

Event Tourism in Armenia:
A Case Study of Yerevan Wine Days and Gastronomic Shows

by

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Abstract

This capstone explores the role of cultural festivals in promoting event tourism in Armenia, with a focus on Yerevan Wine Days and the Yerevan Gastronomic Shows. Using a mixed-method approach, the research integrates survey responses, focus group discussions, organizer interviews, company performance data, and international case comparisons. The study evaluates how these festivals influence visitor satisfaction, local economic development, and Armenia's global cultural image. Drawing from frameworks like the VICE model and international best practices such as Madrid Fusion and Oktoberfest, the paper outlines the key strengths and challenges of Armenian festival planning. The findings highlight the importance of improved crowd management, more diverse programming, and targeted marketing strategies. Recommendations are provided to help Armenia develop sustainable, globally competitive event tourism offerings aligned with national tourism goals.

Keywords: Event tourism, cultural festivals, Armenia, Yerevan Wine Days, VICE model, festival management, visitor satisfaction, tourism development

Event Tourism in Armenia: A Case Study of Yerevan Wine Days and Gastronomic Shows

In recent years, event tourism has become one of the fastest-growing sectors in global tourism, offering not just entertainment, but also strategic opportunities for economic development, cultural preservation, and community engagement. Major festivals such as Germany's Oktoberfest or Spain's Madrid Fusion are no longer just events - they are integral to their cities' branding, attracting hundreds of thousands of visitors and contributing millions to their local economies. These global examples illustrate how cultural festivals can become powerful tools for shaping a destination's identity, strengthening its economy, and building international visibility. As tourism evolves from traditional sightseeing to more immersive, experience-based travel, festivals play an increasingly central role in defining how places are perceived and remembered by visitors. Simeon and Buonincontri explain, "the core service is given by the mix of experience the customer wants to live at the destination and is the main reason for the trip" (Simeon & Buonincontri, 2011).

In the Armenian context, the potential for event tourism is especially promising. Armenia is rich in culture, heritage, and culinary traditions - all essential elements for building attractive and meaningful festivals. In recent years, events like Yerevan Wine Days, the Golden Apricot Yerevan International Film Festival, and the Yerevan Gastronomic Shows have attracted both local and international audiences. These festivals showcase Armenian wine, food, music, and hospitality while also bringing energy to city streets, supporting small businesses, and creating shared cultural moments. When culture, landscape, and events come together, they help shape a strong sense of place - one that can be turned into a clear and appealing identity for tourism promotion (Simeon & Buonincontri, 2011). However, the full potential of Armenia's event tourism industry remains

largely untapped. While enthusiasm is high, the sector continues to face serious limitations - from underdeveloped infrastructure and inconsistent crowd management to weak international marketing and a lack of long-term strategy. “Event tourism is highlighted as a key focus for attracting both domestic and international travelers” (Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Armenia, 2019).

One of the key festivals at the center of this research is Yerevan Wine Days, a major cultural and tourism event held annually on the first weekend of June. In 2024, the festival took place on June 7, 8, and 9, occupying the vibrant streets of Tumanyan, Moskovyan, and Saryan in downtown Yerevan. The event is carefully divided into four main zones: a wine tasting zone, a food zone featuring culinary experiences, a charity zone, and a music zone offering live performances. Entrance to the festival is free, but visitors who wish to participate in wine tastings must purchase the “Wine Enjoyment Package,” which includes a branded wine glass, 12 tasting tickets, an informational booklet, and discount opportunities, all for 12,000 AMD. At the same time, the Yerevan Gastronomic Shows are held, with Moskovyan Street dedicated to food presentations and culinary exhibitions. The goal of the Yerevan Wine Days festival is to present the centuries-old tradition of Armenian winemaking to the world, while also combining education, entertainment, and community building to promote event tourism in the region. This vibrant atmosphere offers an unforgettable experience that celebrates Armenian culture, heritage, and hospitality.

I had the unique opportunity to explore these issues from the inside. Over the past two years, I worked closely with EventToura, one of Armenia’s leading event management companies, which is responsible for organizing many of the country’s largest public events. I was directly involved in the preparation and execution of Yerevan Wine Days, Yerevan Gastronomic Shows,

Beer Days Festival, and Areni Wine Days. My role covered everything from communicating with vendors and curating wine lists to designing post-event surveys and managing logistics. I also collaborated with the social media team to promote participants and boost online visibility. These experiences gave me a deep, hands-on understanding of both the creative and logistical dimensions of festival planning - as well as the recurring obstacles that arise during implementation. I began to notice certain patterns: the same complaints from visitors, the same logistical bottlenecks, and the same marketing gaps that limited audience reach. It became clear to me that although Armenia's festivals are built on passion and tradition, they need a stronger foundation in strategy, innovation, and sustainability to grow further.

Globally, festivals are no longer just weekend attractions; they are long-term economic and cultural assets. Research has shown that events like the Ravello Festival in Italy (Simeon & Buonincontri, 2011), the Pasifika Festival in New Zealand (Dwyer & Wickens, 2011), and the Quinto Tapa Festival in Spain (Leal Londoño et al., 2022) are all examples of how local traditions can be transformed into successful, globally recognized tourism products - when backed by clear vision, strong stakeholder collaboration, and good management. These examples are particularly relevant for Armenia, where the local tourism strategy (Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Armenia, 2019) explicitly aims to increase cultural tourism, yet struggles to integrate international best practices and attract diverse audiences.

What makes festivals especially powerful in Armenia is not only their tourism value, but their potential for decentralized development. Most cultural events remain concentrated in Yerevan, which limits both their impact and inclusiveness. Regions like Vayots Dzor or Syunik, which have beautiful landscapes and rich local traditions, could greatly benefit from expanded event tourism. Festivals in rural areas can generate income for local producers, promote regional

identity, and invite new types of visitors to underexplored parts of the country (Harutyunyan, 2004). But for this to happen, Armenia needs a scalable, research-driven approach to festival planning - one that ensures events are not only popular, but also well-managed, inclusive, and culturally meaningful. “Balanced regional development is needed to distribute tourism benefits beyond Yerevan” (Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Armenia, 2019).

Although this project focuses specifically on festivals taking place in Yerevan, the research findings and recommendations presented in this paper can also serve as a valuable resource for organizing successful festivals in Armenia’s regions. The same principles of effective event management, visitor engagement, cultural authenticity, and sustainable planning can be adapted and applied to festivals in rural areas, helping to expand tourism beyond the capital and distribute economic benefits more evenly across the country. What makes festivals especially powerful in Armenia is not only their tourism value, but their potential for decentralized development. Most cultural events remain concentrated in Yerevan, which limits both their impact and inclusiveness.

One major gap in the current development of Armenian festivals is the lack of localized research. While there is considerable international literature on event tourism, including frameworks such as the VICE model (Dwyer & Wickens, 2011), very little work has been done to apply these insights in the Armenian context. Most existing studies focus on large-scale events in Western Europe or Asia, and few take into account Armenia’s specific challenges - such as limited marketing budgets, outdated planning systems, or restricted access to international networks. There is also limited data on what Armenian visitors actually experience at these festivals, what they value, and what makes them want to return.

This capstone project was created to help fill that gap. Through a combination of surveys, interviews, focus groups, and company performance reports, this research examines the realities

of event tourism in Armenia, using Yerevan Wine Days and the Yerevan Gastronomic Shows as case studies. These events were selected not only for their popularity but for their symbolic value: they represent Armenia's growing self-image as a modern, creative, and welcoming tourism destination. The research also incorporates a comparative international analysis, looking at global best practices from events like Madrid Fusion and Oktoberfest, and asking what lessons Armenia can realistically adapt. To evaluate the findings, the study uses the VICE model, which provides a balanced lens to assess how festivals serve the needs of Visitors, Industry, Community, and the Environment (Dwyer & Wickens, 2011).

In doing so, this paper seeks to answer the following core question: What are the strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities of event tourism in Armenia, and how can festivals be improved to achieve greater economic and cultural impact? Along the way, it also explores several sub-questions, such as: How do Armenian festivals compare with international standards? What can visitors' feedback teach us about planning better events? What are the barriers to scaling these festivals to reach larger or more international audiences?

Ultimately, this research does not aim to criticize Armenia's event sector, but rather to contribute constructively to its growth. Through practical recommendations and data-driven insights, this project aims to support organizers, policymakers, and tourism professionals who believe in the transformative power of festivals - and want to see Armenia shine on the global stage not only as a historical destination, but as a vibrant, evolving hub of cultural celebration.

Literature Review

Cultural events play a major role in promoting a destination's identity. They serve as powerful tools for territorial and cultural marketing by showcasing the unique traditions, landscape, and social atmosphere of a place (Simeon & Buonincontri, 2011). In their study of the

Ravello Festival in Italy, the authors highlight the importance of collaboration with local stakeholders and leveraging cultural heritage as part of the tourist experience. Similarly, Armenia's major festivals, such as the Golden Apricot Yerevan International Film Festival or Yerevan Wine Days, function as cultural ambassadors, offering visitors a rich immersion into Armenian traditions, hospitality, and cuisine. By adopting international strategies, such as those used in Ravello, Armenia could elevate its festivals into globally recognized cultural brands, enhancing both its visibility and appeal in the international tourism market.

