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Leading perspectives to present Bulgaria as a destination for wine tourism

Santana Hristina

*Doctor of Economics and Management, Travel Consultant, University of Economics - Varna
Bulgaria, Varna*

Аннотация

The current paper's goal is to outline some leading perspectives for destination Bulgaria to develop wine tourism as an alternative form of tourism attracting specific tourist segment. Wine and gastronomic tours are gaining great popularity around the world. They gain significant recognition in the Bulgarian travel and tourism industry as an alternative to mass tourism practices. Wine tourism creates new opportunities for the development of certain regions that remain off the side of the traditional tourist routes and contribute local communities' incomes. The interest in this type of tourism is growing due to the fact that it is associated with a series of events that improve the image of destinations. All these circumstances determine the importance of the topic. To fulfil the goal set at the beginning, various research methods were comprehended, such as: research of theoretical studies; processing, analysis and systematization of statistical data; empirical methods and studying. The first part of the publication examines main definitions of wine tourism, giving a short historical review of this alternative form of tourism. The second part of the report is dedicated to the results of the analysis — revealing the resource potential and some significant wine cellars, distinct for visitors and wine professionals. The final part consists of outlined possibilities and perspectives for development, summarizing some research results.

Ключевые слова: wine tourism, alternative tourism, resource potential, perspectives

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Ссылка для цитирования:

¹ **Introduction.** In the era of mass tourism, wine-related travel forms its own profile and independent market niche. Wine and gastronomic tours are gaining great popularity around the world in recent years, no exception for Bulgaria too. According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO), this type of travel is becoming a key factor when fully exploring a given destination for tourists from Europe, Asia and the Americas. For them, wine, gastronomy, culture and nature enrich the experience.

² Wine tourism is one of the fast-growing forms of alternative tourism, which has gained significant recognition in the Bulgarian travel and tourism industry. One of the reasons is that wine tourism, in addition to being often associated with tastings, includes discourse about wine technology, grape harvesting, preparing grapes for fermentation, as well as buying wine directly from the winery. That is way, Bulgaria is easily becoming an attractive destination for wine tourism: there are traditions of production, compact clusters of wineries that make quality wines and an increasing number of places that welcome guests. Wine tourism in Bulgaria is also developing thanks to the appropriate available conditions and resources, stimulating its transformation into a destination for this type of alternative tourism. Moreover, wineries started to offer additional services such as: wine workshops, yoga among the vines or barrels, wine picnics, wine bike tours, grape harvest participation, wine and gourmet tastings.

³ **Hypothesis.** “Liquid gold”, or what we call wine, occupies a particularly important role in Bulgarian history, way of life of its population and their culture. More than often this alternative form of tourism is correlated with collection of intertwining stories — on earth; to people engaged in winemaking; of the vine varieties; of ideologies; the specifics of service technology; of traditions, even of fashion. Wine tourism creates new opportunities for the development of certain areas that remain off the side of the traditional tourist routes. It has the potential to promote entirely new routes and to position destination Bulgaria on the map of the European wine road. One of its many advantages is that it can be practiced year-round. All these circumstances determine the importance of the topic. **The purpose** of the publication is to outline the perspectives of destination Bulgaria to develop as a wine-tourism destination. To achieve the goal, the author will analyze and evaluate the potential of the wine regions, their resources and will discover some good practices. On these specific grounds the attempt is to reveal the possibilities and benefits for destination Bulgaria to present itself on the global travel market through this alternative form of tourism. To achieve **the goal**, the author emphasises on the following **leading tasks**: – Definition of the wine tourism; – Analysis of the wine-regions of the country; – Outlining some leading tendencies for wine tourism development in Bulgaria; – Revealing opportunities and perspectives for the wine tourism in Bulgaria.

⁴ To achieve the goal and fulfil the tasks set, various **research methods** were comprehended — research of theoretical studies; processing, analysis and systematization of statistical data; empirical methods and studying. The main limitations in the implementation of the research are primarily related to the lack of accurate

statistical information regarding the practice of wine tourism, the absence of public access to specific studies and analyses.

