

# Insights from an Island Winery Tour

By Adrienne Wass.

On a Sunday summer morning, a group of librarians and friends gathered in downtown Victoria for a common purpose - to explore the Island's wineries. The weather was ideal, the agenda was set, and the travel music was already in the bus' CD player. My journey had already begun, however, several weeks before we settled into our seats.

I remember the moment a friend suggested an Island winery tour for the Vancouver Island Interest Group. It was a brilliant idea! It was also a completely new concept - I had never reserved a bus, developed a tour itinerary or tried to move a large group of people, who would be sampling several selections of wines, from place to place on schedule. Driven by a passion for wine and a fondness for the local librarians and library staff, I took on the challenge. The Island Winery Tour taught me much more than I expected, and I want to share my experience through the following lessons learned:

- **Lesson** - People on Vancouver Island often prefer the "last minute" approach. Deadlines are considered to be suggestions; after a deadline is past, a significant number of people will inquire about registration.
- **Learned** - Post an official deadline, then make the real deadline several days later to accommodate the latecomers. I can't blame these people, especially as I'm writing this article several days past the "official" BCLA Browser deadline. It's an Island thing.



Stopping at Merridale Ciderworks for Lunch.

- **Lesson** - Bus drivers are people, too.
- **Learned** - Know your tour bus etiquette. The driver needs to know where they are going, which means you need to send an itinerary in advance. Tell them how long you expect to be at each stop, because it's not always easy to park a bus. Are you planning to include lunch? Bus drivers get hungry, too. Consider inviting them to join you; our driver was a social individual who had some interesting stories to share (including sky-diving with his daughter). Finally, bus drivers are normally tipped at the end of the day. Considering the narrow, winding, country roads on the Island, they deserve it.



Host Hans Kiltz introduces us to the best of Blue Grouse Estate Winery - the highlight of the tour!

- **Lesson** – You don't need to do it all yourself.
- **Learned** – See if anyone else wants to share in the experience (or let's be honest, work). You might find a newly-graduated librarian looking for an opportunity to network and add to their resume. I found Iona Reid, a local librarian with a knack for trouble-shooting, writing and paying attention to the important-but-easy-to-miss details. It was also a relief to have a co-host, someone to share in the logistical planning and ultimately, make sure that we didn't leave someone behind at our last stop (never underestimate the importance of a second "head counter", especially when alcohol is involved).



Enjoying lunch and a tasting at Merridale Ciderworks with Tatiana Trakhtenberg, Cathy Condos and partners.

- **Lesson** – The vegetarians are out there – they might not speak up, but they still won't eat chicken.
- **Learned** – When you're planning a group lunch, be sure to include a vegetarian option. As a ravenous meat-eater, this consideration completely slipped my mind. Luckily, restaurants are prepared to deal with this dietary preference in a single word – pasta.
- **Lesson** – Prize draws are a good way to break up a road trip – maybe.
- **Learned** - If you're holding prize draws, make sure they are things are actually things people want to win. We distributed raffle tickets, and then there was some hesitation to collect some of the

"prizes". It creates a bit of a funny, awkward moment, if you call out the winning number (and you know the winner is out there) and no one comes forward. In contrast, chocolate and wine-related gifts proved popular choices. People are ready to jump up and claim these prizes. If they don't need these items themselves, they make excellent re-gifts.



Susan Laidlaw and Ursula Benoit enjoying the scenery at Blue Grouse Estate Winery.

- **Lesson** – Winery tours take time. Tasting takes time, as does the purchasing. Credit card and interact purchases can take even longer in the smaller stores (dial-up still exists in these places).
- **Learned** – Plan your itinerary, then double the amount of time you expect to take at each stop. Our last stop was the Blue Grouse Winery; it was a well-kept, scenic vineyard and our host, Hans, wanted to ensure we had the opportunity to fully appreciate his family's wines. He even brought out extra samples! Standing in sunshine, feeling a light breeze (and maybe a little light-headed), learning about the how the grapes surrounding you ended up in the aromatic glass in your hand – it can't be rushed.

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