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A wine tasting without the whining

Posted By MONIQUE BEECH

Posted 1 month ago

For many, winery tours are a romantic getaway.

Maybe an adult weekend with a group of friends.

Look behind the counter at several Niagara wineries and you'll find crayons, colouring books, stickers and sippy cups. High chairs and booster seats are tucked in the corners of many fine dining winery restaurants.

Wineries in Niagara are becoming increasingly child-friendly, says journalist and mom Sydney Loney.

So Loney and fellow journalist Nancy Ripton -- who together run a mom-focused website called www.justthefactsbaby.com-- set out to find all the family-friendly wine finds in Niagara.

While they were at it, they scouted out restaurants, shops and tourist attractions that accommodated children.

The Toronto residents put it all together and created the Baby-Friendly Wine Route.

Users can click on a destination, such as a winery, and find out whether it offers children tastings of red and white sparkling grape juice, for example.

Or maybe a helium balloon.

If washrooms contain a diaper-changing station.

Loney, the 35-year-old former managing editor of Glow Magazine and a St. Anns, Ont., native, said the idea came to her after eating lunch at Henry of Pelham winery.

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Staff brought out toys for her one-year-old son Charlie.

She wondered how many other wineries welcomed children.

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All but two wineries on the official wine route were surveyed about whether they pair Pampers with their Pinot Noirs. Only those that were keen on kids were included in the route.

"I was surprised by the number of wineries that are trying to accommodate children," said Loney, who worked at Vineland Estate Winery while in university. "I thought they would have said, 'No, no.' "

Some did express reservations about bringing children into a wine boutique full of breakable wine glasses.

"They mentioned they cringe when children come in," Loney said.

Alcohol is a drink for adults, not children.

At Thirty Bench Winery in Beamsville, families are welcome, said staffer Janice Anderson.

Children are given stickers, crayons and freezies. Big windows allow parents to keep an eye on the kids as they play outside near the vines, she said.

"I think it's great that we do family outings. We don't want wine to be pretentious."

Maybe it's something about the culture of wine.

"If you think of old European family standards, wine was part of their daily meals," Anderson said.

"I just think we're becoming much more of a wine-savvy population that now enjoys and appreciates wine as a wonderful complement to good food."

Loney, a wine fan, said wineries are recognizing that many people are opting to have children later in life. By then, they like wine and want to keep their lifestyle.

"I think a few years ago you wouldn't see that many kids in wineries. I just think parents are taking their kids with them more to other things, even in the city here. You see more kids in restaurants where you might not have seen them before."

The wine region map is one of many baby-focused routes on Loney's website designed to guide parents. Others include Toronto, Hamilton and Burlington.

In other Vines & Wine news: In an effort to promote environmental stewardship, Stratus Vineyards in Niagara-on-the-Lake will be selling off its used high-quality French oak wine barrels.

The public can purchase the barrels at the winery on Sept. 6, 7, 13 and 14.

Sold new for \$1,000 to \$1,200 each, the barrels will be on sale for \$125 per item.

The barrels could be reused for a variety of things, such as rainwater collection or wine-cellar furniture and decor.

Proceeds from the recycled barrel sales will benefit The Stop Community Centre's Green Barn Initiative.

The Toronto organization's program teaches the public how to grow organic food in their neighbourhoods.

Stratus is located at 2059 Niagara Stone Rd. The sale will take place from 11 a. m. to 5 p. m. each day.

Do you have an interesting tidbit on the wine and grape industry to share? Contact Monique Beech at mbeech@stcatharinesstandard.ca

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