5 **Theoretical background.** The travel and tourism industry unites various components and specific activities in the process of its development and improvement. According to M. A. Vodenska [18], it consists of three main elements: *dynamic* — travel to a chosen destination; *static* — staying in the destination; an element that derives from the previous two ones and deals with the *impacts* of the economic, physical and social subsystems (being in direct or indirect influence). Compared to mass tourism, alternative tourism, such as wine tourism, evolved later, but there is already a wide variety of its types and forms. Reportedly, the process led to a significant growth in the national tourism product, which is why scholars and professionals believe that it is one of the fastest growing segments in the travel and tourism industry [13; 14].

6 Wine tourism focuses on visits to wine regions, wine cellars and tasting rooms. Thus, tourists are given the opportunity to enjoy a variety of wines, learn more about the traditions, food and cultural heritage of the exact spots. G. Rafailova and S. Kadieva [14] maintain that the essential characteristic of wine tourism is the meaning and significance of the term “wine”, and hence the definition of wine tourism. In a broad sense, this term is embedded in the viticultural cycle — “vineyard — primary wine production — secondary wine production — distribution — wine consumption”. The Australian Association [1] of wine producers have another definition: “*Wine tourism is a visit to wineries and wine regions to experience the unique qualities of the modern Australian lifestyle associated with the enjoyment of wine, food, scenery and culture*”. In 2016, Mincheva and Marinov [12] researched the attitudes of the so-called wine tourists in Bulgaria. They focus on aspects such as wine preferences, frequency of consumption, frequency of traveling with wine, etc. The most popular motivation according to them for undertaking this type of travel was identified as “wine tasting and learning about winemaking”. Another scholar [11] introduces the term of Viticulture, stating that this specific style combined with the process of winemaking compounds the basis of wine tourism. Marinov [11] revealed that viticulture consists of: conducting research and creating applied practices regarding: the origin and distribution of the vine; vine biology (morphological structure); vine ecology (climate and microclimate, latitude, altitude, proximity to water bodies, topography and exposure, and soil); propagation of the vine, creation of vines, pruning and formation of the vine, cultivation of fruit-bearing vines; harvesting and storing grapes; ampelography (grape varieties).

7 Wine tourism is also comprehended as “the development of all tourism and leisure activities dedicated to getting to know everything related to the vine and wine — regions, terroir, vineyard and winery activities, wine consumption culture, accompanying activities and art”. Their customers attend traditional customs and folklore performances, which become additional prerequisites for the development and attractiveness of the destination. According to I. V. Terziyska [17], wine, as a product, is the main component of wine tourism. Therefore, researching this specific tourism, it is necessary to study the quality and varieties of the vineyards as well as the structure of the production bases.

8 At the beginning of the 90s, the concept of wine tourism, also known as enotourism, was officially presented. In Bulgaria, wine tourism became popular during

the socialist regime in the 1990s, when the first organized tours to Bulgaria began to be offered in London [10]. For more than 20 years (1961–1985), our country has almost continuously been ranked among the top 5 wine exporters, states Anderson's statistical analysis [2]. We can assume that the purpose of a tourist visit is not only wine tasting, but also enjoying the vineyards in the region, participation in grape harvesting, familiarization with the production and technological process, purchase of wine. Participation in lectures, seminars and special events dedicated to wine tourism in Bulgaria is becoming more and more popular and profitable at the same time. By analyzing the wine industry in the destination, we will also take into account modern trends and the current state of the regions where wine is produced. On this basis will be outlined the perspectives for further development.

⁹ **Research and evaluation in the development of tourism in Bulgaria's wine regions.** Bulgaria ranks among the leading countries producing quality wines. This is a result not only of the excellent quality of viticulture and vinification, which have been the basis of wine production in this part of Europe since the time of the Thracians, but also due to the extremely suitable geographical and climatic conditions. Bulgaria's potential for growing vines and producing wine is historically determined. The mild climate, combining the fertility of the vine contribute to the grapes ripening bathed in sunlight, make it rich in sugars and develop a strong aroma and taste. Bulgaria acquires appropriate resources that favor the development of wine tourism [6–8; 11; 13; 16]. On its map there are two distinguished main regions for the production of regional wine — the Danube Plain and the Thracian Plain, including 5 wine-growing regions and 51 regions for the production of wines with a guaranteed controlled designation of origin [5]. According to data from the Executive Agency for Vine and Wine in Bulgaria, there are 282 wineries registered and nearly 100 of them offer visits and tastings [3].

