

A Study on Tourist Attitudes Towards Wine Culture in Rajasthan's Heritage Hospitality Industry

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Abstract

The mighty fort-palace architecture, royal courtly culture, rich folk culture and the legendary Rajput hospitality have formed the base of one of the most powerful heritage tourism brands in the world, the one that has been built in Rajasthan. The magnificent fort-palace architecture, royal courtly culture, rich folk culture and the legendary Rajput hospitality are the foundations of one of the world's most powerful heritage tourism brands which has been built in Rajasthan, the largest and most visited state of India. The rapid expansion of the palace hotels (heritage hotels), luxury camping experiences in the deserts and boutique havelis has made the state one of today's most popular places to engage in high-class cultural and experiential tourism. A rapidly changing hospitality industry, wine, which was not a major part of the Rajasthani hospitality culture, has become an important product offering because of the needs of international tourists, high-end domestic travellers, destination wedding guests and food-and-wine tourists. This research aims to explore the perception of tourist attitudes towards wine culture in the heritage hospitality industry in Rajasthan with the following constructs: awareness, acceptance, experiential quality, cultural friction, and behavioral intentions. The study uses a mixed methods design: structured questionnaire surveys (n = 480) in five major tourist destinations (Jaipur, Udaipur, Jodhpur, Jaisalmer, Ranthambore); semi-structured interviews with 42 heritage hotel professionals; and content analysis of the menus of heritage hotels and wine communications. International tourists have high wine awareness and positive attitudes, whereas domestic tourists show more diverse attitudes, depending on age, socio-economic status, travel experience and cultural attitudes. Wine list curation, staff knowledge, communication about food and wine pairing, and pricing strategy are found to be critical quality gaps in wine. The study suggests a model called 'Heritage Wine Experience Integration Model' (HWEIM) and suggests the specific steps that the heritage hospitality operators need to take to tap wine culture as an enabler to make Rajasthan's luxury tourism brand unique and also to face the complicated socio-cultural and regulatory environment of alcohol in India.

Keyword: Hospitality and Education, Tourist, Wine Culture Heritage Hospitality Industry

1. Introduction

Rajasthan is the epitome of the Indian Tourist Experience, with around 54.7 million of its domestic and 1.58 million of its international tourists coming here each year on average (Rajasthan Tourism, 2023). Its brand image (surrounded by grandeur of forts and palaces, romanticism of the Thar desert, chromatic allure of its folk culture and legendary hospitality of its erstwhile royal households) secures desired positioning in the domestic and international tourism market. The historic royal palaces and hunting lodges that have been converted into heritage hotels, particularly the Rambagh Palace, Jaipur, by the Taj Hotels group in the 1950s, and later by the Maharana of Udaipur's Taf Taj Lake Palace, have given rise to a new hospitality category that is both conservation and business, historic and modern luxury.

In this unique hospitality environment, the culture of beverages has made huge changes. The Rajasthan hospitality was traditionally based on non-alcoholic drinks, such as the spiced milk drink thandai, several sherbets, lassi and the ceremonial drink of the Rajput courts, opium infused water (afsana). Although alcohol was not completely

eradicated from the culture of the Rajput warrior aristocracy (the Rajputs did have a tradition of drinking country liquor and later imported spirits), they were not specifically cultivated nor specifically marketed as part of the region's hospitality identity.

The integration of Indian hospitality in the pages of international luxury travel magazines, the explosive growth of destination weddings and MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) tourism in Rajasthan's heritage venues, and the changing beverage preferences of the aspirational urban Indian millennial have all paved the way to an increasing presence of wine in the food and beverage mix of the Rajasthan heritage hotels. The rise of Indian wine brands (Sula Vineyards, Grover Zampa, KRSM, York Winery) has also led to better quality, and more affordable, domestic wines, decreasing the price gap that previously made wine consumption a largely imported product consumer driven market.

However, embedding wine in the heritage hospitality industry of Rajasthan is not an easy task. The regulatory landscape for alcohol in India is one of the most complex and fragmented globally, further complicated by state-level excise policies, dry day measures, and religious/cultural considerations, which make for a complicated operating environment for the development of heritage properties with more complex beverage programmes. Although Rajasthan's excise policy is relatively liberal compared to other states such as Gujarat and Bihar, it does introduce a number of restrictions when it comes to retail sale of wine, and serving wine in restaurants and event licencing. Cultural attitudes to alcohol for both the tourist and host population also complicate the issue.

The study of tourist attitudes towards wine culture in the heritage hospitality sector of Rajasthan, therefore, is seen as a great research area to be captured by the academic literature, which this study will attempt to fill. Knowing the attitudes of tourists, both cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions, is not only crucial for making informed decisions on investments in a wine programme, but also for developing menus, training staff and marketing communication for heritage hospitality operators. It is also crucial for the strategic positioning of Rajasthan Tourism, India's top luxury heritage tourist destination in the global competitive market where food and wine tourism is one of the fastest-growing experiential segments in the world.

