michelangelo. We'll discover the secrets of this famous and unique garden that was lost to history for 300 years!
12:15 PM	3:30 PM	Castiglione in Teverina	Our next stop today will be at the Winery and Olive Mill, Madonna delle Macchie. We'll have a private tour of this small family-run olive mill and winery, followed by a buffet lunch made by the owners with many local delicacies, and of course…their wine & olive oil! You will be hard-pressed to find better Olive Oil in all of Italy!

4:00 PM		Villa Eddarella (Soriano)	Pizza Night! Our farewell dinner at Villa Eddarella and one of the most fun and popular classes of all: Wood-fired Pizza and Cream of Limoncello. We'll make all kinds of amazing rustic pizzas tonight. The brick oven will be ablaze and baking away as we spend our final evening together having some of the best pizza you have ever had. You will be able to make individual pizzas with toppings of your choice as well as the "Roman-Style" pizzas using fresh and seasonal ingredients. Your dessert will include fresh *ricotta* and the *nellina*!
Saturday 7: Ciao Amici L Sadly, our week has come to an end. Departures from Rome *We Hope You Had A Vacation-Of-A-Lifetime and We Will See You Again!*			
5:30 AM	6:00 AM	Soriano	Unfortunately, our week is over. We'll meet in Piazza at Bar Roma & leave at 6:00 AM to get to the train station, and then to the airport by 8:15 AM in time for North America-bound flights.

Info & Contacts (Take a picture if you want)

Days and times listed are based on previous tour experience, however they are approximations and may vary.

Days and times listed may need to be re-arranged to accommodate for unforeseen circumstances.

Your tour leader will inform you each day and each excursion as to meeting and departure times as well as locations based on requirement and/or necessity.

While we do our best to stay on schedule, there are instances where we have to make changes at any given time. We appreciate your flexibility and patience during the times when there are alterations.

Thank you for understanding.

CDV Host (also Telegram and WhatApp)	**Linda**	0039 347 0095 642
CDV Operation	**Carla**	0039 348 809 4715
CDV Office	Via Santa Maria 12, Soriano nel Cimino	
Health Emergency	118	
Police	113	

Two examples of the welcome setup at the accommodation.



Figure A.1: Welcome Setup for 2 guests
Picture of the welcome setup in one of the locations in Soriano nel Cimino for the "Wine & Cooking Under the Tuscan & Umbrian Sun" tour. Setup prepared for 2 guests including gluten-free items.
Own photo.



Figure A.2: Welcome Setup for 1 guest
Picture of the welcome setup in one of the locations in Soriano nel Cimino for the "Wine & Cooking Under the Tuscan & Umbrian Sun" tour. Setup prepared for 1 guest.
Own photo.