

WINE TOURISM IN ITALY

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Italy is one of the leading world tourism destinations. It has a lot of cultural attractions and can boast historical heritage. However, many of the country's rural regions are popular with tourists. Hence, wine tourism is considered to fit perfectly the Italian rural regions.

Moreover, the Italian wine routes are seen as a means of linking the agro-food production to development of rural spaces. The Italian wine routes in the regions of Abruzzo, Basilicata, Calabria, Campania, Umbria, Marche and Tuscany were officially recognized in 1999.

Today, according to the figures given by the Movimento Turismo del Vino, wine tourism in Italy brings about € 2.5 million annually, while it predicts further growth prospects. Furthermore, wine is ranked third in the motivation list of the foreign tourists visiting Italy. Almost 3.5 million tourists visit the country's wineries per year.

The Italian wine tourism consists of wine producers, wine associations, economic actors, personnel, rural and agro-tourism entrepreneurs and representatives of the local communities. However, the most principal actors of the supply side are the wine cellars, the vineyards and local municipalities.

With regards to the wineries involved in this kind of tourism, the majority of them are small firms. Moreover, wine producers in Italy are more inclined to focus on wine tasting and country tours than on their core activity which is production and sale of wine. Furthermore, significant work is being done by the Movimento Turismo del Vino which was set up in 1993 and currently has more than 900 Italian wine firms. The MTV aims at increasing wine tourism in the country, promoting environmental protection, increasing the agriculture quality, promoting the Italian wine culture and enhancing the image, the income and employment in the wine regions.

In terms of marketing and promotion of wine tourism in Italy, the Movimento Turismo del Vino is the original player. The most important and popular national wine-related events are the "Cantine Aperte" which originated from Tuscany and at the moment it is spread to the other Italian wine regions too and the "Calici di Stelle". The "Cantine Aperte" event (Open Day at the wineries) is organized each year on the last Sunday of May. The idea is for the wineries to be open for all visitors free of charge. The latter event is a traditional summer event which takes place in August, on St. Laurence's night when quality wines are offered in the main squares of tourism sites. Additionally, there is also another event, the "Benvenuta Vendemmia" (Welcome Grape Harvest) organized for the visitors to experience the grape harvesting in the countryside.

There is a strong belief in Italy in the dynamic of a collective action. Wine routes are seen as an outcome of a collective action. Even more, they represent a

concrete example of synergy and coherence working together for a specific cause; to promote the region and a series of local products. Tuscany is one of the most famous Italian wine regions with worldwide renowned vineyards and wines. Moreover, Tuscany enjoys its strategic location among famous tourist cities of the country like Florence and Pisa while its medieval architecture and charm compensate the region for an absence of cultural “hot spots”.

To continue with, there are 14 established wine routes in the wine region of Tuscany. However, the most famous one and one of the most developed in the country is the Costa degli Etruschi, which extends to the province of Livorno for more than 80% of its coverage.

The benefits of the wine route are impressive. These are both economic and social ones. The wine route attracts more tourists to the region while it increases their awareness of the distinctive attributes of the region. Thus, the general competitiveness of the region increases. Furthermore, the increased tourist flow in the region enhances the demand for directly sold local products and services and at the same time the increased consumers’ awareness of the territory, improves its image and allows it to differentiate from other regions.

At the winery level, the most apparent effect is reflected in prices. Product prices in the wineries-members of the wine route are significantly higher than those in the conventional farms. Hence, the economic impact of a wine route can be divided into three separate effects, namely the price effect, the selling effect and the production effect. The first one concerns the prices of the directly sold wines already mentioned; the selling effect implies a shift on the selling patterns of the wineries from wholesale to direct sales and the production effect implies changes in the working and production patterns. For example, there is a shift from unbottled to bottled wine. Moreover, increased profitability of the farms motivates the exercise of more activities operated in the farm.

Finally, the social impact is reflected in the improved reputation of the region and on a synergy effect.

References

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