1.1 Research Objectives

The specific research objectives are as follows:

1. To measure the awareness of tourists about wine culture and wine offering to the heritage hospitality industry of Rajasthan.
2. To explore tourists attitude towards wine consumption during their stay in the heritage hotels and eating out in Rajasthan.
3. To find out the major factors affecting satisfaction and dissatisfaction in wine tourism at the heritage properties in Rajasthan.
4. To identify socio-cultural, regulatory and operation challenges to the incorporation of wine culture in the hospitality landscape of Rajasthan's heritage.
5. To explore the possibility of wine tourism as a niche market of the Rajasthan heritage tourism brand.
6. To design a Heritage Wine Experience Integration Model (HWEIM) to help heritage hospitality operators to maximize their wine offering.

1.2 Research Questions

The study will answer the following main research questions:

- How aware are the tourists visiting Rajasthan's heritage hospitality establishments and how much wine experience have they had?
- What are tourists' perceptions of the quality, variety and service of wine in the Rajasthan's heritage hotels and what are the gaps between expectations and experience?
- What are the attitudinal segments of the tourist population in the wine cultural context of this heritage hospitality?

- How do socio-cultural factors — including national culture, religion, gender, age, and prior international travel experience — moderate tourist attitudes towards wine in Rajasthan?
- What is the potential of wine tourism programming (vineyard excursions, wine tasting events, food-wine pairing dinners) as an experiential tourism product within Rajasthan?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Wine Tourism: Conceptual Foundations

The wine tourism as a recognised academic subject was born in the mid-1990s, when Hall et al. (1997) developed the definition of wine tourism as 'visitation to vineyards, wineries, wine festivals and wine shows for which grape wine tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of a wine region are the main factors motivating the visit'. Subsequent scholars have significantly expanded this original definition of production-landscape tourism to cover the entire range of wine drinking and wine appreciating experiences in hospitality settings, such as restaurant wine programming, hotel wine lists, food and wine pairing events and sommelier-led tasting experiences (Getz and Brown, 2006).

The motivational framework of wine tourism has received a great amount of attention. Charters and Ali-Knight (2002) described an alcohol tourist typology continuum from 'wine lover' (where wine is the primary motivation for travel) to 'wine interested' and 'wine curious' to 'reluctant alcohol tourist' (where wine is a secondary motivation to other travel goals). This typology has a great relevance to the context of Rajasthan as majority of heritage hotel visitors are strongly drawn to cultural, historical and luxury experience aspects and wine is a secondary, but crucial experiential factor.

Mitchell and Hall (2006) created the 'Winery Visitor Experience Model', which identified that the four key components that make up tourists' satisfaction are product quality (wine and food), service quality, physical environment, and the 'cellar door' interpersonal experience. This model would be adapted to the heritage hospitality context to suggest that wine experience satisfaction in the palace hotel of Rajasthan is co-determined by wine quality, sommelier service, the atmosphere of heritage, and the 'story' authenticity of the presentation of the wine — a dimension of particular relevance with respect to the unique context of heritage properties.

2.2 Heritage Hospitality and Beverage Culture

There has been little, but increasing, research on the convergence of heritage and hospitality and beverage culture. Food and drink in the construction of destination identity has been explored by Boniface (2003) who argues that gastronomic heritage acts as a 'taste of place' (terroir) which can be used to differentiate tourism destinations and enhance the attachment of visitors to place. In wine-producing communities such as Burgundy, Napa Valley, Barossa Valley and Tuscany, there is a direct connection between wine terroir and destination identity. It is more mediated for heritage destinations not associated with indigenous wine production like Rajasthan and deliberate hospitality curation is needed.

Paying attention to food tourism in the heritage hotels of Rajasthan, Sharma and Nayak (2019) concluded that food experience was one of the most important satisfiers of the stay experience at a heritage hotel and they found that, the traditional dishes of Rajasthan (dal baati churma / laal maas / ker sangri) were an important determinant in the process of cultural immersion and place attachment. Beverage experiences (including wine) were, however, given little consideration in their analyses, indicating a lack of research in this area that the current study aims to fill.

Other comparative evidence from international markets in heritage hospitality is instructive. A useful comparison with the Rajasthan hospitality-industry in India is with the riad hospitality industry in Morocco, the Ottoman palace hotels in Turkey, and the colonial-era luxury properties in Cambodia, all of which have been grappling with the challenge of balancing contemporary luxury beverage culture with traditional cultural identities. Wine

service in international tourist accommodations in Morocco has been integrated into the service offered by the riads with a pragmatic approach, as the properties have created subtle approaches to service that have considered local sensibilities while at the same time set the expectations of their international guests. This experience provides transferable learning opportunities for Rajasthan's heritage hospitality businesses.

2.3 Tourist Attitudes: Theoretical Framework

The attitudes of tourists are conceptualized in this study on the basis of Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and its extension, the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), which assume that intentions to perform the behavior and finally the behavior itself are determined by the attitude toward the behavior (the evaluative beliefs about the behavior), the subjective norm (perceived social pressure), and the perceived behavioural control (perceived ease/difficulty of the behavior). In the context of wine purchases in the heritage hotel industry, it is predicted that the willingness to purchase wine at a heritage hotel in Rajasthan is a function of the tourist's attitude towards wine (cognitive and affective), perceived social norms of travel context and peer group, and perceived ease of ordering wine (including knowledge confidence and price comfort).