One of the recurring challenges in festival planning is finding the right balance between tradition and innovation. As Larson (2011) explains, festivals often fall into repetitive patterns, which can decrease audience excitement over time. Her research on Swedish festivals shows that long-standing events risk stagnation unless organizers actively refresh the program with new themes or creative experiences. This issue resonates with Armenia's own Yerevan Wine Days, where the 2024 edition extended over two rounds - one coinciding with Yerevan's 2,806th birthday. While this increased its popularity, some visitors reported that the extended format felt repetitive. Drawing from Larson's findings, Armenian organizers could benefit from adding variety through interactive artistic performances, rotating cultural themes, or immersive visitor workshops to keep the festival engaging and dynamic.

Food festivals are another highly effective form of event tourism. As shown in Leal Londoño et al.'s (2022) study of the Quinto Tapa Festival in Spain, gastronomy plays a key role in shaping a destination's image. The festival used food as a "soft cognitive" attraction - one that builds emotional and cultural connection. In Armenia, the Yerevan Gastronomic Days 2024 followed a similar model, promoting local cuisine through curated menus, food tastings, and storytelling. The event successfully blended culinary tradition with modern presentation and used

social media to broaden its reach. These strategies align closely with global best practices and demonstrate how Armenian food festivals can become anchor experiences in the country's tourism strategy.

However, successful festivals depend not only on content, but also on structure. Efficient management is essential to ensure safety, satisfaction, and repeat visitation. Soteriades and Dimou (2011) propose a strategic framework for special event planning that emphasizes stakeholder collaboration, performance metrics, and long-term impact assessment. Their model is highly applicable in the Armenian context, where issues such as crowd control, venue capacity, and resource allocation frequently challenge organizers. For instance, large-scale celebrations like the Erebuni-Yerevan Festival often struggle with overcrowding. By applying best practices from the international literature - such as zoning, timed entries, and clearer signage - Armenian festivals can significantly improve logistics and the overall visitor experience.

In the broader tourism field, the concept of the “festival city” has gained traction as a model for urban development. According to Richards and Leal Londoño (2022), festivals can reshape a city’s image and serve as a continuous driver of tourism - but only if they are well-curated, inclusive, and sustainable. While Yerevan already hosts a number of annual events, it has yet to fully embrace this model. Becoming a true “festival city” would require strategic calendar planning, investment in infrastructure, and consistent branding that links the city’s identity to cultural creativity. These goals are achievable, but require long-term vision and cooperation between public and private sectors.

At the policy level, the Tourism Strategy 2020-2030 of Armenia identifies cultural tourism as a key growth area. The strategy emphasizes infrastructure improvement, promotion of heritage events, and increasing international exposure (Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Armenia,

2019). However, challenges such as limited marketing budgets, lack of coordination between tourism and event agencies, and uneven regional development remain barriers. By aligning festival planning with national tourism policy, Armenia can more effectively channel public investment into impactful events, while ensuring alignment with broader goals such as rural development, seasonality extension, and sustainable tourism practices.

Geography also plays a critical role in shaping tourism patterns. Harutyunyan Shushan (2004) highlights the diverse cultural and environmental features of Armenia's different regions, underscoring their potential for localized festivals. Regions such as Syunik and Vayots Dzor, which are rich in both natural beauty and local tradition, could benefit from tailored event planning. Localized festivals can decentralize tourism, distribute economic benefits more evenly, and preserve rural cultural identities. However, these efforts require thoughtful investment in transportation, accommodation, and promotional channels. All of which are addressed in Armenia's tourism geography but not yet fully implemented in festival policy.

Community engagement is another central theme in sustainable event tourism. The VICE model (Dwyer & Wickens, 2011), which stands for Visitors, Industry, Community, and Environment, offers a holistic framework for evaluating festival success. It encourages planners to consider how events affect not just tourists, but also local economies, residents, and ecosystems. The model has been used to guide festival development in countries like New Zealand, where community-led events such as the Pasifika Festival have become iconic. In Armenia, events like the Golden Apricot Festival or the Erebuni-Yerevan Festival are well-positioned to adopt the VICE model by involving local artists, addressing neighborhood concerns, and promoting environmental responsibility. Yet the model has not yet been systematically applied in Armenia - a gap this research aims to address.

The operational complexity of festivals also demands practical planning tools. Van der Wagen and Carlos (2020) provide an applied overview of event management, covering everything from risk assessment and budgeting to volunteer coordination and marketing. Their work highlights how effective event planning requires specialized training - something still lacking in the Armenian context. Most Armenian festivals rely on volunteer or semi-professional teams, which can result in miscommunication, inconsistent standards, or weak vendor coordination. This study draws from Van der Wagen and Carlos's event management checklist to propose a more structured approach for organizing festivals in Armenia.

Meanwhile, the economic potential of festivals should not be underestimated. The case of Oktoberfest, explored in a non-scholarly source from Turizm.ru (2019), shows how a single event can drive city-wide revenue, boost hotel bookings, and create thousands of temporary jobs. While Armenia's events operate at a much smaller scale, the Yerevan Wine Days already shows signs of similar economic impact, especially for small wineries, restaurants, and tourism service providers. Strategic planning, expanded partnerships, and stronger performance tracking can amplify these outcomes and turn Armenian festivals into powerful engines of economic growth.

In summary, the literature on event tourism provides a robust foundation for this research. While existing studies offer rich insights on international case studies, innovation strategies, and planning frameworks, they rarely focus on the Armenian context. This gap limits our understanding of what works - and what does not - in Armenian festivals. My capstone project addresses this gap by collecting primary data from festival participants, organizers, and attendees, and combining it with global best practices to design actionable, culturally informed strategies for event development in Armenia.

Research Questions

This capstone project focuses on understanding the current state and future potential of event tourism development in Armenia. The main aim of this research is to identify the major challenges that festivals face today and to explore possible strategies for improvement. The primary research question guiding this project is: **What are the main challenges facing the development of the event tourism market in Armenia, and how can these challenges be effectively addressed?** This question allows for a deep investigation into key limitations, such as infrastructure gaps, insufficient marketing strategies, and the absence of standardized event management practices in Armenia's festival scene.

In addition to the main research question, the project addresses several secondary questions that help to frame the study more precisely. One important question asks: In what ways can Armenian festivals use digital marketing and social media more effectively to reach international audiences and grow their visitor base? Given the increasing importance of online visibility in global tourism, this question explores how festivals like Yerevan Wine Days and Yerevan Gastronomic Shows can strengthen their international profiles, attract more diverse visitors, and position Armenia as a vibrant cultural destination.

Another secondary question considers: How can visitor feedback, industry data, and organizer insights be used to strengthen the planning and execution of Armenian festivals? Gathering data from real attendees and organizers ensures that the recommendations made in this capstone are not based on theory alone but are deeply grounded in the lived experiences of those who participate in and manage Armenian festivals. This question highlights the importance of using localized knowledge alongside international models.

Finally, the research explores: In what ways can localized case studies - such as Yerevan Wine Days and Yerevan Gastronomic Shows - contribute to creating strategic, practical

recommendations for event tourism development in Armenia? By analyzing two of Armenia's most successful and high-profile events, the project builds a strong foundation for proposing improvements that are directly relevant to the Armenian tourism sector, rather than relying solely on foreign examples.

Altogether, these questions aim to build a bridge between Armenia's current achievements and its future possibilities in the field of event tourism. They reflect a desire to celebrate the progress made so far while honestly addressing the remaining gaps and opportunities for growth. Through this research, the goal is to offer practical, thoughtful, and realistic recommendations that will help Armenian festivals become stronger, more attractive, and more sustainable in the years to come.

Methodology

This research project used a mixed-methods approach to investigate the development of event tourism in Armenia. Combining both qualitative and quantitative methods made it possible to gather a wide range of insights, covering both statistical patterns and personal experiences. Since festivals involve not only logistical organization but also emotional and cultural engagement, it was essential to capture different types of data to build a complete and balanced analysis.

One major method used in this project was a case study approach, focusing specifically on two major Armenian events: Yerevan Wine Days and the Yerevan Gastronomic Shows. These festivals were selected because of their high visibility, cultural significance, and growing influence within Armenia's tourism sector. Having worked closely with these festivals through my professional experience at EventToura, I was able to access internal documents, participant surveys, visitor feedback reports, and firsthand observations. My direct involvement gave me

deeper insights into the logistical challenges, planning strategies, and marketing efforts behind these events, allowing for a detailed and realistic evaluation of their strengths and weaknesses.

Alongside case studies, survey research was conducted to gather direct feedback from festival attendees. The survey targeted visitors who attended either Yerevan Wine Days or the Yerevan Gastronomic Shows in 2024. The questionnaire was carefully designed to explore key topics such as visitor satisfaction, event organization quality, cultural engagement, food and beverage experience, and future attendance interest. Surveys were distributed both online and in person to ensure a diverse range of responses. In total, 70 responses were collected, providing a rich dataset for quantitative analysis. Most participants were aged between 20 and 55 and included both local Armenians and a small group of international tourists, offering a balanced perspective on the events' appeal.

To gain deeper qualitative insights, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key festival organizers. Interviews focused on understanding the behind-the-scenes realities of organizing large-scale events, such as budget constraints, sponsor relationships, marketing challenges, and community engagement efforts. Interviews with Yerevan Wine Days and Yerevan Gastronomic Shows project managers provided valuable professional perspectives. To incorporate an international viewpoint, an additional interview was conducted with an attendee of the Madrid Fusion Festival in Spain. This offered comparative insights into how international festivals handle similar challenges, such as visitor satisfaction, event programming, and marketing strategies.

