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# Wine Tourism Law

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# An overview of wine tourism in Italy

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I. Introduction. – II. Wine tourism in Italy: A national overview. – III. Emerging trends in Italian wine tourism. – IV. The future of wine tourism.

*Since the 2000s, wine production has propelled the growth of rural tourism in grape-growing areas, attracting the interest of scholars and practitioners. The debate first focused on defining the practice and then discussed the most recent trends, including sustainability, technological innovation, and immersive experiences. Italy has been at the forefront of the debate since it is a renowned wine-producing country and wine tourism destination. This chapter focuses on the country and delves into the unique characteristics of some of the main trends influencing the wine tourism industry. Italy has a rich cultural and historical wine heritage and attractions (wineries, wine routes, and wine museums) that draw millions of travellers annually and generate significant economic benefits yearly. Recent changes in the industry have led to transformations in the wine tourism experience. Changes include the shift in travellers' preferences from the product to the unique combination of tangible and intangible wine heritage (the "winescape"), the growing attention to sustainable practices and the emergence of new connections with outdoors, well-being, culture and hospitality. The future of wine tourism hinges on strategic policies that foster collaboration, skill development, data-driven insights, and digitalization, ensuring sustainable growth and enhanced competitiveness in the global market.*

**Keywords:** Wine tourism, Italy, changes in the industry, emerging trends, future development.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Wine tourism is increasingly a significant resource in enhancing the economic value of regions, communities and local economies. This impact goes beyond

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just selling wine, as it generates income, employment and social values. Amidst the growing interest in food and wine on holiday that has emerged since 2000's (Hall & Mitchell, 2001; Richards, 2003; Dixit, 2021), the unique characteristics of wine production have fostered the growth of a specific demand for a segment of rural tourism in grape-growing areas. This has solidified a segment of tourists and sparked discussions among national and international stakeholders on potential strategies to support this growth. Concurrently, practitioners and scholars have become increasingly interested in this phenomenon, leading to a multidisciplinary debate on wine tourism (Carlsen, 2004; Gómez et al., 2019; Kotur, 2023).

Preliminary studies have offered various definitions and conceptualizations of wine tourism in this evolving debate. There is a general agreement that wine tourism involves travel primarily related to wine attractions and activities, such as visiting wineries, vineyards, events, festivals and shows (Getz, 2000; Hall, 1996). A widely recognized definition by Hall et al. (2000) describes wine tourism as visiting vineyards, wineries, wine festivals and shows for tasting and experiencing a grape wine region. Charters and Ali-Knight (2002) expand on this, highlighting the inclusion of wine, food, art, tasting experiences, cellar door activities and cultural tours in the wine tourism experience. Carlsen and Charters (2006) argue that wine tourism should also encompass architecture, heritage, local foods and events, making “arts, wine and food the main elements” of the wine tourism product, providing a unique lifestyle package. Byrd et al. (2016) further identify core and supplementary services while suggesting that wine tourism is more than just visiting wineries or vineyards; it should include outdoor recreation, heritage and cultural touring.

More recent discussions have focused on how wine tourism is adapting to contemporary changes in consumer preferences, technological advancements and broader shifts in the travel and tourism industry while identifying some significant trends. The concept of sustainability is integral to the future of wine tourism, involving not only environmental stewardship, but also fostering local communities and preserving cultural heritage (Nave et al., 2021; Montella, 2017; Dias et al., 2023; Martínez-Falcó et al., 2024). Consumers are increasingly seeking sustainable and health-conscious options in wine tourism. Growing demand for organic, biodynamic and low-alcohol wines reflects broader concerns about health and environmental impact (Castellini & Samoggia, 2018; Deroover et al., 2021). Innovation is at the forefront of modern wine tourism, particularly during the pandemic (Garibaldi & Pozzi, 2020). Technologies like virtual reality

and augmented reality are transforming how tourists engage with wine regions, offering immersive experiences that transcend physical boundaries (Santos et al., 2019; Atwill & Atwill, 2020; Garibaldi, 2022; Sears & Weatherbee, 2023). Tourists are also increasingly seeking immersive and co-created experiences that go beyond traditional wine tastings, including food and wine pairing events, vineyard tours and cultural experiences that provide deeper insights into the wine-making process and local heritage (Carlsen & Boksberger, 2015; Rachão et al., 2021; Carvalho et al., 2023). Effective marketing is therefore essential in distinguishing wine tourism destinations in a competitive global market (Gómez-Rico et al., 2023). Successful strategies include, for instance, implementing national and regional development plans, crafting compelling narratives around wine and its cultural context and leveraging the power of social media.

