



# Canberra vineyard starts exporting wines to Southeast Asia during 2020 travel bans

The pandemic hit Shaw Wines' Asia expansion plans just as they were taking off. The premium, family-owned vineyard wanted to build exports across Asia when COVID-19 halted travel and China imposed new trade measures. Undeterred, the owner, Graeme Shaw worked with Austrade remotely to:

- Find a reputable distributor in Singapore
- Research markets across Asia
- Finalise multi-country contracts.

The Shaw Wines range of rieslings, merlots and malbecs will soon start to appear in high-end hotels and wine shops in Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia and Vietnam.

'I could have tried to do this on my own – but it would have been difficult,' says Graeme. 'It's hard to establish credibility without meeting export partners in person. In a challenging situation Austrade in Singapore helped enormously.'

## Partnering with Austrade to devise an export strategy

In 2019, Graeme began working with TradeStart and Austrade to devise an export strategy for Southeast Asia. Canberra-based Shaw Wines was already exporting to China and had experimented with several sales models – including mini-program sales via WeChat. Graeme wanted insights on what would work best in Southeast Asia.

'The trade advisers understood that I wanted to go gradually,' says Graeme. 'We decided on Singapore as our first market: the city has a mature wine market and it's a gateway for expansion into Southeast Asia.'

Graeme and the advisers reckoned that finding an established wine distributor was the best first step. In March 2020, Graeme was about to set out for Singapore when the pandemic closed international air travel.

## Working remotely with Singapore-based trade advisers

Rather than delay plans, Graeme began working closely with the Singapore-based Austrade adviser, Ryan Solomon. With contacts in the industry, Ryan began to identify potential partners.

'Ryan knew the right people to talk to and he came up with a good shortlist of distributors,' says Graeme. 'He held discussions with a number of distributors on my behalf, assessed capability and then shared his thoughts.'

'The trade advisers also researched credentials. This was very important to us. We had to ensure that Shaw Wines was in good hands. Our wines have won over 1000 medals and trophies at international festivals, so brand reputation is critical.'

## How to find the best distributor

Working together, the advisors at TradeStart and Austrade arranged a series of WebEx calls with four potential distributors. This enabled Graeme to understand how the potential distributors proposed to market his wine and manage his brand.

'This was a critical decision for us because we were trusting our brand to a new partner,' says Graeme. 'All four distributors were excellent, and that was a testament to the groundwork Austrade did in Singapore.'

Graeme says he found it valuable to have Ryan in the meetings, because he knew the Singapore market so well.

'Ryan had questions that I probably wouldn't have thought of,' says Graeme. 'This meant we were constantly identifying risks and then making sure they were managed.'

## Using high-end tourism to increase brand recognition

Shaw Wines selected an established distributor – Cornerstone Wines. The company is part of Hock Tong Bee (Private) Limited, one of the oldest and largest independent wine and spirit companies in Singapore and an increasingly significant regional player.

With the relevant commercial expertise, Austrade helped Shaw Wines to finalise contracts in February 2021. The partnership would see Shaw Wines progressively marketed in Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos.

'In early 2021, we got our first export approved – without me stepping foot in Singapore,' says Graeme. 'Current volumes are small but our objective is to steadily grow.'

Tourism will play a major role in brand development. Part of Shaw Wines' existing strategy involves flying visitors to the vineyard from Sydney for stunning gourmet experiences. Graeme will expand that vision to visitors from Asia when international tourism resumes.

'We are building brand recognition by opening the vineyard and cellar door to high-end tourism,' he says. 'Singapore is a target for this strategy. In time, international tourism will help us to market our brand in Asia.'

## Why work with Austrade?

Graeme recommends working with Austrade and TradeStart to any similar business or SME that wants to expand into Asia and needs on-the-ground expertise. He says this is especially valuable if new exporters can't meet potential clients and distributors in person.

'We did very well among the three of us,' he says. 'Working with Austrade gave us credibility in the Singapore wine market, which is already crowded with hundreds of wines and plenty of distributors.'

'We were feeling our way. Austrade helped us find a great distributor in challenging times. It wasn't just us selecting a distributor; we also needed them to select us.'

Graeme reports that throughout the export journey, Austrade has provided multiple levels of assistance.

'Given their market knowledge, Austrade provide us with good insights and advice on contracts; they help us get our labelling right and are always very thorough,' says Graeme.

'It's risky to start exporting to a new country without visiting it and without local expertise,' he adds. 'With the help of Austrade and TradeStart, we only took calculated risks. This is due to the quality of the people we work with in Singapore and Canberra.'

## About Austrade

Austrade is Australia's leading trade and investment agency. We have the power to open doors, unlock opportunities overseas and help Australian businesses go further, faster.

We also introduce foreign investors to Australian partners, strengthening global supply chains, creating local jobs and boosting the economy.

Promoting Australia's growth and prosperity is why we're here.

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