

Online guide helps visitors choose top drop

By Julian Sambrook

VISITORS to the growing number of vineyards and wineries in the Southern Highlands now have a new resource to direct them to their chosen destinations.

The new guide VineFinders (VineFinders.com.au), a recently introduced, free internet location service that lists over 5000 vineyards, cellar doors, wineries, breweries and distilleries nationwide.

Sites can be searched by name, town, and postcode or by one of 85 wine regions across Australia, with precise locations detailing road entrances, contact information, grape varieties, climatic conditions, opening hours and facilities just a mouse click away.

Thirty producers are currently listed under the Southern Highlands region and more will be added as they come on stream.

Given that many vigneroners feel the area suffers from not being sufficiently well known, VineFinders should help

create a lot more business for the local wine industry in tough and competitive times.

Southern Highlands Vignerons Association president Philip Martin, of Pulpit Rock Estate, is certainly enthusiastic about the new internet facility.

"Our region tends to suffer from a lack of awareness," he says. "Everyone is familiar with the Hunter and most people automatically head up there when they want a wine tourism experience. But here we are, almost two hours closer to Sydney, with excellent road and rail links and some wonderful places to stay. And our cool climate wines are making people sit up and take notice, so the easier we can make it for people to find us, the better."

VineFinders managing partner Dick Friend described the website as an invaluable way for wine enthusiasts to cut travelling time and avoid journeys to cellar doors or other venues that may not always be open.

"VineFinders not only provides route planning, map

print outs and turn-by-turn directions, but also opening times, facilities and other vital information. The result: less time wasted, more wine tasted."

Steve Rosa, Tourism Southern Highlands executive manager, believed the VineFinders site would bring lots more visitors to the region.

"In terms of creating recognition for our wine and related tourism businesses, it's exactly what we need," he said. "Surprisingly, a lot of people don't even know we make wine down here, so it should encourage more people to jump in their cars and come and discover all the terrific things we have to offer."

Because quite a few of the Highlands' vineyards and cellar doors are tucked away in remote or out-of-the-way places and road signs aren't always as clear as they might be, this new service will be a good way for visitors to save petrol as well as time.

Robert Kay, sales manager at Tertini Wines, is another

wine-making enthusiast.

"The quality of the best of the region's wines becomes obvious as soon as you try them," he said. "All we need now is more people to visit and find that out for themselves."

Listing on the VineFinders site is free of charge for qualifying businesses and Mr Friend urges anyone whose vineyard, winery, brewery or other business is not yet featured to get in touch with him and register their details.

"Also, we'd really appreciate it if people who are already on our list could keep us up to date with any changes such as to opening hours, location, special attractions and so on," he said.

To check out the Southern Highland listings go to the VineFinders website, then select NSW under state and Southern Highlands under region.

Alternatively, choose the name of the winery, vineyard or other business you want to locate or the suburb or postcode. Further search refinements are also available.