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Aussie Winemakers Discover Poland

Wine consumption in Poland has recently grown by more than 10 per cent a year while sales of vodka and fortified drinks have been dropping off. Poland has a relatively young population with 60 per cent of people at working age and a further 25 per cent pre-working age.

The fact that Polish people are swapping vodka for wine is one of the Central Europe's best kept secrets, according to the President of the Polish Australian Chamber of Commerce, Kevin Witkowski.

Mr Witkowski, with the assistance of the Australian Trade Commission (Austrade) and the South Australian Council for International Trade and Commerce, last week saw those changes first hand at Poland's largest food and beverage trade show, Polagra.

During the four day event, the normally vodka drinking Poles have instead been swilling some of South Australia's best wines served up by a delegation of South Australian wine producers.

"People have been flocking to the stand and we have been flat out during the show answering questions about our wines," Mr Witkowski said.

"The response has been sensational."

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Hillsview Vineyards and Schild Estate Wines representative, Guenter Pratz, was at the show and said that while Australian wines would fall into the higher price bracket in Poland, the competitors there were similar to those Hillsview and Schild had already come across in Germany.

"There is no reason why we can't beat them in Poland or elsewhere in Central Europe," he said.

"The size of the niche may be relatively small at the moment but it is worth going for. The potential is enormous and the time to do it is now."

Australian company Expo-Trade is one company already cracking the Polish market.

Expo-Trade's Polish born director and export manager, Greg Dyer, believes the potential for South Australian wine sales in Central Europe is excellent.

"The Polish experience to date is mostly Bulgarian and Hungarian wines because of their price position, but there are

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Hungarian wines because of their price position, but there are plenty of connoisseurs out there who can afford to buy good quality wine," Mr Dyner said.

"One of the advantages of selling to Poland was that it offered a gateway to other Slavic markets, the Baltics and Slovenia.

"Poland is a bridge between countries to the north and south, east and west.

"It is the eight largest country in Europe by population and the ninth largest by land mass.

"While Poland has a permanent population of 39 million, it is effectively swells to twice that each year due to a huge number of transit visitors and tourists."

Ross Estate Wines was another South Australian company on show. The company's managing director, Darius Ross, said it had been interesting to discover the high level of interest in sweet and semi-sweet wines, particularly from Polish women.

"This mirrors a trend I have seen in the Australian market with women seeking out softer, sweeter wines," Mr Ross said.

The editor of Swiat Win, Poland's leading wine magazine, believes there is potential for Australia to gain a share of the Polish market. Zbigniew Pakula said the number of large companies importing wine into Poland at the moment is low.

"There are dozens of Polish wine importing companies but only a handful of big players," Mr Pakula said.

"At present Australia does not have a high profile but this could change with a wide distribution and good promotion."

Another Australian exhibitor at Polagra was Marian Janik, who has been researching the Polish market for two years.


Ms Janik represented a range of 16 wines from 4 wineries from NSW and Victoria, including the Olivia Newton John backed "Koala Blue" brand.

"The Polish visitors were intrigued with the marketing presentation of our wines, the bright Aussie images conveyed by the labels really caught the attention of the passing trade," she said.

"It is going to take some time to make significant inroads into this market but I am confident of success."

According to John Price, Austrade's Polish-based Senior Trade Commissioner, the growth in Australian wine consumption would be spurred along by the anticipated accession of Poland and the other Central European countries to the European Union in 2004.

"Already you see the adoption of a Western European/Mediterranean culture and lifestyle, particularly among young people," Mr Price said.



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"Once in the EU, the bureaucracy surrounding the import of wine will melt away and tariffs will fall dramatically. Other drivers for growth are the growing middle class and the huge western European investment in hypermarkets which are transforming shopping habits and now account for a high percentage of wine sales."

With Polagra now wrapping up Kevin Witkowski is already looking forward to next year.

"There is an interest in all things Australian and I see terrific potential in Poland not just for wine but other niche food products as well," Mr Witkowski said.