An alternative framework is Crompton's (1979) push and pull motivations. For tourists with escape, novelty or luxury seeking motivations, the experience of wine in heritage settings may be more acceptable than for tourists with historical and cultural learning motivations, who may be more drawn to these experiences. The historic character of the heritage hotel and its romantic connotations of opulence and ambience may have a special 'pull' towards wine consumption that can be harnessed through experiential design by heritage hospitality operators.

2.4 Indian Wine Market and Cultural Context

Wine market in India is small by international standards, but has shown very dynamic growth over the last 20 years. According to IWSR Drinks Market Analysis, 2024, the Indian wine region had an estimated production of 27 million litres in 2023, from a base of some 2 million litres back in 2000 and dominated by the Nashik Valley producers led by Sula Vineyards. The domestic wine consumer base is highly skewed towards urban metros (Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru, Pune) and is mainly from SEC-A and consists of a large number of younger consumers (25-45) as well as women wine consumers who are growing in numbers.

Indian wine consumption continues to be driven by cultural and religious influences in complex ways. Unlike Islam, Jainism, or some forms of Vaishnavism, there is no doctrinal restriction on the use of alcohol in Hinduism, but it is regarded as a sign of immorality and social deviance in many Indian communities – especially the upper caste Brahmin and in states with a strong Gandhian influence. The norms are slowly disappearing from younger, urban, international travellers, which is significant in terms of generational gap and wine attitude, directly affecting the tourist behaviour in the heritage hotels of Rajasthan.

Rajasthan's specific excise policy context warrants brief note. The state operates a permissive licence regime for heritage hotels, luxury resorts, and starred restaurants, allowing wine and beer service without the operational complexity faced in drier states. A 'Tourist Permit System' allows foreign nationals to carry limited quantities of alcohol without restriction. Nevertheless, excise duties on imported wines remain substantial, creating significant price differentials between domestic and imported wine that shape heritage hotel wine list composition and tourist price sensitivity.

2.5 Research Gap

A review of the existing literature reveals a clear gap: while significant scholarly attention has been devoted to wine tourism in producing regions (particularly New World wine countries), to heritage tourism in Rajasthan, and to food and beverage management in Indian luxury hospitality, no prior study has specifically investigated tourist attitudes towards wine culture within the distinctive context of Rajasthan's heritage hospitality industry. This study

makes a direct and substantive contribution to filling this gap, with implications for both academic theory and industry practice.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a concurrent mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative tourist survey data with qualitative stakeholder interview findings and secondary content analysis. The mixed-methods approach was selected to capture both the breadth of tourist attitudinal patterns (requiring quantitative survey measurement) and the contextual depth of industry and cultural dynamics (requiring qualitative inquiry). Primary data were collected over a nine-month fieldwork period (June 2023 – February 2024), spanning the high tourist season (October–February) when international visitor density is at its peak and the shoulder season (June–September) when the domestic tourist profile dominates.

Five study destinations were selected on the basis of heritage hotel density, tourism visitor volume, and geographic diversity within Rajasthan: Jaipur (Pink City; political and cultural capital; dense heritage hotel cluster), Udaipur (City of Lakes; often rated India's most romantic city; high international visitor share), Jodhpur (Blue City; Mehrangarh Fort; growing luxury boutique hotel sector), Jaisalmer (Golden City; Thar Desert gateway; glamping and desert camp tourism), and Ranthambore (wildlife and heritage combine; Ranthambore Fort; safari-heritage tourism segment).

3.2 Quantitative Component: Tourist Survey

A structured questionnaire was developed to measure tourist attitudes across the following dimensions: (a) wine awareness and prior experience; (b) attitude towards wine in general (using a 7-point Likert scale adapted from the Wine Attitude Scale of Quester and Smart, 1998); (c) attitude towards wine in the Rajasthan heritage hotel context specifically; (d) evaluation of heritage hotel wine offerings (quality, selection, pricing, service, food-wine pairing); (e) willingness to participate in wine tourism activities; and (f) socio-demographic and travel profile variables.

The questionnaire was pilot-tested with 45 respondents and demonstrated satisfactory reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.81$ for the attitude subscale; $\alpha = 0.78$ for the experience evaluation subscale). The final instrument was administered in English to 480 tourists across the five sites. A stratified sampling approach was employed to ensure representation of domestic and international tourists in proportions consistent with actual visitor composition at each site.

Table 1: Sample Distribution Across Study Sites

Study Site	Domestic (n)	International (n)	Total (n)	% International
Jaipur	74	22	96	22.9%
Udaipur	56	40	96	41.7%
Jodhpur	68	28	96	29.2%
Jaisalmer	60	36	96	37.5%
Ranthambore	72	24	96	25.0%
Total	330	150	480	31.3%

3.3 Qualitative Component: Stakeholder Interviews

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 42 heritage hospitality professionals across the five study sites, comprising: heritage hotel General Managers (n = 8), Food and Beverage Directors (n = 10), sommeliers and wine stewards (n = 7), executive chefs (n = 6), front-of-house managers with wine service responsibility (n = 6), and Rajasthan Tourism Development Corporation (RTDC) officials with responsibility for food and beverage policy (n = 5). Interviews lasted between 40 and 75 minutes, were conducted in English or Hindi, and were audio-recorded with consent. Transcription and thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, supported by NVivo 12 software.