¹⁰ 1. DANUBE PLAIN — Northern wine-growing region. The Danube plain is the northernmost physical-geographical area in Bulgaria. It is also the largest plain territory in the country and occupies approximately 30 % of the area of Bulgaria. In this region, there are good conditions for growing mostly red grape varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Pamid, Gamza, Pinot Noir, but white varieties of very good quality also grow here — Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Riesling, Aligote, Tamyanka, Misket. Quality white dry wines, naturally sparkling wines using the classic technology, as well as quality red wines with a rich fruity aroma are produced here. The traditions in viticulture and winemaking are very deep and revered, therefore in this region there are some of the oldest and largest wine centers in the country — in Ruse, Svishtov, Vidin, Lyaskovets, Suhindol and Pleven. In the region of Pleven is the only Wine Museum in the country.

¹¹ 2. BLACK SEA REGION — Eastern wine-growing region. The eastern viticultural and wine region covers Ludogorie, Dobruja and 25–40 km. inland from the Black Sea coastline. The mild climate here is very favourable for the cultivation of the white varieties Muscat Ottonel, Dimyat, Chardonnay, Juni blanc, Traminer, Sauvignon blanc, which produce grapes of excellent quality here. Some of the best dry and semi-dry wines in our country are produced in this region. About 53% of the white grape varieties are concentrated in this region. In the Northern Black Sea region of Bulgaria, mainly white varieties such as Dimyat, Riesling, Muscat Otonel, Chardonnay, June Blanc, Traminer, Sauvignon Blanc are grown, which produce grapes of excellent quality

here. There are large producers such as: Khan Krum, Vinex Preslav and LVK Targovishte, Domain Boyar — Shumen, Osmar Wine Cellar, Dimyat Varna, Vinprom Alvina.

¹² The varieties traditionally grown in the Southern Black Sea region are white, mainly Chardonnay, Dimyat, Rkatsiteli, Muscat and Sauvignon Blanc. Of the reds, cabernet, merlot and pamid prevail in the varietal palette. The two prominent wine centers are Pomorie and Burgas.

¹³ 3. ROSE VALLEY — Sub-Balkan wine region. This is the smallest wine-growing region of Bulgaria. It is located south of Stara Planina and covers the territories between the Balkans and the Eastern part of lower Sredna Gora. Here, mainly white dry and semi-dry wines are produced. The wines have a characteristic pleasant fruity aroma, fresh and harmonious taste. Those from the local variety Cherven Misket are one of the best representatives of white wines in our country and are distinguished by a rich fruity aroma, an elegant body and a gentle enough memorable aftertaste. This is where the variety “Padarevski Misket” originated, which later became popular throughout Bulgaria as “Sungurlarski Red Misket”. In the Sub-Balkan vineyard — “Rosova Dolina” wine region, white grape varieties are grown: Misquet, Muscat Otonel, Rkatsiteli, Chardonnay, June Blanc, Traminer, German Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc, and red varieties: Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Syrah, Pinot Noir and pamid. Main wine centers are: Hisarya, Karlovo, Moskovets, Shivachevo, Karnobat, Sungurlare. Famous producers are Wine Cellar “Rozova Dolina” — Karlovo, “Vinex Slavyantsi”, Vinprom “Karnobat”, “Chateau Vetroviti Hulmove”, Cellar “Starosel”.

¹⁴ 4. THRACIAN LOWLANDS — Southern wine-growing region. The southern wine-growing region — Thracian Lowlands, covers the municipalities around the regions of Plovdiv, Haskovo, Pazardzhik, Stara Zagora, Sliven, Kardjali, Yambol and, quite formally, Smolyan. White and red grape varieties are grown, but red wines dominate in quantity and quality. There are many main wine-growing centers in the Eastern Thracian wine-growing region: Chirpan, Parvomai, Stara Zagora, Nova Zagora, Korten, etc. Red varieties such as cabernet sauvignon, merlot, mavrud, and recently quite successfully also pinot noir are grown. Along with powerful reds, in recent years increasingly better results have been achieved with white Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Muscat and Traminer. Remarkable fine naturally sparkling wines are also produced here. In the western parts of the Upper Thracian Lowland, it is assumed to be the birthplace of the Bulgarian Mavrud and Pamid varieties. Apart from these two varieties, Cabernet Sauvignon, Rubin, Mavrud, Pamid, Merlot, Syrah, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot, etc. are mostly grown. Prominent wine centers are Asenovgrad, Septemvri, Brezovo, Brestovitsa, Perushtitsa and Karabunar. In recent years, Sakar and the Eastern Rhodope foothills of this region has been among the most interesting for growing vineyards in the country. In this part, the terrains are incredibly diverse and excellent for growing wonderful grapes. The vineyards around Harmanli, Lyubimets, Svilengrad, Ivaylovgrad and Stambolovo have been famous for their magnificent red wines for centuries. Sakar is a dome-shaped border mountain in South-Eastern Bulgaria between the Maritsa, Tundzha, Sokolitsa and Sazliyka rivers. Her ancient name is Masteira, translated as "Sacred". The land is sandy, stony and poor, but excellent for growing wonderful grapes. Some of the best quality Merlot wines are produced here. In this part of the Thracian Lowland, Malkata Zvezda, Stambolovo Winery, Haskovo Winery, Castra Rubra,