A focus group was also organized to collect more detailed opinions from visitors. Five participants, aged between 35 and 55, who had attended one of the selected festivals, were invited to join an informal discussion. Open-ended questions were used to guide the conversation, encouraging participants to share their reasons for attending, their evaluation of the events, and

their suggestions for improvement. This format allowed for deeper exploration of visitor attitudes and revealed recurring themes related to atmosphere, crowd management, pricing, and food quality.

In addition to primary data collection, secondary data from company reports and visitor analyses was used. Official documents from Yerevan Wine Days 2023 and Yerevan Gastronomic Shows 2024 were reviewed to analyze key performance indicators such as attendance numbers, visitor satisfaction scores, demographic profiles, and online engagement statistics. This secondary data helped contextualize the primary findings and allowed for cross-checking of survey and interview results against officially reported outcomes.

For data analysis, survey results were statistically analyzed to identify common trends in visitor satisfaction, engagement, and suggestions. Quantitative results were supported by thematic analysis of the interviews and focus group discussions, identifying major recurring themes such as marketing challenges, logistical improvements, and cultural representation. Company reports were used to validate attendance trends, satisfaction rates, and marketing performance.

Ethical considerations were carefully respected throughout the research process. Participation in all surveys, interviews, and focus groups was voluntary. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and anonymity was guaranteed. No personal identifiers were collected, and all data was used solely for the academic purpose of this capstone project, in line with ethical research standards.

By combining case study analysis, survey research, interviews, and secondary data, this methodology provides a comprehensive and multi-layered understanding of event tourism development in Armenia. The use of multiple sources ensures that the final analysis is well-rounded, realistic, and based on both statistical evidence and personal experiences. This approach

allowed the project not only to identify existing challenges but also to propose actionable, practical recommendations for the future growth of Armenian festivals.

Research Findings and Analysis

This chapter presents the main findings of the research conducted on event tourism in Armenia, using Yerevan Wine Days and Yerevan Gastronomic Shows as case studies. The analysis is based on multiple sources of data, including surveys, focus group discussions, interviews with organizers and international visitors, company reports, and comparisons with international best practices. Each section highlights a different aspect of the research, combining quantitative and qualitative insights to build a comprehensive understanding of the current situation, identify areas for improvement, and propose actionable recommendations. The structure of this chapter follows the stages of data collection and analysis, beginning with survey results, followed by focus group feedback, interviews, organizational data review, and a comparative analysis of international models.

Survey Findings

To gather insights into the experiences, expectations, and suggestions of attendees, I designed a structured online survey targeting individuals who participated in the Yerevan Wine Days and Yerevan Gastronomic Shows in June 2024. The survey included both multiple-choice and open-ended questions to capture a wide range of perspectives. It was distributed through social media platforms and personal networks, reaching attendees who had firsthand experience with the events. A total of 75 participants completed the survey. The majority were within the 18-25 age group and primarily from Yerevan. In addition to demographic and motivation-based questions, the survey assessed satisfaction with various aspects of the festivals such as food, entertainment, organization, and cultural programming. Open-ended responses provided valuable qualitative data

for identifying common themes and improvement areas. I am analyzing the data through both descriptive statistics and thematic coding. These findings are also being compared with internal visitor analysis reports and performance indicators provided by the organizing company to ensure accuracy and deepen the interpretation. Together, this approach provides a comprehensive understanding of audience experience and expectations.

To better understand the experiences and expectations of attendees at the Yerevan Wine Days and Gastronomic Shows, a survey was conducted targeting individuals who had participated in these events. The first set of survey questions focused on the demographic background of the respondents and their initial motivations for attending. The majority of participants fell within the 18-25 age group, indicating that these festivals currently appeal most strongly to a younger audience. While this is a positive sign for engaging youth in cultural and tourism activities, it also revealed a gap in participation from older age groups. As a result, additional efforts were later made to gather perspectives from people aged 35-55 to gain a more balanced view.

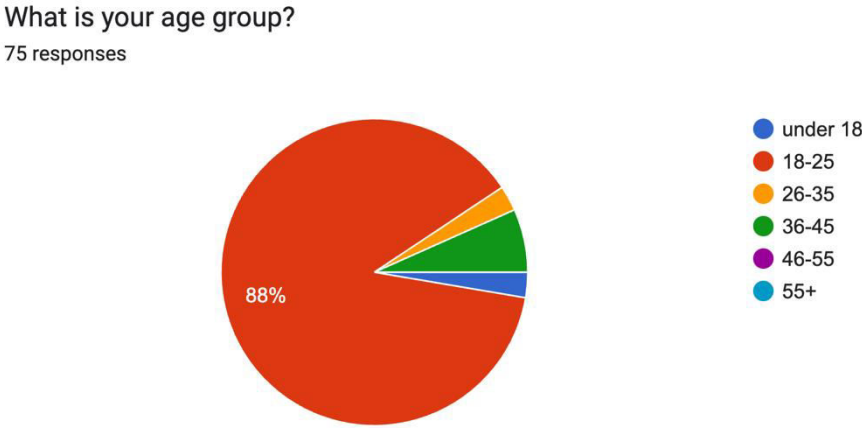


Figure 1 - Visitor Age Group Breakdown (Survey Results)

Geographically, the majority of respondents were from Yerevan, accounting for 68 out of the total participants. This is not surprising, given that the festivals are held in the capital and naturally draw a large local crowd. In addition to the capital-based attendees, 4 participants came from other cities across Armenia, indicating some level of domestic tourism from outside Yerevan. Importantly, the survey also captured the perspectives of 3 international visitors, which, although a smaller portion of the sample, highlights the festivals' growing appeal beyond Armenia's borders. These numbers emphasize both the success in engaging local audiences and the opportunity to expand outreach efforts. To truly position these festivals as significant cultural and culinary destinations, it will be essential to continue developing marketing strategies that not only sustain local interest but also attract more visitors from different regions of Armenia and from abroad.

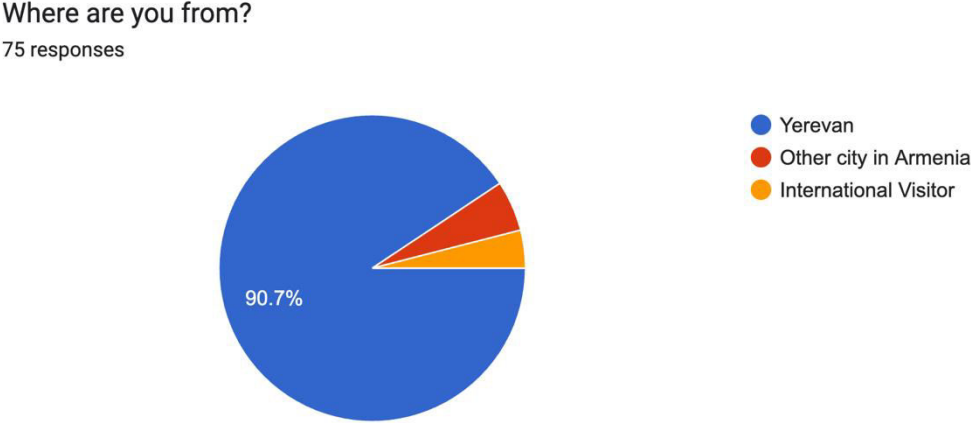


Figure 2 - Geographic Distribution of Visitors (Local vs. International, Survey Results)

When asked whether they had attended the Yerevan Wine Days or the Gastronomic Shows held in June 2024, all survey respondents confirmed their attendance. This ensures that the feedback collected is grounded in actual experience and provides relevant insight into the event atmosphere and organization. Respondents were then asked about their main reasons for attending

the festivals. The most common responses included enjoying Armenian food and wine, socializing with friends and family, and supporting local producers. This indicates that the festivals are serving multiple purposes - both as entertainment and as a platform for community engagement and economic support.

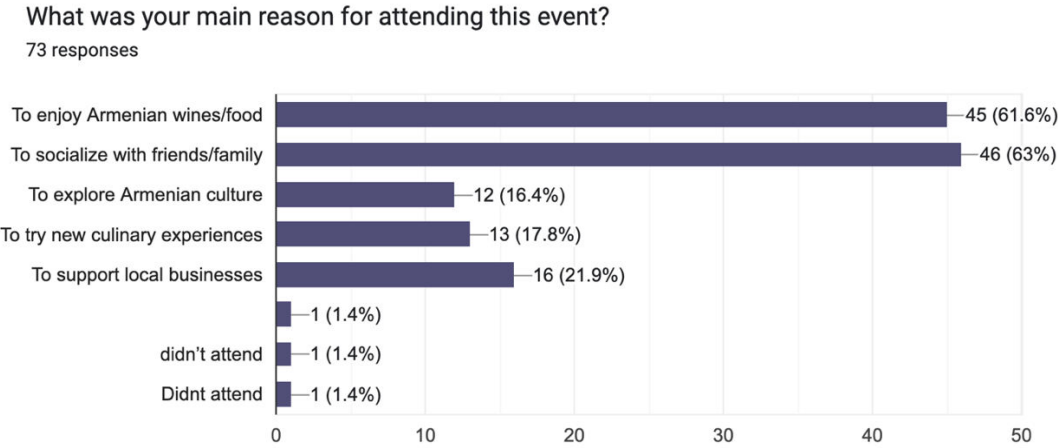


Figure 3 - Visitor Motivation for Attending Yerevan Wine Days (Survey Results)

Interestingly, while some participants mentioned cultural interest as a motivation, it was not among the top responses. This suggests that while the festivals may include cultural elements, they are currently perceived more as social or gastronomic events than as deeply cultural experiences. Therefore, festival organizers might consider integrating more explicit cultural programming - such as traditional performances, historical exhibits, or artisanal demonstrations - to enrich the cultural appeal and create a stronger identity for these events.