3.4 Content Analysis

Wine-related content was systematically analysed across 28 heritage hotel wine lists/menus, 12 heritage hotel websites, and the social media channels of 15 heritage properties (Instagram, Facebook). The content analysis examined wine list composition (domestic vs. imported, varietal range, price positioning), wine communication approaches (descriptors, pairing suggestions, storytelling elements), and the visual and narrative positioning of wine in heritage hospitality marketing materials.

3.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS v.28. Descriptive statistics were computed for all variables. Independent-samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA were used to examine differences in attitudinal scores across tourist nationality, age, gender, and travel experience groups. K-means cluster analysis was employed to identify attitudinal segments within the tourist population. Multiple regression analysis was used to identify predictors of overall wine experience satisfaction among heritage hotel guests. Qualitative data were analysed thematically, with themes triangulated against the quantitative findings.

4. Findings And Analysis

4.1 Tourist Profile

Of the 480 survey respondents, 68.8% were domestic tourists and 31.3% international. The domestic sample was drawn primarily from metropolitan centres: Delhi NCR (24.5%), Mumbai (18.2%), Bengaluru (12.4%), Pune (9.1%), and Hyderabad (7.6%). International respondents were principally from the United Kingdom (18.7%), United States (16.0%), France (10.7%), Germany (9.3%), and Australia (8.0%), with the remainder from other European nations, the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, and East Asia.

The sample was predominantly highly educated, with 78.4% holding graduate or postgraduate qualifications, and relatively affluent, with 71.2% reporting annual household incomes above INR 12 lakh (domestic) or USD 60,000 equivalent (international). A majority (64.7%) were staying in three-star or above heritage-classified properties. International tourists had substantially higher prior wine experience than domestic tourists: 87.3% of international respondents described themselves as at least 'occasional wine drinkers,' compared with 54.2% of domestic respondents. A notable 23.6% of domestic respondents described themselves as abstainers from alcohol for religious or cultural reasons.

Table 2: Tourist Profile — Selected Characteristics

Profile Variable	Domestic Tourists (%)	International Tourists (%)
Age 18–30	28.5	22.0
Age 31–45	38.4	36.7

Age 46–60	24.5	30.7
Age 60+	8.6	10.7
Graduate/Postgraduate	74.2	87.3
Prior India visit	100	52.7
Prior international travel	67.3	100
Regular wine drinker	31.8	63.3
Occasional wine drinker	22.4	24.0
Non-drinker (cultural/religious)	23.6	4.7

4.2 Wine Awareness and Prior Experience

Wine awareness was measured across four dimensions: general wine category awareness (types, regions, major varietals); Indian wine awareness (knowledge of domestic wine brands and wine-producing regions); awareness of wine availability in Rajasthan heritage hotels; and awareness of wine tourism activities in Rajasthan.

General wine awareness was high among international tourists (mean score 4.28/5.00) and moderate among domestic tourists (mean score 2.94/5.00). Indian wine awareness showed a different pattern, with domestic tourists scoring significantly higher (mean 3.41/5.00) than international tourists (mean 2.18/5.00), reflecting domestic brand exposure. Crucially, awareness of wine availability in Rajasthan heritage hotels was low across both groups (domestic: mean 2.47/5.00; international: mean 2.83/5.00), suggesting a significant communication gap in heritage hotel wine marketing. Awareness of wine tourism activities in Rajasthan was very low across both groups (domestic: 1.82/5.00; international: 2.12/5.00), reflecting the nascent state of wine tourism programming in the region.

4.3 Tourist Attitudes Towards Wine in Heritage Hotels

Overall attitude towards wine in the Rajasthan heritage hotel context was measured using a validated 12-item Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree). Mean scores were computed for each item and for the overall attitude index. International tourists demonstrated consistently more positive attitudes (mean composite score 5.61/7.00) than domestic tourists (mean composite score 3.89/7.00), a difference that was statistically significant ($t(478) = 14.73, p < .001$).

Table 3: Selected Attitude Items — Domestic vs. International Tourist Mean Scores (Scale: 1–7)

Attitude Statement	Domestic Mean	International Mean	Sig.
Wine enhances the luxury heritage hotel experience	4.12	6.08	p<.001
Wine service is appropriate in palace hotel settings	3.98	5.94	p<.001
I would order wine at a Rajasthan heritage hotel	3.54	5.77	p<.001
A good wine list reflects a hotel's quality	4.21	5.83	p<.001
Wine complements Rajasthani cuisine	3.03	4.24	p<.001

I find wine pricing in heritage hotels reasonable	2.78	3.91	p<.001
Heritage hotels should offer wine pairing with meals	3.67	5.62	p<.001
I am curious to try Indian wines in Rajasthan	3.89	4.83	p<.001

Within the domestic tourist sub-sample, significant attitudinal variation was observed by age cohort. Tourists aged 18-30 demonstrated the most positive attitudes towards wine in heritage hotel settings (mean composite 4.41), while those aged 60 and above demonstrated the least positive attitudes (mean composite 2.83), a pattern consistent with generational shifts in Indian beverage consumption norms. Domestic tourists with prior international travel experience (particularly to Europe or Australia) also demonstrated significantly more positive wine attitudes than those without such experience (mean 4.58 vs. 3.24; $p < .001$), suggesting that international exposure is a powerful moderator of wine attitude formation among Indian tourists.