In Italy, wine production spans all regions and holds significant economic, territorial, historical, social and cultural importance. The cultivation of grapes has led to a diverse range of rural landscapes and a variety of wines, each distinct in terms of grape varieties, terroir, sensory characteristics and historical and cultural significance. This diversity is represented by 529 certified wines, six tangible and intangible assets recognized as World Heritage Sites, three UNESCO Creative Cities of Gastronomy and two rural landscapes listed in the FAO's Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems program (Garibaldi, 2024). In this context, wine tourism has emerged as an attractive form of tourism since the 2000s, resulting in a flow of tourists who travel to established Italian wine regions to visit vineyards and wineries with the landscape, as well as the cultural, historical and social contexts of which the wines are an expression.

A growing number of studies have highlighted the promising prospects of wine tourism in Italy (e.g., Del Chiappa et al., 2016; Garibaldi, 2018; Canovi & Pucciarelli, 2019; Garibaldi, 2020; Seccia & Garibaldi, 2021). However, rapid changes within the industry require continuous investigation of tourists' behavioural patterns and the suppliers' innovations.

This chapter describes the unique characteristics of wine tourism in Italy and discusses some of the main trends influencing this industry at the national level. The first section provides an overview of wine tourism systems, including the main initiatives promoted nationally. Drawing from most recent research on food and wine tourism in Italy, the second section explores demand behavioural patterns, focusing on major trends shaping the industry. Finally, the last section suggests key policies that may ensure a more robust and sustainable future of wine tourism.

## II. WINE TOURISM IN ITALY: A NATIONAL OVERVIEW

In Italy, wine plays a crucial role in attracting tourists. It has become a key element in drawing Italian travellers, evolving from a mere holiday interest to a significant part of the overall tourist experience and standing among primary motivators for travel (Romano & Natilli, 2009; Cinelli Colombini, 2015; Garibaldi, 2018; 2019; 2020).

Wine tourism accounts for around 14 million travellers and same-day visitors annually, generating approximately €2.9 billion. The average tourist's expenditure can be up to €400 and includes €89 for wine purchase and €46 for wine harvest tourism (Associazione Città del Vino, 2024a).

The tourism offer centred on wine is a composite system with different products, services and experiences. Wineries represent the core attraction. Their proposals have evolved from basic tastings and visits to hospitality services and enriched activities such as cultural events, concerts, exhibitions, wellness treatments, cooking classes, themed dinners, sensory experiences and sports activities to meet new customers' needs. Today, wineries attract a broad range of tourists interested in the region's heritage and cultural tourism focused on landscape, rural culture and wine traditions.

Italy also accounts for 103 Wine and Food Routes, mostly concentrated in Tuscany (20) and Veneto (16) (Garibaldi, 2022). These routes are marked and promoted with appropriate signage that highlight wine-producing areas' natural, environmental and cultural features. They are designed to connect vineyards and wineries that are open to the public, offering a curated journey through the country's rich oenological heritage (Festa et al., 2020). Established by Italian Law n. 268/1999, these Wine Routes are described as "routes marked and promoted with appropriate signage, highlighting natural, environmental and cultural features, along with vineyards and wineries that are open to the public, individually or collectively." They connect wineries, restaurants, hotels, wine bars and other facilities, using the region's typical wines as a cultural and physical link among participants. In 2006, the Wine Routes were further regulated under European guidelines through The European Charter of Wine Tourism, linking tourism development with wine culture, including vineyards, wine and the surrounding area.