Participants also shared how they learned about the festivals. Social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok were by far the most common sources of information, followed by word of mouth and, to a lesser extent, traditional advertising like posters or flyers. This trend reflects the growing importance of digital outreach in promoting public events,

particularly among younger generations. It also reinforces the need for a well-managed social media presence, complete with engaging visuals, influencer partnerships, and timely updates. However, for future editions, it may be worthwhile to explore how to more effectively reach older audiences who may not be as active on these platforms.

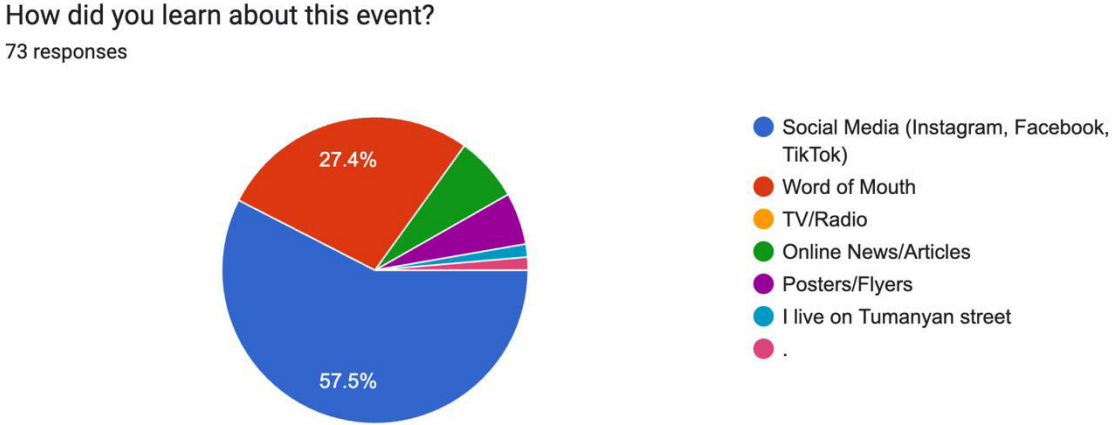


Figure 4 - Sources of Event Awareness (Survey Results)

Following the questions about motivation and background, the survey explored how participants rated their overall experience at the festivals. The majority of respondents rated their experience positively, with an average score of around 3.9 out of 5. While many gave the highest rating, there were also a few who rated the event a 2 or 3, suggesting that while the majority were satisfied, there is room for improvement in certain areas. These moderate ratings may reflect issues related to crowding, activity variety, or logistical challenges, which are further explored in later feedback.

When asked whether the festival met their expectations, 58 out of 70 respondents said “Yes,” which shows a strong overall sense of satisfaction. However, some attendees answered “No,” and their written comments often mentioned concerns about overcrowding or the need for

more structured activities. This mix of responses indicates that while the events are generally successful, they may benefit from more consistent planning and crowd control measures to ensure all guests have a positive experience.

A particularly encouraging result came from the question about future attendance: 65 out of 72 participants said they would attend the event again. This demonstrates strong loyalty and interest from the audience and reflects positively on the overall appeal of the festivals. Maintaining this return rate is crucial for the sustainability of these events, especially since word-of-mouth and repeat attendance help build a reliable fan base.

Participants were also asked to rate their satisfaction with the organization of the event. The average rating was approximately 3.8 out of 5, showing that while many guests appreciated the efforts made by organizers, some aspects - possibly related to logistics or information sharing - could still be improved. Similarly, when asked if the location and venue were convenient, most participants responded “Yes,” but a few noted issues related to accessibility or crowd density. These answers suggest that expanding the physical area of the festivals or improving signage and directions could make a noticeable difference.

The survey also asked attendees to rate the quality of the activities offered. This question received very positive feedback, with an average rating of 4.0 out of 5. This implies that the entertainment and interactive elements of the festivals were well-received, and most guests found them enjoyable and engaging. However, maintaining variety and innovation will be important to keep returning attendees excited and interested year after year.

Regarding cultural content, 55 out of 71 respondents felt the festival offered opportunities to learn about Armenian culture or traditions. This is an encouraging sign, as cultural representation is one of the core goals of these events. At the same time, it suggests that a

significant portion of attendees either did not notice or did not feel connected to the cultural elements. More visible or immersive cultural programming - such as performances, workshops, or storytelling - could help address this gap.

Finally, the entertainment provided at the events received an average engagement score of around 3.9 out of 5. This shows that attendees generally enjoyed the music, performances, and activities, although the range in responses suggests that not all entertainment was equally compelling. This feedback could help organizers fine-tune the lineup to better suit diverse tastes or perhaps introduce more interactive or live components to boost overall enjoyment.

The final section of the survey addressed practical aspects of the festival experience - such as pricing, advertising, food quality, and opportunities for improvement. When asked whether the ticket prices were fair and reasonable, the overwhelming majority of respondents answered “Yes.” This shows that attendees generally found the event accessible in terms of cost, which is important for maintaining inclusivity and attracting a wide range of visitors. Fair pricing also encourages repeat attendance and supports positive word-of-mouth promotion, which can be especially valuable for events with limited advertising budgets.

Advertising and promotional efforts also received positive feedback. Most participants agreed that the event’s advertising was clear and informative. This is a promising sign that the event’s communication strategy - especially across digital platforms like Instagram and Facebook - is effectively reaching its target audience. Clear and timely promotion helps manage expectations, reduce confusion, and generate anticipation. However, while the majority responded positively, there is still room to enhance outreach efforts for specific audience groups, such as older participants or international tourists who may rely more on traditional media or tourism networks.

Food and beverage options are among the most anticipated elements of any culinary or wine festival, and the survey responses reflected a high level of satisfaction in this area. On average, attendees rated their satisfaction with food and drinks at over 4.1 out of 5, indicating that the festival met or exceeded expectations for most guests. This strong rating reinforces the importance of continuing to highlight Armenia's culinary offerings, which play a central role in both domestic and international tourism appeal. However, even in this area, a few respondents suggested the addition of vegetarian options, more diverse food choices, and better signage at food stalls.

The final question on the survey invited open-ended feedback and suggestions. Fourteen participants shared their thoughts. Several of these highlighted a recurring theme: overcrowding. Multiple respondents recommended expanding the event area, improving crowd control, and adding more seating or quiet zones. Others suggested more visible entry points, better signage throughout the venue, and environmentally friendly practices such as waste separation. A few participants also expressed interest in increasing the overall level of engagement through more interactive or cultural elements, which aligns with previous findings that suggest room to enhance the cultural identity of the events.

These open comments provide a valuable look beyond the numbers. They highlight the importance of practical, on-the-ground improvements that can make a big difference in how attendees experience the festivals. As organizers look to future editions of Yerevan Wine Days and Gastronomic Shows, this kind of direct feedback can serve as a roadmap for thoughtful, user-centered changes.

Focus Group Findings

To deepen the understanding of visitor experiences and perceptions, a focus group was conducted with five participants who attended the Yerevan Wine Days and Gastronomic Shows. This smaller, more intimate format allowed for detailed conversations, revealing layers of insight beyond the survey responses. The participants were carefully selected to include individuals of different ages and backgrounds, some of whom were first-time visitors, while others had attended previous editions of the festivals. This diversity in experience made the discussion particularly valuable, as it provided a range of perspectives on the strengths and weaknesses of the events.

When discussing their primary motivations for attending, participants echoed the dominant themes of the survey, citing their interest in enjoying Armenian wine and food, and the desire to spend meaningful time with friends and family. However, the focus group format allowed participants to elaborate on their choices. Several described the festival as a “highlight of the summer,” a joyful tradition that they look forward to annually. Others emphasized that the event provided a unique platform to support local producers, discover lesser-known Armenian wineries, and celebrate national culinary heritage. These reflections underscored the emotional connection many visitors feel toward the festivals, elevating them from mere entertainment to meaningful cultural experiences.

As the conversation unfolded, the participants offered candid evaluations of whether the festivals met their expectations. While the overall sentiment remained positive, with attendees praising the festive atmosphere and the variety of offerings, they also raised critical points for improvement. Overcrowding emerged as a significant concern. Several participants shared that during peak hours, navigating the festival grounds became difficult and at times uncomfortable. This feedback aligned with comments from the survey, confirming that crowd management is an area requiring serious attention. The group suggested practical solutions, such as expanding the

festival's footprint, introducing timed entries, or better distributing popular stands to reduce congestion.

Moreover, the focus group discussion highlighted the need for clearer navigation within the event space. Participants expressed that while the festival's layout was lively, it sometimes felt chaotic, making it challenging to locate specific wineries or food vendors. Suggestions included the use of maps, better signage, and volunteer guides to assist visitors. These improvements could greatly enhance the overall visitor experience, making the festival more accessible, especially for first-time attendees.