Katarzyna Estate, Terra Tangra, Villa Lyubimets, Light Castle, etc. are located. All of them have already proven themselves both on the Bulgarian and the world market.

¹⁵ 5. STRUMA RIVER VALLEY — Southwest wine-growing region. This area occupies the lands south of the town of Dupnitsa and is significantly influenced by the warm air currents along the Mesta and Struma rivers. Compared to the others, it does not have a large area, but on the other hand, it is the warmest and most specific wine-growing region in Bulgaria. Mainly merlot, cabernet sauvignon, cabernet franc and Shiroka Melnishka loza (broad Miller vine), emblematic of the area since ancient times are prevalent. The last one is an exotic and very specific wine variety. The produced wines of the Shiroka Melnishka loza, after prolonged aging under suitable conditions in the presence of oak, develop a unique character with an exotic and very pleasant nuance in taste. Leading role in the region with their quality wines with their own character are wine producers such as Damianitsa, Vini Boshkilov, Logodaj, Sintika, Medi Valei, Winery Mira, who sell local wines with great success, not only in the region, but also throughout the country and abroad.

¹⁶ **Results and discussions.** Despite the good traditions in viticulture, winemaking and tourism, as well as the availability of sufficient numbers of wine cellars, no complete tourism products have yet been developed, known in the world practice as “Wine Roads”. However, the Ministry of tourism has developed nine destinations for wine and culinary tourism and aim to compete the recognized world roads. Assessing the revealed areas has a positive impact on the development and establishment of Bulgaria as a tourist destination for wine tourism. This contributes the achieving of identity in the marketing management of destinations by synchronizing the management models of local and national authorities.

¹⁷ Considering the pointed-out prerequisites, special attention needs to be paid to the cellars having own hotel establishments. Bulgaria as a developing country of wine tourism is proud to present some distinguished wine estates. Taking the Western part of the country, Bononia estate winery and resort is a must to outline. The main building intertwines three centuries — the 19th, 20th and 21st, and guests have the opportunity to see everything that the owners have managed to preserve and restore. The complex has its own character, equipped with the highest class of materials, compliments and services, enjoying the beautiful view of the Danube River. Bononia Estate Restaurant is modern and cosy, pampering its customers with delicious dishes of local products.

¹⁸ “Sedem Pokolenia” (Seven generations) wine complex is located in close proximity to the Danube River, 30 km west of the city of Ruse, and offers its guests cosiness, an authentic Bulgarian atmosphere, combined in a unique way with American luxury. The unique location of the chateau provides its visitors with a magnificent view of the Danube River and its vineyards, as well as the opportunity to visit the medieval town of Cherven, the Orlova Chuka cave, the Ivanovo rock churches, the Basarbov rock monastery “St. Dimitar Basarbovski”, nature park "Rusenski Lom" and the natural phenomenon “Stulpishte”, which are located in the immediate vicinity. All these prerequisites turn this complex into an attractive center for wine, family and cultural and historical tourism.

19 Wine and Spa Hotel Chukara inspires rest and relaxation away from the big city, the stress and dynamics of everyday life. Located in the picturesque hills of Stara planina and picturesque Tryavna represents a pure inspiration by the life in the countryside. Chukara Wine and Spa Hotel offers all guests the opportunity to spend time in nature, in the fresh air, with their closest people, undertake bike tours and forest tracking, botanic tours in the region of Gabrovo and Tryavna.

