

THE FESTIVAL OF SOUTH AFRICAN WINES IN VLADIVOSTOK,

28 October 2011



It was rather strange to fly for almost ten hours and have no passport or customs controls on arrival. Yes, it was still the same country – vast & mysterious Russia!

We flew from St. Petersburg to Vladivostok – the city on the border with Northern Korea & China, just across the Eastern Sea from Japan. Locals say that this is the eastern-most European outpost in Asia, but speaking in strict geographical terms it is awfully far from Europe.

We flew with a group of Diplomats of the SA Embassy in Russia and a representative of the DTI to run the Festival of South African Wine in the capital of the Primorsky Krai ("Near-the-sea Region") of Russia. Although the event didn't match its sister-Festival in Moscow in glamour or impact, the Festival in Vladivostok did probably surpass the Moscow event in status. The head of Vladivostok legislature, the head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs branch, the Honorary Consul of the USA and almost 100 representatives of the local government, business elite and wine community were among the guests of the Festival.

Another big surprise for us was the number of South African brands that were available in this remote part of the world. In the list that was sent to us prior to our arrival were wines of Simonsig, Vergelegen, Laroche, Plaisir du Merle, Long Mountain, Robertson Winery, Kumkani (The Company of Wine People), Cape Zebra (Perderberg), Eagle Crest (Swartland Winery), and of course the big brands such as KWV, Kumala, First Cape and Golden Kaan. There were even some rare finds like Vilafonté Series M 2005 and Graham Back The Coffeestone Cabernet Sauvignon 2003. Only later we discovered that we had depleted the stock of some South African wines in the whole city. For example the six bottles of the Simonsig's Kaapse

Vonkel Brut were the only allocation of the wine for the whole region in that period, and we retrieved all of them for the Festival!

Most of these wines were presented either at the reception function or at the SA Wines workshop conducted by WOSA for the wine specialists and professionals. The wines received a lot of praise and the atmosphere at the event was joyous and celebratory.

The Ambassador of South Africa in Russia – Mr. Mandisi Mpahlwa – welcomed all guests with an address, which was followed by live artists performance, South African music and videos of Cape Winelands. All that was accompanied by elegant snacks and plenty of exquisite South African wine.

Vladivostok is getting a lot of attention lately due to the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit – an annual gathering of the 21 Pacific Rim country leaders – which will be housed in the city September next year. The whole region is being renovated and several big business and residential districts of Vladivostok as well as major roads and bridges are being built anew. The region is also attracting a lot of attention and investments as Russia thrives to put a firmer grip on its outlying territories.

The Festival was organised on the initiative of and was largely financed by the Honorary Consul of South Africa in Primorsky Krai – Mr. Yury Sivachenko – the only representative of the RSA in the whole of Siberia and the Far East of Russia. Mr. Sivachenko was very excited of the connection to South Africa and was planning several other initiatives, such as a restaurant with SA cuisine, tourism to SA, etc. The other contributors to the Festival were the DTI, the Embassy and the WOSA. Overall it was a great event and achieved its aim of increasing awareness of South Africa and its wonderful wines very well!