Another important theme that emerged was the desire for richer cultural programming. While the participants appreciated the emphasis on Armenian gastronomy, they felt that the cultural narrative could be made more prominent. Ideas such as traditional dance performances, artisan workshops, or storytelling sessions about Armenian wine history were proposed. These additions would not only deepen the cultural immersion of the festival but also help distinguish it from other wine or food events internationally.

Emotions also played a significant role in the participants' reflections. They expressed enthusiasm about the sense of community the festivals fostered, describing the events as vibrant gatherings that bring people together. At the same time, some voiced frustration over logistical shortcomings, indicating a passionate interest in seeing the festivals improve and thrive. This emotional engagement highlights the festivals' potential to build loyal, returning audiences-provided that organizers continue to evolve and respond to visitor feedback.

In summary, the focus group findings complement and enrich the survey data by offering deeper, more personal insights into visitor experiences. Participants valued the festivals not just for their social and culinary attractions but also as meaningful cultural events that celebrate

Armenian heritage. However, the discussion also surfaced clear areas for enhancement, particularly in crowd management, navigation, and cultural programming. These reflections will be essential in informing future recommendations and draw a natural bridge to the next phase of this research, which delves into the perspectives of festival organizers and international comparisons.

Interview Analysis (Organizers of YWD & Madrid Fusion visitor)

To complement the quantitative data gathered from surveys and the qualitative insights from the focus group, two in-depth interviews were conducted to further understand the organizational perspectives and international benchmarks relevant to Armenian festival development. The first interview involved the organizers of Yerevan Wine Days and Gastronomic Shows, providing an insider view of the complexities of event management in Armenia. The second interview offered a valuable international perspective from a participant of the Madrid Fusion Festival in Spain, one of the world's most prestigious gastronomic events. Together, these interviews shed light on both the internal challenges faced by local festival planners and the global standards that could inspire future improvements.

The discussion with the Armenian festival organizers revealed a passionate yet highly pragmatic approach to event management. They described how, over the years, the festivals have grown from modest beginnings into major cultural events that attract thousands of visitors. Despite this success, they acknowledged that organizing such large-scale festivals in Armenia comes with significant hurdles. One of the foremost challenges they identified was securing reliable funding. Much of their financial backing comes from local sponsors, occasional state support, and partnerships with private companies. However, this funding is not always consistent year to year, making long-term planning difficult. They expressed a desire for more structured financial support,

perhaps through dedicated cultural tourism funds or stronger governmental involvement, to ensure the festivals' sustainability.

Logistics emerged as another major theme. The organizers spoke openly about the operational complexities of hosting festivals in urban spaces like central Yerevan. The challenge is not just about accommodating large crowds, but doing so while respecting public spaces, ensuring safety, and maintaining a positive visitor experience. Overcrowding, which was a frequent point of criticism in both the survey and focus group, was fully recognized by the organizers. They shared that while expanding physical space is a priority, they are also exploring strategies such as timed entry tickets, redesigning festival layouts, and even extending event durations to better distribute visitor flow throughout the day.

When it comes to marketing, the organizers are acutely aware of their strengths and gaps. Their primary tools are social media platforms, which they leverage successfully to attract younger, local audiences. However, they admitted that their reach beyond Armenia remains limited. They pointed out that due to budget constraints and the lack of established international partnerships, it has been difficult to promote the festivals widely abroad. This self-awareness is crucial, as it aligns directly with suggestions from the international interviewee and points to a clear area for future investment. The organizers expressed interest in collaborating with tourism boards, travel influencers, and international media outlets to elevate the global profile of their festivals.

The organizers also reflected on their role in cultural promotion. They see these festivals not merely as entertainment but as cultural showcases that can strengthen national identity and promote Armenian heritage. However, they acknowledged that more could be done to highlight traditional arts, crafts, and music, which currently play a secondary role to the culinary focus. Their

openness to evolving the festivals' format demonstrates a proactive attitude toward continuous improvement.

The second interview, with a visitor to the Madrid Fusion Festival, provided an enlightening contrast. Madrid Fusion is celebrated for its seamless organization, world-class culinary exhibitions, and immersive visitor experiences. The interviewee emphasized how the festival's professional structure-including clear signage, detailed event schedules, and advanced ticketing systems-contributed to a smooth, enjoyable experience even amidst large crowds. Importantly, the visitor described how the festival balanced consumer experiences with industry-focused programming, such as cooking demonstrations by celebrity chefs, expert panels, and educational workshops. This dual approach not only enriched visitor engagement but also elevated the festival's reputation within the international culinary community.

The interviewee observed that while the Armenian festivals are lively and full of potential, they currently lack some of the professional polish seen at Madrid Fusion. They suggested that Yerevan Wine Days and Gastronomic Shows could benefit from incorporating more educational elements, like wine-tasting masterclasses, sessions with Armenian vintners, or culinary history talks. Such additions would deepen the visitor experience and attract audiences interested in learning, not just consuming.

Another significant point raised was the power of international partnerships and media coverage. Madrid Fusion thrives on its global visibility, supported by collaborations with international culinary associations and consistent features in worldwide media. The interviewee recommended that Armenian festival organizers pursue similar alliances, which could open doors to new audiences and create opportunities for cross-cultural exchanges. Initiatives like hosting

foreign chefs, participating in global food tourism networks, or even partnering with UNESCO cultural programs were mentioned as potential strategies.

What becomes evident from these interviews is a shared recognition of Armenia's potential to position its festivals on an international stage. The organizers possess a deep passion and vision for their events, while external observers see clear opportunities for refinement and growth. Importantly, the challenges identified in the interviews-such as crowd management, diversification of programming, and marketing limitations-mirror those revealed in the survey and focus group findings. This consistency strengthens the validity of the research and provides a cohesive foundation for the recommendations that will follow in this capstone.

In conclusion, these interviews enrich the research by offering complementary perspectives that bridge local realities and international aspirations. They underscore that while Armenia's event tourism market is vibrant and full of promise, realizing its full potential will require strategic planning, professional development, and expanded global engagement. These insights will be critical in shaping the subsequent sections of this paper, particularly in the analysis of international best practices and the formulation of actionable recommendations.

Company Report & KPIs Analysis

To reinforce the findings of this research with quantitative and operational data, internal reports and key performance indicators (KPIs) from the organizing company of Yerevan Wine Days and Gastronomic Shows were reviewed. These reports, which cover both the 2023 and 2024 festival editions, provide valuable insights into visitor demographics, attendance trends, marketing reach, and economic impact. The KPIs used by the organizers currently focus on five key areas: growth, audience engagement, economic impact, marketing reach, and satisfaction. These indicators reflect a well-rounded but still developing approach to measuring success. As

the festivals continue to grow and evolve, so too should their metrics. Incorporating additional KPIs related to cultural depth, international expansion, and sustainability would offer a more holistic evaluation model and help guide the strategic decisions needed to maintain excellence in future editions.

One of the most encouraging observations from the company reports is the steady growth in visitor numbers. According to the data, Yerevan Wine Days experienced a noticeable increase in attendance from approximately 25,000 visitors in 2023 to over 35,000 in 2024. This surge in participation demonstrates the growing popularity of the event and aligns with the positive sentiments expressed in the survey and focus group. However, this rapid growth has also intensified challenges related to crowd management and venue capacity - issues that were consistently raised by both festival attendees and organizers during interviews.

The reports also highlight valuable information about visitor demographics. In 2024, the majority of attendees were from Armenia, with a significant portion from Yerevan itself, which mirrors the findings from the survey. However, what is particularly noteworthy is the gradual rise in international visitors, particularly from neighboring countries and the Armenian diaspora. While international attendance remains modest compared to domestic participation, the upward trend signals untapped potential for future growth. This reinforces the feedback from the interview with the Madrid Fusion visitor, who emphasized the importance of expanding international visibility and building global partnerships.

From a marketing perspective, the company's KPIs show that social media campaigns continue to be the primary driver of engagement. The 2024 data indicated a substantial increase in online reach, with festival-related posts generating over 500,000 views and 20,000 interactions across platforms such as Instagram and Facebook. These figures confirm the effectiveness of

digital marketing strategies, particularly in engaging younger audiences. However, the organizers themselves acknowledged in their interview that outreach to older demographics and international markets remains limited, which suggests a need for more diversified marketing approaches moving forward.

The economic impact of the festivals is also noteworthy. The reports estimate that in 2024, participating businesses - including wineries, restaurants, and artisan vendors - experienced an average sales increase of 30% during the festival period compared to regular weekends. This highlights the role of Yerevan Wine Days and Gastronomic Shows in stimulating local economic activity, supporting the broader goal of positioning Armenia as a vibrant destination for gastronomic tourism. Furthermore, the feedback collected from vendors through internal post-event surveys revealed high satisfaction with the festival organization, yet echoed visitor concerns about crowd density and the need for better spatial arrangements. Events must be managed as integrated systems, with clear coordination and communication, especially when multiple stakeholders, city services, and vendors are involved. As the events grow, this integrated approach becomes essential to avoid logistical bottlenecks (Van der Wagen & Carlos, 2020).

Another positive takeaway from the internal reports is the increasing engagement of local partners and sponsors. In 2024, the festivals attracted over 40 business partners and sponsors, ranging from beverage companies to cultural institutions. This growing network of collaborators not only provides crucial financial support but also enhances the festival experience by diversifying offerings and activities.