4.4 Attitudinal Segmentation: Cluster Analysis

K-means cluster analysis identified four distinct attitudinal segments within the combined tourist sample, characterised as follows:

Segment 1: The Wine Enthusiast (22.7% of sample)

This segment — predominantly international tourists (74.3% of segment) and younger urban domestic tourists — exhibits the highest positive wine attitudes (mean 6.28/7.00), strong wine knowledge, active wine ordering behaviour, high willingness to participate in wine tourism activities, and a preference for premium imported wines alongside curiosity about Indian wines. Heritage hotel wine programmes represent a primary satisfaction driver for this segment. They are the most receptive audience for wine pairing dinners, sommelier-led tastings, and vineyard excursion add-ons.

Segment 2: The Curious Explorer (29.4% of sample)

The Curious Explorer segment comprises tourists who are broadly positive towards wine but limited in knowledge and experience (mean attitude score 4.74/7.00). Domestic tourists are well represented (52.8% of segment), particularly younger and middle-aged urban professionals. This segment exhibits high receptivity to guided wine discovery experiences — they are open to wine but need gentle facilitation through knowledgeable staff recommendations, accessible wine list descriptions, and approachable entry-level pricing. They represent the highest-potential growth segment for Rajasthan's heritage wine market, as positive experiences are likely to convert them to Segment 1 behaviour on future visits.

Segment 3: The Cultural Purist (31.2% of sample)

The Cultural Purist segment is dominated by older domestic tourists, pilgrimage-motivated visitors, and tourists from smaller Indian cities with conservative cultural orientations (mean attitude score 2.64/7.00). This segment does not consume wine and does not wish to encounter wine culture prominently in heritage hotel settings, with some respondents expressing mild discomfort with overt wine promotion in historic properties they associate with India's cultural heritage. Heritage hospitality operators must navigate this segment's preferences carefully — ensuring that non-alcoholic beverage alternatives are of equal quality and prestige, and that wine service is conducted with discretion that does not intrude on the experience of non-consuming guests.

Segment 4: The Pragmatic Consumer (16.7% of sample)

Pragmatic Consumers consume wine when travelling but are primarily price-sensitive and quality-conscious (mean attitude score 4.12/7.00). Both domestic and international tourists are represented in this segment. They

order wine when they judge the value proposition reasonable — currently, the majority in this segment report that heritage hotel wine pricing frequently fails this test, leading to substitution with beer or cocktails. Improved domestic wine offerings at accessible price points represent the primary opportunity for converting Pragmatic Consumer wine spend in heritage hotel settings.

Table 4: Tourist Attitudinal Segments — Summary Profile

Segment	% of Sample	Mean Attitude	Dominant Profile	Primary Need
Wine Enthusiast	22.7%	6.28/7.00	International, young urban domestic	Premium selection & wine events
Curious Explorer	29.4%	4.74/7.00	Mixed, younger domestic professionals	Guided discovery & accessible entry
Cultural Purist	31.2%	2.64/7.00	Older domestic, pilgrims	Discreet service & premium non-alcoholic
Pragmatic Consumer	16.7%	4.12/7.00	Mixed, price-sensitive	Value-for-money domestic wines

4.5 Evaluation of Wine Offerings in Heritage Hotels

Among the 362 respondents (75.4%) who had consumed or attempted to consume wine at a Rajasthan heritage property, experience evaluation was assessed across six dimensions on a 5-point scale. The results present a mixed picture, with the atmospheric heritage setting providing a powerful positive context for wine experiences, but substantive quality gaps identified in wine knowledge, selection, and pricing.

Table 5: Tourist Evaluation of Wine Experience Dimensions in Rajasthan Heritage Hotels

Evaluation Dimension	Mean Score (/5.00)	Satisfaction Band
Atmospheric setting for wine experience	4.42	High
Overall wine quality	3.61	Moderate
Range and variety of wine list	3.14	Moderate-Low
Staff wine knowledge and recommendations	2.87	Low
Food-wine pairing guidance	2.63	Low
Wine pricing (value for money)	2.51	Low
Availability of Indian wines	3.28	Moderate
Wine presentation and glassware	3.74	Moderate-High

The atmospheric setting for wine consumption — candle-lit palace courtyards, rooftop terraces overlooking medieval forts, candlelit heritage dining halls — was rated very highly (mean 4.42/5.00), confirming the distinctive competitive advantage that heritage properties possess as wine experience settings. Wine presentation and glassware quality also scored reasonably well (mean 3.74/5.00). However, staff wine knowledge (mean 2.87/5.00), food-wine pairing guidance (mean 2.63/5.00), and wine pricing (mean 2.51/5.00) scored poorly, indicating critical service delivery and value perception gaps.

