

Function Report

Weekend Coach Tour of the King Valley Wine Region

Saturday 28 May & Sunday 29 May, 2016

Who could have predicted that when the coach left a dull, damp and wintery Box Hill at 7am, we would be greeted in the picturesque King Valley with beautiful sunny weather? It was still damp when we stopped at a Hume Highway rest area for morning tea.

Chrismont Winery

Our first winery stop was Chrismont, where we were welcomed to their new 7 million dollar cellar door by owner Jo Pizzini. With its extensive views over the vineyards and surrounding hills, this was a perfect introduction to the King Valley.



Gracebrook Vineyards

The second stop was just up the road at Gracebrook Vineyards, where David and Rhonda Maples have restored the 110 year old Gracebrook Stables to house their cellar door and restaurant. A tasting of Gracebrook wines was followed by a fabulous lunch. The property remains a working farm with vineyards, vegetable gardens and farm animals – including the pigs that greeted us on arrival.



Pizzini Winery



No visit to the King Valley would be complete without a visit to the Pizzini family winery. After a brief introduction by Fred Pizzini the tasting was handed over to Cellar Door Manager Rob and we were treated to an exclusive tasting of some of the family's premium Italian style wines. We fell behind schedule because Fred insisted that we taste more of their range, including the stunning Nebbiolo, probably the best example of this variety and style.

Beechworth Carriage Motor Inn

After eventually (and reluctantly) leaving Pizzini Winery, we had a relaxing one hour ride on the coach to our overnight accommodation in Beechworth. After arriving and settling in, most of us took the time to relax for a while and prepare for the Winemaker's Dinner at Amulet Vineyards.

Winemaker's Dinner, Amulet Vineyard



It was dark and cold when we arrived at Amulet Vineyard, but once inside we were warmly greeted by owner and hostess Sue Thornton. As at lunch, the meal exceeded our expectations and the Amulet wines were perfectly matched to the three course meal. There was a healthy buzz of conversation and laughter along with the clinking of glasses throughout the evening. An unexpected highlight was the kangaroo escort as the coach drove out towards the front gate.

Beechworth Honey Experience

After a hearty cooked breakfast at the Beechworth Carriage Motor Inn and loading our luggage onto the coach most of us decided to walk the short distance to the Beechworth Honey Experience. The crisp, sunny morning made the walk very pleasant. At the Beechworth Honey Experience we were able to sample a range of different honeys – about 40 different varieties with an amazing diversity of taste, viscosity and texture. We also worked our way through a sequence of video presentations that explained the process of honey production and the importance of bees for not just honey, but all food and the environment. Numerous purchases of honey and honey products were made.

Ciavarella Oxley Estate Winery

Our hosts Cyril and Jan guided us through a tasting of a selection of their handcrafted wines in their small and intimate cellar door. Most memorable were a 2013 Zinfandel, a 2010 Reserve Durif, a unique Late Harvest blend of Aucerot and Semillon and a Noble Aucerot. Ciavarella Oxley is the sole custodian of the rare variety Aucerot in Australia.



Brown Brothers

Our visit to Brown Brothers was a fitting finale to this weekend tour and most, if not all participants will remember it as the highlight of the weekend. As we alighted from the coach we were welcomed by Ross Brown himself and led to the recently refurbished Canadian Barn, where Ross conducted an entertaining and informative workshop on sparkling wine with a focus on Prosecco and the premium Patricia sparkling wine.

Lunch with matching wines took place in the Patricia's Table Restaurant – yet another memorable meal.



After lunch we were split into two groups. One group was taken down into the Family Cellar and was treated to an aged wine workshop and tasting of Shiraz, Mondeuse and Cabernet blends from the '80s, '90s and '00s, surrounded by thousands of dust covered bottles of premium Brown Brothers wine. The second group was taken to the Kindergarten Winery for a workshop and tasting of new wines currently being developed. The two groups then 'swapped over' so that everybody was able to enjoy both Family Cellar and Kindergarten Winery workshops.



The journey home

After an exceptionally satisfying weekend, and leaving Brown Brothers an hour later than scheduled, our three hour coach trip back home to Box Hill was made memorable by the failure of the coach heating system. Unfortunately our driver Rick Hoult was unable to fix the problem so we all had to rug up as we were driven from the sunny King Valley back to a cold and overcast Melbourne.

Thank you

The outstanding success of this weekend tour was due in no small part to the tireless efforts and attention to detail of Wine Guild Victoria's Secretary Dianne Lofts.