Wine museums represent a growing attraction for travellers, as they preserve and communicate wine culture while educating and entertaining visitors. Italy accounts for 58 wine museums (Garibaldi, 2023); they are widespread

throughout the country, testifying to the richness of Italian wine production. Remarkable examples are MUVIT, the Wine Museum of Torgiano (Umbria) and WiMu, the Barolo Wine Museum (Piedmont). The former offers a comprehensive exploration of wine's role over 5,000 years, with over 3,000 artefacts illustrating wine's influence in various fields, including art, literature, religion and iconography (Fondazione Lungarotti Onlus, 2024). The latter is an interactive and emotional journey through the culture and tradition of wine and its pairing with arts, cinema, music and literature (WiMu, 2024).

Events related to wine tourism also play a crucial role, acting as a bridge between producers and visitors who engage in various activities, tastings and even direct purchases of food and wine products. This phenomenon is widespread locally in Italy, featuring numerous festivals, fairs and traditional events. These gatherings allow consumers to deepen their understanding of the history and origins of wine products, attracting a diverse audience, including newcomers who may become potential customers and visitors. Additionally, national events enhance the impact of word-of-mouth recommendations and personal experiences, which are powerful tools for communication, persuasion and attraction (Seccia & Garibaldi, 2021).

Two associations have played a fundamental role in the development and success of wine tourism in Italy. The National Association of Wine Cities was founded in 1987 and today includes over 550 members, including 430 cities. It emphasises the protection of vineyards as essential to the landscape and agricultural productivity. The association advocates for policies integrating vineyard preservation into public planning and promotes collaborative partnerships between public and private sectors to support sustainable local development (Associazione Città del Vino, 2024b). The Wine Tourism Movement, established in 1993, is another vital organisation supporting wine tourism growth in Italy. With over 800 associated wineries across 20 regions, the movement focuses on promoting high-quality wine tourism services. It organises significant events such as Cantine Aperte, where wineries open their doors to the public, allowing visitors to engage with winemakers, experience wine production firsthand and enjoy local food pairings. These events are cultural experiences and critical economic drivers, attracting tourists and supporting local businesses (Movimento Turismo del Vino, 2024).

The wine tourism offer is regulated by Ministerial Decree n.2779 of March 12, 2019, which provides guidelines and standards for tourism activities. This decree equates wine tourism with agritourism, including fiscal considerations. It sets standards such as a minimum of three days of operation per week or

season, the use of booking tools, informative signage, company web pages, glassware for tastings and staff training. Wine tourism activities include tastings, guided vineyard tours, educational, cultural and recreational initiatives, harvest experiences and tastings of other agri-food products.

### III. EMERGING TRENDS IN ITALIAN WINE TOURISM

Wine tourism is an evolving practice, continuously adapting to changing consumer preferences, technological advancements and broader shifts in the travel and tourism industry. These transformations are redefining how the wine tourism experience is created, implemented and promoted. Three main trends emerge from the most recent studies: winescape, sustainability and enriched experiences.

#### **From wine to winescape**

The growing importance of intangible heritage in travellers' holiday experiences (Richards, 2012) has raised their desire to understand wine's cultural and social meanings. Today, wine is no longer the only factor driving the choice of destinations and activities; tourists seek the unique combination of vintages, natural landscapes, local traditions, collective identities, architecture and artefacts (Du Rand & Heath, 2006; Montanari, 2006; Harvey, 2009) - what Peters defines as 'winescape' (Peters, 2018).

Evidence from the Italian market confirms this shift in travellers' mindset: 66% of national tourists consider wine holidays opportunities for cultural enrichment, as they can meet local producers and learn stories about the wineries, wines, people and places (Garibaldi, 2024). The unique 'winescape' of Italy - which accounts for 529 certified wines, six tangible and intangible assets recognized as World Heritage Sites, three UNESCO Creative Cities for gastronomy and two rural landscapes listed in the FAO Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems program - certainly influences the attitude of national tourists to see wine holidays as cultural trips.