4.6 Food and Wine Pairing: Rajasthani Cuisine

A distinctive dimension of this study involves the explored potential for food-wine pairing with Rajasthan's indigenous culinary heritage. Qualitative interviews with heritage hotel executive chefs and F&B directors revealed significant interest in, but limited systematic development of, Rajasthani cuisine-wine pairing programmes. Several interesting pairing possibilities were identified and are consistent with emerging wine education discourse in Indian hospitality:

- Laal Maas (slow-cooked mutton in red Mathania chilli gravy) paired with full-bodied Indian Shiraz (Sula Rasa Shiraz, York Arros Syrah) — the spice and umami of the dish complementing the peppery fruit character of Rajasthani-Nashik Shiraz wines.
- Dal Baati Churma (slow-roasted wheat rolls with lentil soup and sweetened crumbled wheat) paired with off-dry Riesling or Grover Zampa La Réserve Blanc — the sweetness of churma finding an elegant counterpart in residual-sugar white wines.
- Ker Sangri (desert bean and berry pickle curry) paired with orange wines or aged Sula Sauvignon Blanc — the tangy, earthy profile of this desert ingredient finding resonance in skin-contact whites.
- Gatte ki Sabji (gram flour dumplings in yoghurt gravy) paired with light, fresh Rosé wines — the acidity of the yoghurt-based dish complementing the refreshing character of Indian Rosé.

Only 14.3% of heritage hotels surveyed had developed systematic food-wine pairing menus integrating Rajasthani cuisine. The majority relied on standard international pairings (steak-Cabernet, fish-Chardonnay) that failed to leverage the unique cultural capital of the regional culinary heritage. This represents a significant missed opportunity for experiential

4.7 Qualitative Findings: Stakeholder Perspectives

4.7.1 Heritage Hotel General Managers and F&B Directors

The range of strategic orientations that were apparent among the leaders of the heritage hotels with respect to wine. The focus of the group was on the employees of the progressive operators, the majority of whom were based in the lake view properties of Udaipur or the boutique desert hotels of Jaisalmer, who had invested considerably in the development of wine programmes, with the help of trained sommeliers, creation of Indian wine lists and testing wine pairing dinner events. A General Manager of a heritage property in Udaipur succinctly expressed the strategic argument: 'Wine is not about the alcohol – it is about the civilised, slow and experiential way of consuming culture.' We welcome guests here to have something extraordinary, beautiful wine moment on our lake side terrace is part of that extraordinary.' Conservative operators—which had more presence in heritage properties in the old city of Jaipur and in pilgrimage destinations—were more conservative, claiming for minimal investment in wine programmes due to concerns about cultural sensitivity, regulatory complexity and the high proportion of non-drinking customers.

4.7.2 Sommeliers and Wine Stewards

The small number of sommeliers and wine stewards interviewed was a very informative group of professionals. Every one of them had formal wine education from the Wine and Spirit Education Trust (WSET) or the Court of Master Sommeliers and a number of them had international wine region experience. The necessity to bring the sophisticated international wine expectations in tune with the wine availability and price in Rajasthan was a recurring theme. A sommelier at a heritage property in Jodhpur commented on the quality of imported wines that are available to us, saying that the excise duty on these wines makes it too costly for many guests. We have invested significantly in our Indian wine programme: 'Sula', 'Grover' and 'KRSMA' and now we have some great Indian wines that really compare with the mid-range options from abroad. However, educating and conferring confidence on our staff for selling Indian wines to international guests is a challenge, not all of them can do that!

4.7.3 Policy and Regulatory Context

The officials from RTDC admitted that there is a conflict between the vision of Rajasthan to be a luxury culinary tourism hub and the regulatory framework under excise. Heritage hotels face a relatively streamlined licensing process, compared to other hospitality providers, but the 'dry day' regulations (when alcohol service is not allowed, even in licensed hotels, on religious holidays) and the import duty tax structure that drives up the price of international wine, and the lack of any significant winery or wine region within Rajasthan itself were identified as structural constraints on the development of wine tourism. A 'Rajasthan Wine Trail' comprising heritage hotel wine experiences and day-trip visits to promising wine areas in neighbouring states (specifically the Nashik wine areas, which are easily accessible from the major cities of Rajasthan), was a product concept idea that one senior RTDC official suggested might be a viable wine tourism product.

4.8 Regulatory and Cultural Barriers

Five main barriers were identified through a synthesis of the survey and interview data and content analysis of the challenges faced in integrating wine culture into the heritage hospitality in Rajasthan:

1. Price sensitivity of import wine pricing (because of excise duty) for value sensitive tourist segments and limitation of the profitability of heritage hotel wine programmes.
2. Cultural diversity of the tourist clientele, where a considerable minority of domestic tourists have cultural and/or religious abstinence orientations that demand special and respectful attention in handling wine service.
3. Training and awareness issues among staff relating to food-wine pairing and awareness on Indian wine which negatively affect the quality of wine service.
4. Operational uncertainty due to regulatory complexity – dry day restrictions, event licensing, and variable enforcement.
5. Lack of Rajasthan wine identity – no regional terroir story – no indigenous wine production – restricting the use of place-based wine story-telling that is so effective in wine-producing destination contexts.

