

WINE TOURISM IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

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Wine has long been associated with the Mediterranean. The ancient Greeks and Phoenicians traded wine, while more recently wine production has developed into one of the main areas of agricultural production of the region. However, wine is more than just a farming activity. Wine is a part of the way of life for many countries on the Mediterranean shore, and is an essential element in expressing the regional cuisine, not only within the Mediterranean, but also throughout the world.

Wine tourism can be defined as visitation to vineyards, wineries, wine festivals, and wine shows for which grape-wine tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of a grape-wine region are the prime motivating factors for visitors. Although tourism is important for many wineries in terms of the ability to sell wine, either directly to visitors through cellar sales or by placing such customers on a direct-mail-order list, tourism, if mentioned at all, often is seen in very disparaging terms with the implication being that those who are interested seriously in wine are not tourists.

According to the Movimento del Turismo del Vino (MTV) (Wine Tourism Association), between 2 and 2.5 million tourists visited wineries, vineyards, and wine-related companies, developing an estimated 3,000 billion Lira. On a single weekend in May 1996, some 500,000 tourists visited 700 wineries during the Cantine Aperte (Open Cellars) festival. Italian wine tourists typically are foreign (German), male, aged between 26 and 45, in higher income brackets, professionals, love to buy wine and produce directly from the grower and visit areas where art, nature, wine and good food can be found.

Italy, as one of the few countries to have a national body that attempts to coordinate wine-tourism activities and as one of the world's largest producers of wine, is well placed to take advantage of wine tourism. However, if it is to gain the full benefits, there must be a commitment to coordinate across various levels of both the wine and tourism industries.

Portugal is a country that, by virtue of its long trade links with Britain, has long used wine as a means to link wine regions with tourism. The city of Oporto in northern Portugal uses the Port-wine connection extensively in its promotion as well as in the hosting of events and festivals. The Alto Minho region in northern Portugal, which is best known in wine terms as producers of vinho verde, also has been attempting to develop linkages between wine and tourism. The Vinho Verde DOC region is the largest demarcated wine region in Portugal. The Alto Minho region has received substantial EU funding through various regional and rural development programs, such as LEADER, to improve tourism-product development and promotion, including wine tourism. Interestingly, regional wine-tourism product mainly has been aimed at international and domestic tourists who already have arrived in the region to see the culture and heritage of the region rather than specifically using the regional wine as a branding tool to attract tourists. Wine-

tourism-related development has included the development of wine routes, home-stay accommodation, and guides to the gastronomic opportunities in the region.

Spain is also increasingly using the large number of tourists as a means to promote its wine regions and wine types. For example, sherry is undergoing a revival, while regions such as the Bjoja in northern Spain have established an export department that coordinates the activities of the various bodegas in the area and that utilizes the links between wine and tourism as a major promotional tool.

Today, Greece and, to some extent, Israel and Lebanon are experiencing a resurgence of their ancient traditions of wine making. For Greece, this also has seen the establishment of appellation regulations in line with EU standards. This resurgence has led to the development of wine-tourism products and the use of local wine and cuisine in generic tourism promotion. For Greece, the resurgence has promoted the development of cruise packages. Greek wineries are present throughout the country and, because of its geography, are generally some distance apart, making wine touring difficult in comparison to Burgundy or Napa. In Israel, wine, while having a growing domestic culture, generally is considered an incidental part of tourism, although there is increasing attention to its wineries and wine regions. Several districts of Israel have wineries with developing tourist visitation (Negev, the Haifa-Jerusalem coast, the Golan Heights, and Upper Galilee).

The Mediterranean region has long been noted for its cuisine. However, the linkages between food and wine often have not been made explicit in tourism promotion and product development. The overt use of wine tourism as a component of regional development in the Mediterranean has the potential not only to contribute to regional restructuring responses, but also to help redefine and reposition its tourism product in the international tourism marketplace. Moreover, the development of product networks and cooperative marketing strategies can help to ensure that the distinctive regionality of Mediterranean tourism is enhanced through international tourism as places compete on the basis of what makes them unique rather than simply competing on the basis of price for the mass tourist.

References

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