What is particularly noteworthy when examining these internal KPIs is the promising year-on-year growth trend. Between 2023 and 2024, the festivals experienced a remarkable

increase of approximately 40% in visitor attendance. If this growth trajectory continues, projections for 2025 could see attendance figures surpassing 45,000 visitors, especially if marketing efforts are expanded and international visibility improves. However, while these numbers are encouraging, they also bring inherent risks. Rapid growth, if not carefully managed, could strain the organizational capacity of the festivals and diminish the quality of the visitor experience. A successful event hinges on risk management, venue design, and real-time decision-making, all of which will become increasingly important as the scale and expectations of the festival grow (Van der Wagen & Carlos, 2020).

Without appropriate interventions, such as expanded venues, better crowd flow strategies, and infrastructure enhancements, there is a real danger of reaching a saturation point where attendee satisfaction begins to decline. Overcrowding, in particular, was a recurring concern across all data sources, and unchecked growth could exacerbate these issues. Furthermore, overreliance on domestic audiences might limit the festivals' expansion potential in the long run. Diversifying the visitor base to include more international attendees is therefore not only an opportunity but also a necessity to sustain momentum.

Additionally, as the festivals grow, expectations from both visitors and vendors will likely rise. Attendees may anticipate more diverse experiences, improved amenities, and higher levels of organization, while participating businesses might expect greater returns on their investments. If these rising expectations are not met, there is a risk of plateauing attendance or even a decline in future years. Proactive planning, informed by the current KPIs and continuous visitor feedback, will be essential to navigate these challenges successfully.

This forward-looking analysis reinforces the importance of strategic growth management and aligns closely with the themes explored in earlier sections of this capstone. It will also serve

as a foundation for the recommendations provided later in this paper, ensuring that future editions of the festivals not only maintain but exceed their current levels of success.

A closer look at the organizing company’s internal data reveals not only the operational outcomes of the Yerevan Wine Days and Gastronomic Shows but also the underlying framework used to measure success. Key performance indicators (KPIs) play a critical role in evaluating the festivals’ effectiveness year to year, and in shaping future goals and strategies.

Category	KPI Example	Status
Growth & Popularity	Total Attendance	Positive, strong growth
Audience Profile	Demographics, International Reach	Domestic strong, international growing
Marketing Impact	Social Media Reach, Media Mentions	High digital engagement
Economic Value	Vendor Sales, Sponsorships	Vendors +30%, sponsors increasing
Visitor Satisfaction	Survey Scores	~4/5, crowding issues noted
Community & Culture	Local participation	Needs strengthening
Sustainability	Eco-practices	Opportunity for improvement

International Best Practices and Comparison

To better understand the potential for growth and innovation in Armenia’s event tourism sector, it is useful to examine successful international festivals that have become global benchmarks. Two well-established examples are Madrid Fusion and Oktoberfest, both of which

offer valuable lessons in festival organization, audience engagement, and strategic planning. While these events differ in size, theme, and cultural context, they provide practical insights into what makes a festival sustainable, scalable, and internationally relevant. When compared with Yerevan Wine Days and Gastronomic Shows, several patterns emerge that reveal both strengths and areas for improvement in the Armenian context.

Madrid Fusion is globally recognized as a prestigious culinary event that attracts professional chefs, food critics, industry experts, and gastronomy enthusiasts from around the world, held annually in Madrid, Spain, usually in late January. The event attracts around 12,000 professional attendees each year, including world-famous chefs, food critics, wine producers, and culinary innovators from more than 40 countries. One of its core strengths lies in its professional structure and educational programming. Attendees have access to cooking demonstrations, panel discussions, product showcases, and workshops led by internationally renowned chefs. This educational component transforms the festival from a consumer experience into a knowledge-driven platform that contributes to the culinary field more broadly. In contrast, Yerevan Wine Days focuses more on casual enjoyment and social interaction. While this creates a vibrant and approachable atmosphere, it lacks the learning opportunities and professional engagement seen in Madrid Fusion.

Oktoberfest, on the other hand, stands out for its exceptional crowd management, large-scale logistics, and integration of tradition with tourism. The world's largest Volksfest, featuring both a beer festival and a traveling carnival, is held annually in Munich, Bavaria, from mid-September to the first Sunday in October. The event attracts over seven million international and national visitors at its peak, taking place very centrally in Munich, on the Theresienwiese - a mostly empty 100-acre space. The festival maintains a structured environment with timed entries,

designated seating areas, detailed maps, and multilingual signage. Its strong branding and consistent visual identity also help maintain coherence across a vast event space.

In comparison, Yerevan Wine Days has struggled with overcrowding and limited navigational clarity. Both survey and focus group participants expressed concerns about the density of the crowds, lack of clear signage, and difficulty navigating vendor areas-issues that highlight the need for more advanced crowd flow planning and on-site orientation.

The contrast between these international events and the Armenian festivals is not meant to diminish the achievements of Yerevan Wine Days, but rather to point out realistic opportunities for improvement. For example, incorporating educational components such as wine masterclasses or short talks by local experts could enrich the visitor experience and align the event more closely with international standards. Similarly, introducing timed entry slots, venue expansion and change, and clearly marked festival zones would address logistical concerns while enhancing comfort and safety for attendees.

To structure this comparison more systematically, the VICE model - which evaluates tourism experiences across four dimensions: Visitors, Industry, Community, and Environment - offers a useful framework.

VICE Element	International Best Practices	Armenian Context	Gap / Opportunity
Visitors	Timed entry, clear navigation, ticket tiers, educational sessions	Open public access, limited educational content, crowding issues	Improve crowd control; add wine workshops and clearer layout

Industry	Strong ties with culinary professionals, global media coverage	Growing vendor network, limited international exposure	Build partnerships with global food tourism networks
Community	Cultural storytelling, tradition-centered experiences (e.g. Oktoberfest’s folk identity)	Emphasis on food and drink, less visible cultural programming	Include music, craft booths, and storytelling about Armenian wine history
Environment	Recycling stations, eco-friendly cups, sustainable vendor guidelines	Environmental sustainability not currently emphasized	Introduce basic green initiatives (waste separation, reusable materials)

This comparative framework illustrates that while Armenian festivals have established a strong foundation, there is significant room for strategic improvement. The focus should not necessarily be on replicating the scale of events like Oktoberfest or the prestige of Madrid Fusion, but rather on adapting best practices in ways that suit local realities. With limited budgets and infrastructure, even small changes - like volunteer-led navigation support, printed maps, or short cultural showcases - could significantly elevate the visitor experience.

Yerevan Wine Days organizers can draw important lessons from international best practices. One key takeaway is the importance of crowd management and spatial organization. Festivals like Oktoberfest use large, open areas such as the Theresienwiese to spread visitors out and avoid overcrowding, ensuring that the experience remains enjoyable and safe even for millions

of guests. Similarly, Madrid Fusion holds its events indoors at dedicated convention center, providing clear visitor flows, protection from weather conditions, and well-structured presentation areas. For Yerevan Wine Days, adopting strategies such as expanding festival zones, improving signage, creating wider walkways, and offering scheduled entry times for wine tastings could help manage the growing number of visitors more effectively. These measures would not only improve visitor comfort and safety but also enhance the overall professionalism and international appeal of the event.

Thematic Analysis

This Section presents a thematic analysis of the data collected through surveys, interviews, focus groups, and secondary reports. Based on a careful review of participant responses and organizer reflections, several key themes emerged that are critical to understanding the strengths and challenges of event tourism in Armenia. These themes include event organization and management, audience experience and behavior, building community and cultural identity, marketing strategies, and organizer reflection and professional input. By exploring each theme in detail, this section aims to provide a comprehensive and structured view of how festivals like Yerevan Wine Days and the Yerevan Gastronomic Shows contribute to Armenia's event tourism sector, while also identifying areas for future improvement.

Event Organization & Management

A central theme that emerged throughout this research is the importance of professional, structured event organization. From both the visitor perspective and organizer reflections, it became clear that the success of large-scale cultural festivals like Yerevan Wine Days and the Yerevan Gastronomic Shows relies heavily on efficient planning and clear logistics. The majority of survey respondents rated the overall organization positively, but several open-ended responses

highlighted the need for better crowd control and clearer event navigation. These concerns were echoed during the focus group, where participants noted that while the festivals felt festive and vibrant, some areas became overwhelmingly crowded, making it difficult to enjoy all zones equally.

Interviews with organizers from EventToura reinforced this point. They described the challenge of balancing accessibility and exclusivity - particularly when managing thousands of visitors across multiple festival zones. Despite efforts to create smooth visitor flow, some bottlenecks were unavoidable, especially near the main entrance and wine stands. One organizer noted, “We try to let the space breathe, but with such high foot traffic, even wide streets like Tumanyan and Saryan become packed.” While this speaks to the popularity of the event, it also signals the need for more intentional space planning, perhaps taking inspiration from events like Oktoberfest, which uses a large, open venue (Theresienwiese) to prevent overcrowding.

Another organizational aspect raised during interviews was the logistics of vendor coordination. With dozens of wine producers, food vendors, and sponsors involved, timing and communication become critical. Festival organizers shared that even small delays - such as a wine truck arriving late - can create a domino effect that impacts the entire setup. In contrast, international festivals like Madrid Fusion operate in indoor venues with pre-constructed booths, minimizing the chance of disruption due to weather or delays. This highlights an opportunity for Armenian festivals to explore semi-permanent modular setups or tented spaces that offer flexibility while improving stability and layout. Festivals serve not only as cultural showcases but also as critical economic engines, generating revenue for producers, vendors, and surrounding businesses while helping shape a city’s economic rhythm (Dwyer & Wickens, 2011).