5. Heritage Wine Experience Integration Model (Hweim)

In this paper, the authors suggest an integration model, named Heritage Wine Experience Integration Model (HWEIM) for Rajasthan's heritage hospitality operators to optimise the wine culture as a part of the luxury heritage guest experience. The HWEIM is designed with four strategic areas that are connected to each other, and are aligned with the four attitudinal segments found in the analysis.

Domain I: Heritage Atmosphere as Wine Theatre

The atmosphere of the Rajasthan heritage properties is incomparable as wine experience places. The HWEIM's first domain is the intentional and systematic creation of wine 'moments' that can be used to create a theatrical space using the heritage setting. Specific programmes are: Sunset Wine Experiences on the fort-view terraces (Wine Enthusiasts and Curious Explorers); Candlelit Haveli Wine Dinners with heritage silver service, palace chef food courts (Wine Enthusiasts); and 'Moonlight at the Mahal' wine events held in historic palace courtyards on full moon evenings (both segments). The philosophy is that the wine consumption context becomes a context of experiential memory through the experience of living in the context of heritage.

Domain II: Rajasthani Culinary Wine Pairing

The second aspect of the HWEIM is the potential of Rajasthani cuisine-wine pairing as a product differentiator, which is huge and untapped. Based on the pairing research done in this study, heritage properties are recommended to create specially made 'Royal Rajasthani Wine Pairing' menus, which link together the regional dishes with a carefully selected list of Indian and international wines in a systematic manner. These menus should evoke the culinary tradition of the royal kitchens, drawing on the culinary heritage of the royal kitchens of Mewar, Marwar and Jaipur and provide a story-rich food-wine experience like no other international wine tourism destination.

Rajasthani cuisine training in pairing with wine should be a part of all the F&B training programmes and should be evaluated by senior sommeliers.

Domain III: Indian Wine Advocacy and Education

The HWEIM's third domain is directly related to the discovery that there is a strong growth potential in the Curious Explorer and Pragmatic Consumer segments and needs to be facilitated to appreciate the wine. Carefully selected and written up for beginners, the Heritage properties' Indian wine programmes include recommendations for Sula wines, Grover Zampa wines, KRSMAs wines, York wines and boutique producers of emerging Indian wines, along with staff trained to confidently promote the quality and value of Indian wines. A 'taste of India' wine flight programme, which includes a guided comparative tasting of four to five Indian wines with regional amuse bouches, is recommended as a low entry barrier, high engagement wine education programme to transform Curious Explorers into wine enthusiasts.

Domain IV: Inclusive Beverage Programming

The HWEIM has been specifically designed to tackle the Cultural Purist segment within its fourth domain, inclusive beverage programming. Not-for-profit offerings must be of equal prestige, complexity and cultural richness to the wine offering and of equal celebration to those guests who don't drink alcohol, otherwise the non-alcoholic beverage will be an afterthought and so, ultimately, will be guests' experience. Recommend the development of a signature 'Rajasthan Non-Alcoholic Beverage Programme' based on the old traditional beverage culture of Rajasthan, which employs organic spices, rose and kewra flavours in its artisanal beverages such as thandai, sherbets, aam panna, and jaljeera, and is offered with the same ceremony and narration as a wine service. This will not only respect cultural diversity but will also enhance the overall experience of the beverage, making it a true asset to hospitality.

6. Discussion

The results of this study shed light on a multi-layered wine culture attitude towards the heritage hospitality industry in Rajasthan. The basic message is that attitudes of tourists towards wine in this situation are not homogenous but are strongly segmented according to nationality, age, cultural background, previous travel experience, and specific context of the heritage hospitality. Theoretically and practically important segmentation is a result of this.

In theory, using TPB to study wine consumption at the heritage hotel is a complex concept. For domestic tourists who face socially-normative attitudes towards alcohol, the high levels of subjective norms indicates that the norm-shaping capabilities of heritage hospitality environments, where attitudes towards the appreciation of wine are normalised and celebrated, can be active. As a space between everyday social relations and cultural marginalisation, the heritage hotel can serve as an appropriate space for this norm shifting function, in line with Turner's (1969) anthropological theory of liminality as a space for social and cultural change.

The difference between the scores for wine attitude between international and domestic tourists is dramatic, not only because of cultural difference, but also because of the differences in exposure and education to wine between these two groups. This finding gives further evidence for a wine attitude formation model where experiential learning is the main factor of attitude change and has important connotations for the investment in wine education by heritage hospitality operators. It is not a mere revenue maximisation exercise to provide high quality, guided wine experiences to the domestic tourists (Curious Explorer and Pragmatic Consumer), but an investment in long term development of India's wine culture and the domestic wine tourism market.

