

Wednesday, November 20th, 2019

## **Vinality International Academy continue their incoming program with a triumphant return to Sicily and exploration of Mount Etna**

**Once again Vinality International Academy welcomed Italian Wine Ambassadors, Experts, and Faculty to Italy to continue the pioneering work of their incoming program. This time, the group visited Sicily and the area of Taormina at the end of October. The visit strengthened the collaboration with wine and food magazine *Cronache di Gusto* allowing the participants access to Taormina Gourmet, ahead of their “gita scolastica” (school trip) to the territories of Mount Etna.**

Despite being in the throes of planning for the Vinality Tour and anticipating another edition of the [Vinality International Academy](#) (VIA) Italian Wine Ambassador Certification Course in Hong Kong, the VIA team still managed to make time in their schedule to facilitate another incoming program for its existing Ambassadors, Experts and Educators. Coinciding with the increasingly popular event [Taormina Gourmet](#), organized by [Cronache di Gusto](#), the VIA Incoming program allowed Ambassadors to participate in diverse masterclasses, symposia, and tastings in Taormina ahead of their more focused winery tours of Etna.



Photograph: VIA Italian Wine Ambassadors, Experts, and Educators during one the winery visits to the Mount Etna Region in Sicily last October.

Once again, one of the highlights of the trip was the opportunity to participate in a masterclass lead by VIA Chief Scientist Attilio Scienza. This time attendees were treated not to an exploration of soils and territories, but rather a discussion of “Nine thousand years of history in a glass: how to tell the stories of the vines.” The session drew attention not only to the varied specialisms of Prof. Scienza, but to a topic that is fundamental to VIA and its community: the importance of being able to communicate stories about wine.

The first-hand learning experience of the Ambassadors continued beyond Taormina Gourmet, as they were invited on an in-depth tour of the territories – locally called with the word *Contrada* – and wineries found on Mount Etna. The trip included the opportunity to visit the Etna DOC Consorzio President, Antonio Benanti, and other prestigious wineries such as Azienda Passopisciaro, Azienda Cottanera, and Palmento Costanzo.



The opportunity to visit such prestigious estates was not lost on those participating, as Jeff Osborne from Canada commented: *“After ten days of wine exploration on Europe's most active volcano Mount Etna, I have a much different understanding and appreciation for the history, current production and vision for the region and its Etna DOC & Terra Siciliane IGT wines than I had previously, or than I expected to have.”* Osborne went on to explain the importance of this new-found *“respect, appreciation and support”* in his role as someone at *“ground zero in one of the world's fastest growing and developing wine markets at the moment.”* Osborne's experience highlights, once again, the importance of these trips to those in the wine industry to expand their wine knowledge and disseminate it within their home markets.

The benefit of the incoming program is being taken advantage of not only by the Ambassadors who have qualified through the Vinitaly International Academy, but also the Faculty who develop and teach the VIA Ambassador course. The opportunity to be part of the incoming program was snatched up by Italian Wine Expert and VIA Faculty member Henry Davar, despite it falling so close to the upcoming VIA certification course in Hong Kong. He was enthusiastic about the role this program plays: *“When we rolled out VIA version 2.0 late in 2018, we made a promise to getting members of our community back to Italy as often as possible. Consider this promise kept! Etna is so dynamic. It's no longer just a bunch of pioneering ‘stranieri’ huddled high up on the northern slopes anymore. There are many producers big and small farming the mountain's diverse terrains and, as would be expected, making diverse styles of wine. Having boots on the ground allows the VIA Faculty and our VIA community to experience this quickly changing landscape first-hand, and to take the message back to their markets.”*

The incoming program and its catch phrase “gita scolastica” (literally school trip) is fast gaining visibility as a program and demonstrating its worth not simply to those within the VIA community, but to the Italian wine community as a whole. Its growing importance is demonstrated by the diverse nationalities and countries of residence of participants (Hungary, Canada, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, United States, UK, Poland, United Arab Emirates, Croatia, Slovakia, and Japan) as well as the prestigious wine personalities keen to host the group. VIA aims to build on the strong foundation these trips have cemented in 2019, to bring about greater collaboration and partnerships into 2020 and beyond!

The next edition of the VIA incoming program will take place in 2020. Meanwhile the Vinitaly International Academy is preparing for the flagship Ambassador Certification course that will take place in Verona prior to Vinitaly from 10<sup>th</sup> -14<sup>th</sup> of April, 2020.

About: [Vinitaly International Academy](#) (VIA) aims to be the gold standard of Italian wine education. It offers a complete educational path with standardized courses that will teach professionals and educators to master the diversity of Italian wine in a rigorous, organized manner. VIA's main objective is to foster a global network of highly qualified professionals such as Italian Wine Ambassadors and Italian Wine Experts: in turn, they will support and promote Italian wine throughout the world. VIA was founded by Stevie Kim, Managing Director of Vinitaly International. The new VIA ecosystem avails of the guidance of Italian trade associations Federdoc, Federvini, Vignaioli Indipendenti FIVI, and Unione Italiana Vini as members of the Institutional Advisory Board. Italian vine genetics scholar, Prof. Attilio Scienza, oversees VIA's scientific and educational direction as the Chief Scientist. VIA Faculty Sarah Heller MW and Henry Davar teach the flagship Italian Wine Ambassador course. The following trade associations in the Italian wine industry have also joined as VIA Supporters: Italia del Vino; Italian Signature Wines Academy; Le Famiglie del Vino, Wi-Fi Wine from Irpinia, Consorzio di Tutela Vini del Trentino; Consorzio di Tutela Sicilia DOC; Franciacorta; Consorzio di Tutela Vini d'Abruzzo. To date the VIA community comprises 215 certified Italian Wine Ambassadors and 15 Italian Wine Experts. Since its foundation in 2014, over 560 candidates from all over the world have taken VIA's courses.