The main challenge in conveying the intangible wine heritage relies on authenticity (Kim & Bonn, 2016). Rather than focusing on the issue of whether the wine 'objects' are authentic, it is worthwhile to understand tourists' perceptions (Wang, 1999). Italian travellers relate the concept of authenticity with tastings of traditional recipes based on local products (62%), tourist activities where they experience well-preserved 'winescapes' (38%) and encounters with local people (26%) (Garibaldi, 2024).

### **Sustainable wine tourism experiences**

Travellers are increasingly drawn to sustainable holiday options, such as green or community-friendly transportation modes, accommodations and activities. Sustainability's influence on decision-making is not just a trend, but a significant factor that is often a primary consideration alongside value for money and the number and quality of services and infrastructure.

Similar attention is now being paid to wine and food tourism, with travellers showing a growing appreciation for green and socially responsible destinations and activities. This shift in preferences is evident in the Italian market (Garibaldi, 2021; 2023). As for environmental sustainability, 75% of national travellers are more willing to participate in experiences that offer local wines and dishes based on regional and local products. They also value responsible and green company behaviours such as the adoption of waste sorting systems (73%), the use of renewable energy sources (66%) and water-saving systems (66%). Regarding social and ethical initiatives that can drive tourists' decisions, 68% of Italian travellers consider ongoing company projects to help the local community important. The willingness to take wine and food experiences also increases when tourists can buy souvenirs and products from local producers (67%) and visit companies that employ disadvantaged people (64%) or adopt ethical business policies (64%) (Garibaldi, 2024).

Recent data also highlight the critical role of local producers in promoting sustainable wine tourism experience, thus encountering the growing demand from modern tourists. Italian wineries and farms are increasingly adopting green and social initiatives (Reale Mutua Assicurazioni & Confagricoltura, 2024); their commitment to sustainability can become a value for tourists. For instance, the Insula Beach Club of Planeta Estate wine resort (Sicily) promotes awareness initiatives of marine litter while offering its customers local food and company wines (Planeta Estate, 2024). "Turismabile" project connects wineries and wine experiences for people with different types of disabilities (physical, sensory, intellectual and mental disabilities) in the Langhe and Roero area (Piedmont), increasing their accessibility to this market (Turismabile, 2024).

### **Enriched wine tourism experiences**

Over the years, the consumption patterns in wine tourism have undergone a significant shift. The traditional focus on tasting local wines and interacting with local producers has been replaced by a growing desire for unique and comprehensive experiences (Therkelsen, 2015; Garibaldi & Pozzi, 2018;

Richards, 2021). This evolution has given rise to new connections with the outdoors, well-being, culture and hospitality (Garibaldi, 2022; UN Tourism, 2023).

The pandemic has moved travellers' requests to nature, outdoor activities and gastronomy. The European Travel Commission surveys have monitored tourists' interests during and after the emergency, reporting an increasing desire to enjoy natural landscapes and gastronomic activities on holiday. The most recent survey ranks these experiences among the top two for European citizens' vacations in 2024, accounting for 17.8% and 16.7% of all preferences (ETC, 2024). Similarly, In the Italian market, 26% of national tourists are willing to participate in active experiences in outdoor spaces, such as wine trekking in the vineyards, bike tours around wineries and grape harvests (Garibaldi, 2024). Today, Italian wine destinations and attractions offer numerous proposals: for instance, Valdichiana Living (Tuscany) organizes an e-bike tour to discover the Montepulciano "Vino Nobile" and visit wineries and the 'winescape'; Argiolas Winery (Sardinia) offers a guided trekking tour around the vineyards to its customers.

Well-being is another popular and emerging priority. The need to detach from daily routines and take care of mental and physical recovery on holiday has grown recently (Boooking.com, 2023; 2024), leading to new proposals combining wine and wellness. Italy accounts for many initiatives of this kind, ranging from wine resorts and spas - such as 'Roccafiore' (Sicily) and 'Filodivino' (Marche) - to yoga courses and art classes in the vineyard - like those offered by Cinque Quinti (Piedmont) and Barone Ricasoli (Tuscany) wineries. Today, tourists warmly welcome these experiences; 35% of Italian tourists want to participate in well-being experiences centred on wine (Garibaldi, 2024).

