

For immediate release

Coup for Tasmanian 'new media' company sees it develop Australia-first initiative

A Tasmanian 'new media' company, started with the assistance of a Tasmanian ecommerce IT grant has, in a major coup, established an unprecedented alliance with motoring giants RACV and RACT – leading to the creation of an Australia-first initiative to support regional Victoria and Tasmania.

VisitVineyards.com is Australia's first aggregated online portal for wine and food tourism, bringing together more than 30,000 regional growers, wine and food producers, and accommodation hosts.

It was established by Robyn Lewis, who hails from Southern Tasmania, where she and husband Charles also run a farm and vineyard, where the business is headquartered.

A well respected name in the food and tourism industries, Robyn's brainchild enables travellers to plan and maximise the benefits of visits to vineyards, cellar doors and food producers across Australia – targeting a market of more than four million annual domestic visitors and one million international inbound wine and food travellers.

From humble beginnings in 2002; the site now has 27,000 subscribers and outranks the popularity of three State tourism websites.

It has 12 employees in three States, with the majority based in Tasmania – and despite its growth, has no plans or necessity to move the business, which can be operated locally thanks to the internet.

Robyn, who has just been named a finalist in two categories in the 2010 Telstra Business Women's Awards in Tasmania, spent years building strategic relationships in industry to grow the site, before forming alliances with the motoring powerhouses of RACV and RACT.

The partnership means more than 2.2 million RACV and RACT members are offered unprecedented access to vineyards and wineries, winery restaurants, food producers, microbreweries and related experiences in regional Victoria and Tasmania.

Dubbed *Wine and Food Selections with RACT* in Tasmania, the program is an extension of the Show Your Card and Save Program, which provides discounts to more than 115 million members worldwide. It is the first time in the history of the program this extent of wine and food products have been offered.

The initiative has only just been launched in Victoria, and is already being touted as providing vital economic benefits to that State.

Chair of the Victorian Food and Wine Tourism Council, Tourism Victoria Board member and co-owner of her own winery, Janelle Boynton, says the program offers "great discounts providing customers with an extra incentive to travel to take up the opportunities and spend more in the regions, helping to grow our State economy".

With more than 37 years tourism industry related experience, Australian Tourism Export Council Chairman, former Chairman of Tourism Tasmania and global tourism advisor John King, says there is no doubt of its benefits.



King, who is also Managing Director of Sydney-based tourism marketing and development consultancy Global Tourism & Leisure, says “it will not only drive tourism and increase spend, but will grow knowledge of the producers, growers and farmers involved. Whilst people in Tasmania may know of the fabulous local producers, others are still learning – and this program will connect these consumers directly to the producers involved.”

“It’s fabulous news that Robyn has successfully negotiated to have Tasmania included in this program, which will allow Tasmanian operators direct market access to the huge pool of RACV members right on their doorstep, something that many have been trying to gain for years.”

Robyn Lewis says it’s been a long road to success, and the journey will continue.

“We faced tough times in the beginning. Raising capital as a Tasmanian was extremely difficult; doubly so being a woman. Then the business officially launched two weeks before the global financial crisis, forcing us to change strategic direction from business to consumer to business to business. So far it has worked - and we’re by no means slowing down.”

Robyn anticipates expanding her workforce shortly. She looks forward to Tasmania’s broadband services being more accessible and reliable, to underpin this growth.

She says the true benefits of the business’ success are two-fold – for the consumer, and for regional Australia, and she has made sure that Tasmania is very much included.

“It’s a genuine win-win. It’s also humbling to know you’re supporting regional producers and growers who – despite what appears to be an immense interest in local products – are facing increasing costs, static spend and ever-increasing competition”.

“We plan on doing what we can to help change that.”

For more information and high resolution images:

Kirstie Bedford
KDJM communications
M: 0437 455 001
E: kirstie@kdjmcommunications.com.au

About VisitVineyards.com

VisitVineyards.com is Australia’s first and largest comprehensive online guide for wine and food travellers, providing up-to-date information, recommendations and reviews of the best regional culinary travel experiences in the country. In two years it has attracted more than 27,000 subscribers and is building its brand amongst culinary travellers.

VisitVineyards.com brings together more than 30,000 wine, food and travel providers across every Australian region to enable wine and food travellers to find out what’s going on, the places not to be missed and information about their next destination. It features a range of current itineraries and Australia’s largest wine and food events calendar.

Up to 20 wine, food and travel writers nationwide have contributed to the site, and VisitVineyards.com has also developed international alliances, including world-renowned wine writer Jancis Robinson MBE.

www.VisitVineyards.com

In Victoria: <http://racv.VisitVineyards.com>

In Tasmania: <http://ract.VisitVineyards.com>