Overall, while the festivals are successful in execution, this research revealed several areas where event organization could be strengthened. Suggestions include staggering entry times for wine tasting, enhancing wayfinding signage, and expanding the physical footprint of the event. As the scale of Yerevan Wine Days and the Gastronomic Shows continues to grow, a more structured, scalable model of event management - informed by both local experience and international examples - will be essential for sustaining quality and visitor satisfaction.

Audience Experience & Behavior

Understanding audience experience and behavior is crucial for evaluating the true success of any festival. Based on the surveys, focus group discussions, and interviews conducted for this research, it is clear that the majority of visitors to Yerevan Wine Days and the Yerevan Gastronomic Shows left with highly positive impressions. Most survey participants rated their overall festival experience between 4 and 5 on a 5-point scale, highlighting the festive atmosphere, quality of food and wine, and the opportunity to socialize and explore Armenian culture as key strengths of the events.

Despite this general satisfaction, certain recurring points emerged that suggest opportunities for improvement. Many visitors mentioned issues related to crowd density, particularly during peak hours in the evening. Participants in the focus group emphasized that while the event's lively energy was enjoyable, overcrowding sometimes made it difficult to fully engage with all zones and activities. Some visitors found it challenging to move freely between the wine tasting stands and food areas, which affected the smoothness of their experience. This feedback mirrors best practices observed at international festivals like Oktoberfest, where large open spaces and organized visitor flows help prevent bottlenecks and ensure comfort even during massive attendance.

Another important aspect of visitor behavior was purchasing patterns. “Transparent pricing and clear ticketing systems build trust among attendees” (Turizm.ru 2019). Survey results showed that a significant majority of attendees purchased the “Wine Enjoyment Package” in advance or upon arrival. This package includes a branded wine glass, a fabric case to carry it, 12 wine tasting tickets, and an informational booklet that introduces all the participating winemakers and offers discount codes and raffle access. The price of the package in 2024 was 12,000 AMD. While this model is popular and effective, a few visitors still reported confusion about how the ticket system worked. Some respondents felt the information was not clearly communicated at the entrances or online. This feedback illustrates a common challenge in event tourism - the gap between what organizers intend to communicate and what visitors actually perceive. Addressing this disconnect requires more transparent, user-centered design and real-time responsiveness (Leal Londoño et al., 2022). This suggests that while the package model is popular and effective, better communication strategies - such as clearer signage or information kiosks - could further enhance the visitor experience.

The data also indicated strong repeat visitor potential. A high percentage of respondents expressed interest in returning to future editions of the festivals and stated that they would recommend the events to friends and family. This finding is particularly important, as it suggests that Yerevan Wine Days and the Gastronomic Shows have successfully built a loyal and growing audience base, a critical factor for long-term sustainability.

Overall, the audience experience at both festivals was overwhelmingly positive, with visitors appreciating the blend of cultural immersion, entertainment, and gastronomic discovery. However, small but consistent feedback on crowd management and visitor guidance points to areas

where incremental improvements could significantly elevate the festival experience in the coming years.

Building Community & Cultural Identity

One of the most powerful impacts of festivals like Yerevan Wine Days and the Yerevan Gastronomic Shows is their role in building a sense of community and reinforcing Armenian cultural identity. Both events successfully serve as platforms that bring together locals, diaspora Armenians, and international visitors to celebrate the country's rich traditions, particularly its ancient winemaking heritage and vibrant culinary scene.

Survey data showed that a significant number of attendees, especially local visitors, viewed the festivals as more than just entertainment; they saw them as a source of pride and cultural expression. Focus group participants emphasized that the festivals made them feel connected to Armenian traditions in a modern and accessible way. The combination of traditional Armenian music, locally produced wines, traditional foods, and cultural references created an authentic atmosphere that resonated with both older and younger generations. This dual appeal - honoring the past while embracing contemporary trends - helps strengthen cultural continuity in a rapidly changing society.

Organizers also reflected on the importance of showcasing small local businesses and winemakers, some of whom come from rural regions like Vayots Dzor and Tavush. By giving these producers visibility on a large platform, the festivals contribute not only to the economic development of Armenia but also to preserving and promoting regional identities. Events like these also have the potential to educate both locals and tourists about Armenia's unique offerings - from ancient grape varieties to distinct regional culinary practices - thus deepening appreciation for the country's cultural richness.

International examples, such as Madrid Fusion, also demonstrate how food and wine festivals can serve as cultural ambassadors. Madrid Fusion successfully elevates Spanish culinary traditions to a global audience, positioning Spain as a leader in gastronomy. In a similar way, Yerevan Wine Days can strengthen Armenia's international cultural image by positioning its winemaking and culinary arts as central elements of national identity.

Overall, festivals like Yerevan Wine Days and the Yerevan Gastronomic Shows do more than boost tourism or entertain crowds - they build emotional and cultural connections. Strengthening this community-focused dimension will be essential for maintaining authenticity as the festivals grow, and for ensuring that event tourism continues to contribute meaningfully to Armenia's national identity.

Marketing Strategies

Marketing has played a crucial role in the growth and popularity of Yerevan Wine Days and the Yerevan Gastronomic Shows. Based on survey results, focus group discussions, and interviews with organizers, it became clear that effective marketing strategies were a major factor in attracting both local and international visitors. Most survey respondents reported learning about the festivals through social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, followed by word of mouth and television promotions. This indicates the significant impact that digital marketing, especially targeted social media campaigns, had in raising awareness and building excitement around the events.

The organizers' focus on visually compelling, story-driven content contributed to this success. High-quality visuals of Armenian vineyards, traditional winemaking practices, and festive street scenes helped convey the cultural richness of the festivals. In today's digital age, social media plays a defining role in shaping how a destination's identity is projected and perceived by

the public (Leal Londoño et al., 2022). In 2024, the rebranding of Yerevan Wine Days further strengthened its marketing identity by visually linking the event to Armenia's ancient winemaking traditions. As mentioned earlier, the integration of *karas* imagery, hand-drawn ornaments, and references to 6,100 years of viticulture offered an authentic, emotionally resonant story that differentiated the festival from other regional events.

Nevertheless, interviews with organizers also revealed areas for improvement. While online engagement was strong, international outreach could still be expanded. Compared to events like Madrid Fusion, which actively targets global audiences through multilingual promotions, Yerevan Wine Days' communication largely remains Armenian-centered. Introducing broader language options, international media partnerships, and targeted campaigns in key tourism markets could significantly increase the festivals' global visibility.

Another emerging area is influencer marketing. Organizers noted that collaborations with local Armenian influencers were highly effective in boosting attendance, especially among younger audiences. However, a more strategic approach to partnering with international travel bloggers, wine experts, and gastronomy influencers could help broaden the event's reach. By showcasing authentic festival experiences through trusted voices, Yerevan Wine Days could strengthen its reputation as a must-visit cultural event on the international calendar.

Finally, the use of loyalty marketing - such as offering discounts for returning visitors or promoting package deals through partner hotels - remains an untapped opportunity. Given the high repeat visitor interest shown in the surveys, developing loyalty initiatives could both increase attendance and encourage longer tourist stays in Armenia, amplifying the festivals' overall economic impact.

In short, while marketing efforts have been largely successful in building excitement and recognition for the festivals, there remains strong potential to expand and internationalize these strategies. By learning from best practices and further professionalizing their approach, Yerevan Wine Days and the Gastronomic Shows can continue to grow both in reputation and in reach.

Organizer Reflection & Professional Input

Insights gathered directly from the festival organizers provided a valuable behind-the-scenes perspective on the successes and challenges of managing large-scale cultural events in Armenia. Through interviews and informal conversations, several key themes emerged that shed light on the inner workings of Yerevan Wine Days and the Yerevan Gastronomic Shows.

One major point emphasized by organizers was the logistical complexity involved in coordinating so many participants - winemakers, chefs, sponsors, volunteers, and security teams - across multiple streets and festival zones. Organizers described a balancing act between creating a vibrant, accessible environment for visitors and ensuring smooth operational management behind the scenes. Many noted that while Armenia's event tourism sector is growing rapidly, the industry still lacks a formalized training system for event management professionals. Much of the knowledge is gained through practice, which makes institutional memory and continuous improvement particularly important. In this regard, maintaining detailed documentation becomes essential. Organizers would benefit from creating visual documentation maps after each festival, marking areas with high visitor congestion, queue build-up, or logistical issues. These diagrams, along with digital reports and heatmaps, could serve as reference tools for future planning, helping teams adjust layouts, deploy staff more effectively, and respond proactively to crowd flow problems. Over time, such records can form the foundation for a more professional and data-driven approach to festival management.

Organizers also reflected on the evolution of their strategies over the years. For example, they emphasized how rebranding efforts in 2024, supported by professional historical consultation, helped anchor the festivals more deeply in Armenian cultural identity. The focus on using authentic symbols like *karases* and emphasizing Armenia's winemaking heritage was not just an aesthetic decision but a strategic one, intended to enhance both local pride and international marketability.

In terms of challenges, several organizers pointed to crowd management as an ongoing difficulty. While street festivals naturally attract large, unpredictable flows of visitors, the organizers expressed interest in adopting more sophisticated visitor flow models, such as staggered admissions, designated tasting zones, and timed entry slots - practices seen in events like Madrid Fusion and Oktoberfest. They acknowledged that adapting these international practices to the local context will require both creative thinking and infrastructural improvements.