As mentioned, wine travel has recently become an opportunity for cultural enrichment (Garibaldi, 2024). Wineries are no longer attractions only for wine lovers, but also for those seeking immersive cultural experiences. Italy offers valuable examples of cultural pairings. 'Rocca di Frassinello' (Tuscany) and 'Ca' del Bosco' (Lombardy), for instance, are wineries that have successfully transformed the production site into a place where to experience culture; the former organizes cultural events inside the production site and has established an exhibition-museum on the relationship between Etruscans and wine, while the latter has created a unique art exhibition with sculptures adorning the cellar and the vineyards. Similarly, 'Castello Banfi' is a historical cellar in a medieval castle, a place to live and experience, with luxury-themed accommodation, two

gourmet restaurants and a wine shop. ‘Antinori nel Chianti Classico’ (Tuscany) and ‘Tenuta Castelbuono’ (Umbria) provide examples of modern-designed wineries that have become must-see attractions for people travelling in these regions (Seccia & Garibaldi, 2021).

The last emerging pairing concerns hospitality. Travellers’ interest in holistic experiences has led wine and food attractions to enrich and diversify food services and accommodation facilities (Richards, 2021). Data from the Italian market clearly shows appreciation for new tasting concepts (46% of preferences), like gourmet and candlelight dinners or aperitifs in wineries. Many wineries have implemented their offer with these services and 17 of them also features Michelin-starred restaurants. The same happens for accommodation: 23% of Italian travellers would like to stay in wine and food hotels instead of more popular establishments like hotels, bed and breakfasts and farmhouses (Garibaldi, 2024). An example of themed accommodations comes from the ‘Vinum Hotel’ chain (South Tyrol). The chain accounts for 20 hotels near wineries that offer services and experiences centred on wine. It also differentiates members’ proposals into five themes - i.e., wine and tradition, wine and design, wine and romance, wine and active, wine and wellness (Vinum Hotels, 2024).

#### **IV. THE FUTURE OF WINE TOURISM**

Wine tourism in Italy has experienced significant growth in the past few decades and the potential for further expansion is promising (Garibaldi, 2023; Garibaldi, 2024). Today, wines and winescapes have become attractions for domestic and international travellers, enhancing the appeal of the destinations and serving as a substantial source of income for wine regions, the industry and local communities. The increasing interest from travellers has prompted destinations and suppliers to enhance and innovate their products, services and experiences. As discussed above, recent studies indicate a shift from traditional offerings to more enriched experiences focusing on culture, sustainability, outdoor activities, well-being and hospitality, reflecting similar trends that have been observed also in other countries (Deroover et al., 2021; Dias et al., 2023; Carvalho et al., 2023; Martínez-Falcó et al., 2024)

In the future, the wine and travel industry should step up efforts to adapt to an increasingly dynamic environment. Analysing the sector and its trends allows for identifying four key policy priorities.

National and regional strategies can ensure a more robust and sustainable future for the wine tourism industry. Intra- and inter-sectoral collaboration among public and private stakeholders can foster knowledge and resource sharing while stimulating the development of innovative products, services and experiences.

Leveraging competencies is crucial to maintaining and improving the industry's competitiveness. Wine tourism's evolving nature necessitates continuous skill enhancement for the workforce. The demand for qualified professionals will rise in the coming years, especially among companies showing better growth performance and meeting more 'advanced' demand.

The sector also requires more and better data to understand how the market is changing. The recent initiation of a critical review process by the World Tourism Organization (UN Tourism) and the International Organisation of Vine and Wine (OIV) is a step in the right direction. In Italy, the Italian Association of Gastronomy Tourism and the Italian Institute for Monitoring Agro-food (ISMEA) are working to implement the method following UN Tourism and OIV recommendations, further emphasising the importance of data in the industry.

Finally, embracing digitalization can unlock new opportunities for the industry. Destinations and suppliers should accelerate the adoption of market intelligence tools and integrate digital elements into pre- and post-experience phases while focusing on the human approach of the "during".

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