

Nikki Lohitnavy: GranMonte's groundbreaking winemaker

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Based in Khao Yai National Park, GranMonte Vineyards is one of the country's top vineyards. It's also home to Thailand's first female enologist ('wine-maker'), Nikki Lohitnavy, who recently received a bachelor's degree in enology from the University of Adelaide. Nikki is responsible for the whole production process, from the grapes to the glass.

James Vernon

ThaiAsiaToday.com (TAT): Could you please tell our readers about what you do, and about an enologist's various roles and responsibilities?

Nikki Lohitnavy (NL): As an enologist, I basically act as manager of the whole winemaking process. This involves deciding when to prune the vines, when to harvest, checking on the various harvesting parameters required for each particular kind of wine, such as the levels of sugar, pH, acidity as well as the flavors. I have to monitor the crushing, fermenting, barreling, clarification and stabilization, as well as blending and bottling. In fact, it's pretty much everything, from the grapes to the bottles!

TAT: How did you first become interested in winemaking?

NL: I had my first taste of wine at the age of 14. I was introduced to wine by enjoying a few sips at dinner with my parents, but I became much more interested in it as a student in Melbourne.

TAT: What are some of the pros and cons of growing grapes for use in winemaking in Thailand?

NL: The benefits are that we have plenty of sunshine, making our grapes nice and ripe and full of flavor. On the downside, the weather is very unpredictable. And there are also some problems with disease, so we have to manage our spraying schedule very carefully.

TAT: How do you promote a 'wine culture' within the kingdom?

NL: We accomplish this through holding enjoyable and educational wine dinners, tastings and so on.

TAT: How do you find Khao Yai's rural lifestyle?

NL: I really like it here – and I'd much rather live here than in Bangkok. Nevertheless, I do make it back every once in a while to enjoy the city lights, sights and sounds.

TAT: How do you feel about being the nation's first female wine-maker? Do you feel it says anything about the future of Thai society?

NL: This definitely says something for any society, not just Thai society. It says women can do things just as well as men!

To learn more about the GranMonte Vineyard, visit the company's website at <http://www.granmonte.com> .

The Thai Winemakers' Association's 'wine tourist trail'

Formed towards the end of 2004, exactly 10 years after the first Thai wine was launched, the Thai Wine Association (TWA) was set up by the kingdom's leading wine producers, who joined forces to establish quality standards and labeling requirements for Thai produced wines. Members adhere to a 'Thai Wine Charter', which conforms to international standards.

Since one of the association's key objectives is to build and develop awareness and to enhance the image of Thai wines at home and abroad, the group established a 'wine trail', which includes visits to key viticultural areas, which includes the provinces of Chiang Rai, Loei, and Pichit, as well as GranMonte's lush vineyards in Korat, where you can also sample culinary delights from the winery's VinCotto restaurant.

For further information on the tour, call Tel: +66 (0)87 049 5656, or visit the TWA's website at <http://www.thaiwine.org> .