A final key reflection was the importance of data-driven planning. Organizers emphasized that feedback gathered through surveys, visitor analysis reports, and social media engagement played a crucial role in shaping the 2024 festival editions. However, they also acknowledged the need for even more systematic data collection and analysis in the future to better understand visitor needs, measure satisfaction, and plan for sustainable growth.

Overall, the reflections of the festival organizers show a deep commitment to improving the quality and reputation of Armenian festivals. They demonstrate both pride in what has been achieved so far and a clear awareness of the steps needed to elevate event tourism to a truly international level. As noted by Soteriades and Dimou, sustainability is not just environmental - it's also economic and social, which reinforces the importance of long-term planning and inclusive stakeholder engagement (Soteriades & Dimou, 2011).

Limitations and Avenues for Future Research

While this research aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of event tourism development through the case studies of Yerevan Wine Days and the Yerevan Gastronomic Shows, several limitations must be acknowledged.

First, the sample size for both the survey and the focus group, while informative, was relatively limited. Although responses provided valuable insights into visitor satisfaction, motivations, and feedback, a larger and more diverse sample - particularly in terms of age groups - would have allowed for even stronger generalizations. In particular, international visitors were underrepresented in the survey responses, limiting the ability to fully understand the global appeal and challenges faced by the festivals.

Second, the research was focused primarily on festivals held in Yerevan. Although rural event tourism was discussed as a future opportunity, the study did not directly include festivals outside the capital city. Therefore, some of the findings and recommendations may need to be adapted to fit the different logistical, cultural, and infrastructural realities of rural regions like Vayots Dzor or Syunik.

Another limitation was the reliance on participant recollections and perceptions. Surveys, focus groups, and interviews capture subjective experiences, which can vary depending on individual expectations, weather conditions, time of attendance, or personal preferences. While these perceptions are crucial for understanding visitor behavior, they should ideally be supplemented by additional objective data, such as economic impact assessments or detailed crowd-flow analyses.

Additionally, time constraints limited the ability to conduct longitudinal research. Observing festivals over multiple years would offer a clearer picture of how organizational strategies evolve, how visitor demographics change, and how marketing efforts impact long-term

growth. A longitudinal approach would also help measure the sustainability and cultural authenticity of festivals as they expand.

Recommendations for Future Studies

Future research on event tourism in Armenia could expand in several important directions. First, a broader study that includes rural festivals would help capture the full potential of decentralized tourism development. Comparing Yerevan-based events with regional festivals could highlight unique opportunities and challenges for each context, such as differences in infrastructure, crowd management needs, and local community engagement.

Second, a focused study on overcrowding management would be highly beneficial. During the focus group sessions with festival visitors, overcrowding was repeatedly identified as a major issue that affected overall satisfaction. Visitors suggested several potential solutions, such as introducing scheduled entry times for wine tasting zones, expanding the physical festival footprint into additional streets, and setting up one-way visitor flows using signage and volunteers. Future studies could explore the feasibility and effectiveness of these strategies in the Armenian festival context.

However, implementing these solutions comes with potential challenges. Scheduled entry times may be difficult to enforce without a technological ticketing system, and expanding the festival space would require cooperation with city authorities and additional logistical resources. Managing one-way visitor flows could also require a large number of trained volunteers and clear multilingual signage, which may increase operational costs. Future research could specifically analyze these challenges and propose tailored strategies for festivals operating in urban, historical city centers like Yerevan.

Third, future studies should aim to be even more precise in categorizing research subjects. Rather than referring generally to “participants,” research should differentiate clearly between visitors (attendees) and exhibitors (winemakers, food vendors, sponsors). Understanding the distinct perspectives of these two groups would provide a richer, more detailed analysis of festival experiences and operational dynamics.

Fourth, future research could integrate economic impact studies, measuring not only visitor satisfaction but also the revenue generated for hotels, restaurants, local producers, and artisans. Such data would make a stronger case for public and private investment in Armenia’s event tourism sector.

Finally, adopting a longitudinal research design would allow future scholars to track festival growth, visitor loyalty, and cultural shifts over time. Observing how festivals evolve across several years would offer a dynamic view of sustainability, authenticity, and visitor behavior trends.

Conclusion

This capstone project explored the development and challenges of event tourism in Armenia through an in-depth case study of Yerevan Wine Days and the Yerevan Gastronomic Shows. By combining survey results, focus group discussions, organizer interviews, and international comparisons, this research identified several key themes influencing the success and sustainability of Armenian cultural festivals.

The findings showed that while both festivals are successful in creating vibrant, culturally rich experiences, they face challenges common to growing event tourism sectors. Strengths such as effective marketing, strong visitor engagement, and the authentic representation of Armenian cultural identity were highlighted. However, recurring issues such as overcrowding, limited

international outreach, and infrastructural constraints were also identified, suggesting areas for targeted improvement. Organizer reflections demonstrated a clear willingness to learn and adapt, acknowledging the need for more systematic crowd management, stronger international promotion, and data-driven decision-making.

The primary research question - What are the main challenges facing the development of the event tourism market in Armenia, and how can these challenges be effectively addressed? - was answered through the thematic analysis. The research showed that Armenia's event tourism market struggles with scalability, infrastructure, and professional event management practices, but that many of these challenges can be addressed by adapting successful international models, like those seen in Madrid Fusion and Oktoberfest, to the Armenian context. The secondary research questions were also addressed: localized data from surveys and interviews provided clear insights into visitor behavior and expectations, while comparisons with international festivals offered concrete lessons for growth.

Based on these findings, several practical recommendations can be made. First, festivals should focus on expanding and optimizing their physical layouts to better manage large crowds, possibly by using staggered ticketing times and clearer visitor flows. Second, marketing strategies should be further internationalized, offering multilingual content and partnering with international influencers to reach broader audiences. Third, festivals should implement more systematic data collection processes to track visitor feedback, economic impact, and long-term growth trends. Finally, lessons from the 2024 rebranding effort suggest that grounding marketing narratives in authentic cultural history - such as Armenia's ancient winemaking traditions - is highly effective and should be continued in future promotions.

In conclusion, while Armenia's event tourism sector is still developing, it holds tremendous potential. With thoughtful planning, strategic improvements, and continued cultural authenticity, festivals like Yerevan Wine Days and the Yerevan Gastronomic Shows can not only enhance Armenia's domestic tourism industry but also establish the country as a recognized cultural destination on the global stage.

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Appendix A - Survey Questionnaire

1. Name
2. What is your age group?
3. Where are you from?
4. Have you attended either the Yerevan Wine Days Festival or Yerevan Gastronomic Shows on June 7, 8, 9, 2024?
5. What was your main reason for attending this event?
 - To enjoy Armenian wines/food
 - To socialize with friends/family
 - To explore Armenian culture
 - To try new culinary experiences
 - To support local businesses
 - Other
6. How did you learn about this event?
 - Social Media (Instagram, Facebook, TikTok)
 - Word of Mouth

- Online News/Articles

- Posters/Flyers

7. How would you rate your overall experience at the event? (Scale: 1-5)
8. Did the event meet your expectations? (Yes/No, with explanation)
9. Would you attend this event again in the future? (Yes/No)
10. How satisfied were you with the organization of the event? (Scale: 1-5)
11. Were the event's location and venue convenient for you? (Yes/No, with suggestion)
12. How would you rate the quality of the activities offered? (Scale: 1-5)
13. Did the event offer opportunities to learn about Armenian culture or traditions? (Yes/No)
14. How engaging was the entertainment provided at the event? (Scale: 1-5)
15. Was the event's advertising clear and informative? (Yes/No)
16. Were the event's ticket prices fair and reasonable? (Yes/No)
17. How satisfied were you with the food and beverage options at the event? (Scale: 1-5)
18. Do you have any additional feedback or suggestions to improve future editions of these festivals?

Appendix B - Interview Questions

Yerevan Wine Days & Gastronomic Shows Organizer Interview

1. What was the biggest challenge in organizing this year's festival, and how did you overcome it?
2. How do you select wineries and restaurants to participate in the event?
3. Who is the main target audience of this festival, and how do you attract them?
4. Which marketing strategies are the most effective in attracting visitors?

5. How do you handle crowd management and ensure visitor safety during the event?
6. How does this festival contribute to Armenia's tourism and support local businesses?
7. What improvements or new features are planned for the next festival?
8. If you had unlimited resources, what would be the important change you would make to improve the festival?

Madrid Fusion Festival Attendee Interview

1. Can you share your overall impressions of Madrid Fusión?
2. Did you notice any unique approaches in crowd management, venue layout, or scheduling that enhanced the visitor experience?
3. How does Madrid Fusión incorporate sustainability and the use of local products in its events?
4. Was it possible to establish valuable networking connections with chefs, food producers, or festival organizers?
5. Did you see collaborations between Madrid Fusión and international organizations or chefs that could serve as an example for Armenian festivals?
6. Are there specific chefs, speakers, or organizations from Madrid Fusión that could be invited to Armenia for collaboration?
7. Did you study Madrid Fusión's marketing strategies?

Appendix C - Focus Group Questions

These questions were asked to five focus group participants: Arman, Narine, Mane, Narek, and Sofi.

1. What was your main reason for attending this event?

2. Did the event meet your expectations?
3. Do you have any additional feedback or suggestions to improve future editions of these festivals?