The discovery that food-wine pairing of Rajasthani food is still in nascent stages in the heritage hospitality industry is both a gap and opportunity of great strategic value. Place-specific food and beverage experiences have been identified as one of the top attractions that differentiate destinations and satisfy tourists in most of the food tourism

literature reviewed (Hall and Sharples, 2003; Richards, 2002). The royal, cultural and ecological uniqueness of the Thar Desert in Rajasthan serves as a natural base for a unique wine pairing programme which no other competition destination can match. It is recommended that each property, along with the Rajasthan Tourism brand portfolio, prioritize the evolution of 'Rajasthan Royal Wine Pairing' as a culinary heritage brand.

It is now necessary to say something more about the regulatory context. Although the excise structure in Rajasthan is more liberal than in other Indian states, the import duty structure imposes a significant price distortion on the import market for wines, which is a significant disadvantage for quality wine programmes in heritage hotels, as it systematically disadvantages high quality international tourists. Policy priority for rationalisation of excise duty on quality imported wines, through Rajasthan Tourism Federation and Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI) is identified as significant Policy priority which would significantly improve the commercial viability of the wine investment in Heritage Hotel.

7. Conclusions And Recommendations

7.1 Conclusions

This research has been the first systematic multi-method study for understanding the attitudinal aspects of wine culture among the tourists in the heritage hospitality of Rajasthan. It makes the following principal conclusions.

First, wine attitudes among tourists in the context of heritage hospitality are multifaceted and divided into four groups: Wine Enthusiasts (22.7%), Curious Explorers (29.4%), Cultural Purists (31.2%) and Pragmatic (16.7%). A segment-aware approach to the Heritage hotel wine strategy is crucial to ensure maximum commercial benefit and guest satisfaction from a wide range of tourists.

Second, Rajasthan's heritage properties have an exceptional and underutilized atmospheric benefit as wine experience properties. The palace courtyard, the fort-view terrace, the candlelit haveli dining room – all add a theatrical dimension to wine experiences that no traditional restaurant or wine bar can bestow. This is the most unique competitive advantage that can be given to the operators of the heritage wine programme in Rajasthan.

Thirdly, there are gaps in critical service quality that are affecting the realisation of the wine experience potential in Rajasthan, especially in wine knowledge, food-wine pairing advice and wine pricing. The investments in sommelier training, development of Rajasthani cuisine-wine pairing programme, nurturing domestic wine advocacy are crucial to ensuring that this atmospheric advantage can be translated into the long-term customer satisfaction.

Fourth, it is important to promote the inclusion of wine culture in the heritage hospitality industry by using an inclusive beverage programming approach that respects and celebrates the cultural purist segment's affinity for traditional non-alcoholic drinks, at the same time not excluding them from the quest for wine revenue.

Fifth, the HWEIM framework — Heritage Atmosphere as Wine Theatre, Rajasthani Culinary Wine Pairing, Indian Wine Advocacy and Education, and Inclusive Beverage Programming — provides a coherent and actionable strategic architecture for heritage hospitality operators seeking to optimise wine culture as a component of the luxury Rajasthan guest experience.

7.2 Recommendations

The following specific recommendations are addressed to heritage hospitality operators and tourism policy stakeholders:

1. Heritage hotel operators should invest in WSET or Court of Master Sommeliers certified wine training for all F&B-facing staff, with particular emphasis on Indian wine knowledge and Rajasthani cuisine-wine pairing.
2. Dedicated 'Royal Rajasthani Wine Pairing' menus should be developed at all heritage properties offering formal dining, with narrative menus that draw on royal culinary heritage storytelling.

3. A 'Taste of India' wine discovery flight programme should be developed as a standard hospitality offering for all heritage hotel guests, positioned as a cultural education experience rather than an alcoholic beverage service.
4. Rajasthan Tourism should explore the feasibility of a 'Rajasthan Royal Wine Trail' product, linking heritage hotel wine experiences with day-trip excursions to Nashik Valley wineries, potentially marketed as a dedicated itinerary for the Wine Enthusiast and Curious Explorer segments.
5. The Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI), working through RTDC, should advocate for rationalisation of import duties on quality wines to improve price competitiveness of heritage hotel wine programmes.
6. Heritage properties should develop signature Royal Non-Alcoholic Beverage Programmes — featuring artisanal renditions of traditional Rajasthani beverages — to ensure that the Cultural Purist segment is served with equal prestige and hospitality narrative richness.
7. Future research should examine the commercial impact of the HWEIM framework through longitudinal studies of heritage hotels that implement its recommendations, tracking wine revenue per guest, guest satisfaction scores, and repeat visit intention.

7.3 Limitations

This study is subject to several limitations. The sample, drawn from a nine-month fieldwork period, may not fully capture seasonal variation in tourist profiles. Self-reported attitude measures are subject to social desirability bias, particularly on topics with cultural sensitivity such as alcohol consumption. The content analysis of heritage hotel wine lists was cross-sectional and may not reflect the dynamic evolution of wine programmes over time. Future research should employ longitudinal designs, experimental methods (such as wine experience manipulation studies), and extend the geographic scope to heritage hospitality in other Indian states for comparative analysis.

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