

TOURISM TRAILBLAZERS

GEMTREE WINES



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About Gemtree Wines

- Viticulturist, Melissa Brown and her husband Mike, co-own Gemtree Wines, an organic and biodynamic winery in McLaren Vale, Fleurieu Peninsula. Prior to COVID, Gemtree Wines offered casual tastings and tours, primarily for interstate and international visitors about their biodynamic philosophy and farming practices. Since 2020-21, the winery has collaborated with local businesses to provide immersive experiences championing the land's flora and fauna and its traditional First Nations owners.

Challenges faced

- Chinese tariffs on Australian wine in 2020 significantly impacted distribution to this key market, causing a loss of approximately 25 per cent of wine sales.
- No visitors coming through the tasting room during lockdowns, followed by reduced visitation.
- Limited to communicating with wine club database as no new customers were able to visit the winery.
- Hesitancy by travellers as tourism opened back up required alternative ways for new and existing loyal customers to engage with the business.

Overcoming adversity

- Introduced new virtual tastings. Gemtree sent samples of its wines to customers to enjoy via video call, providing the tasting room experience in the comfort of their own home. The fantastic response saw Gemtree grow its customer base and build its wine club.
- Partnered with local businesses that shared Gemtree's philosophy of getting people back to nature including off-grid eco accommodation, CABN and Senior Cultural Custodian, Karl Winda Telfer. These collaborations introduced safe and immersive experiences for visitors if the tasting room was shut or operating at reduced capacity due to density restrictions.
- Introduced self-led experiences to minimise contact with guests such as Gemtree Eco Trail self-guided tours, picnic hampers to purchase and consume outdoors, and e-bike hire to encourage cross-visitation with other McLaren Flat wineries.

Lessons learnt

- Engage in opportunities to reach new customers and increase visitation, i.e. Great State Voucher program to generate income and keep staff employed.
- Staff retention is a priority to ensure the time and effort in training is not lost and the business keeps its loyal employees. When tourism offerings were offline, Gemtree kept its staff busy working in wine production and sales which kept morale high and meant the tasting room could re-open with its skilled staff when the time came.
- Collaboration is key. Working in partnership with CABN and Karl Winda Telfer gave Gemtree the opportunity to diversify to offer accommodation and a cultural tour which attracted a variety of visitors to grow visitation.



Tourism is critical to the ongoing wellbeing of the Fleurieu Peninsula. We have so much to offer and I feel so blessed and grateful to live here. It's a real privilege to showcase our region to visitors.

Melissa Brown, Gemtree Wines

The Gemtree Approach

- Be brave – unless you are prepared to make decisions with an element of risk, you will never change anything. Innovation is key to keeping up with market trends and providing products and experiences that consumers want.
- Remain positive – the uplifting community spirit in SA and McLaren Vale, with local businesses helping each other out to get through challenging times, allowed Melissa to stay hopeful and motivated to make the best of the situation.
- Don't resist change – Gemtree now offers better and more diversified products and experiences due to the changes made to its business delivery model.

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