20 The Uva Nestum family winery is located 1.5 km from the town of Gotse Delchev close to the emblematic villages of Leshten and Kovachevitsa. Nestled between four majestic mountains, the boutique winery Uva Nestum has 17 acres of its own, naturally pure vineyards, where Rubin, Syrah, Cabernet Franc, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon varieties are grown with great love and care. The boutique cellar is part of the Uva Nestum Wine & SPA complex, winner of various architecture awards, combines discreet luxury and harmony amidst the greenery of a 62-acre park.

21 Yalovo Winery is a small boutique cellar located in the foothills of Stara planina, 15 km south of Veliko Tarnovo. It is housed in the massive stone building of the former school in the village of Yalovo. It was built at the beginning of the 20th century, but in the 1950s the school closed its doors and the building was transferred to Civil Defence quarters. In 2014, the reconstruction of the building and its transformation into a winery began. The main production is located in a suitable annex, and a former classroom is a room for aging the wine in barrels. The customers who desire to spend an overnight there have the opportunity to accommodate in the partnering establishment of Raya hotel.

22 Zlaten Rozhen is one of the emblematic wineries near Melnik. The story begins in 2009. with the purchase of several small vineyards. In 2014 the first wines were bottled in the own base in the village of Kapatovo, and in 2018 a tasting room was also opened, which welcomes wine lovers all year round. Zlaten Rozhen has its own boutique hotel next to the Rozhen Monastery (emblematic culture inheritance in the village of Rozhen), 15 km from the winery.

23 Zornitsa Family Estate is located in the Struma Valley, 15 km southeast of Sandanski and 5 km from Melnik, among vineyards and mountain peaks. The estate has six elegant villas, a year-round warm outdoor eco pool, terroir signature cuisine and a rich selection of wines. Restaurant aEstivum emphasizes local and organic produce from the eco farm and estate gardens, and our wine cellar features both the best of the region and world-renowned wines. Lovers of mountain and cultural tourism can choose between fabulously beautiful eco-trails or a walk to one of the nearby sights — the Rozhen Monastery, Rupite, the house of Venerable Stoina in Zlatolist, the Melnish pyramids.

24 Midalidare Wine Estate is located in the vast hilly countryside in the heart of Sredna Gora, Mogilovo village and is home to two wineries, built at either end of the village and surrounded by 160 hectares of carefully cultivated vineyards. The smaller winery, located in the western part of the village, was built in 2009, and in 2011 — at the eastern end of the village, the second winery was also built. The two wineries work in parallel to maximize process optimization and minimize the time needed to transport the grapes to the processing site. Attractive wine tours are offered, during which guests of

the estate can go not only along the wine route, but also visit the Varietal Library and the Wine Museum, after which they can test their knowledge in an interactive game. The Estate possesses own hotel — Midalidare Hotel & SPA, which revives a two-century old school building to turn it into a cosy place for guests. In the last couple of years, they became host to one of the highest ranked Rock festivals in Bulgaria, attracting numerous visitors who combine wine tours and rock music adventures.

²⁵ Boutique hotel Soli Invicto (translated as “the invincible sun”) rises above the Edoardo Miroglio cellar, opened in 2002 with first production in 2005. The cellar is located in the central part of the massif of approximately 220 hectares of vineyards that cover the slope of the hill “Sveti Ilia”, near the village of Elenovo. It offers wonderful conditions for rest and wine-culinary tourism, fishing and visits to cultural and historical sites that abound in the region.

²⁶ Salla Estate Winery was established in 2010. It is located in the village of Blaskovo, municipality of Provadia. The village is located in the heart of the famous Sirta Provadian plateau, only 60 km from the city of Varna. The winery owns 300 decares of its own vineyards, located right next to the cellar. In addition to a wine tasting room, the winery has a cosy Bulgarian-style restaurant, a guest house, a picnic area, horse stables, picturesque vineyards and caring staff.

²⁷ At 12 km from Targovishte, on the remains of the Neolithic and ancient Thracian artifacts is the village of Ovcharovo. A unique location, an amazing view and a fresh breeze coming from the Preslav mountain — in this wonderful place is located the “Villa Ovcharovo” Winery and Hotel Complex. The Villa is accommodated in the protected area of Urumovo Lale, and borders the vineyard.

²⁸ Zaara Estate is a boutique winery located above the village of Glavan, in the embrace of Sakar Mountain. The complex welcomes its customers with luxury hotel and restaurant base, elegant atmosphere, a magnificent selection of wines from the estate's own brands Dogma and Zaara Estate. In addition — culinary specialties are prepared with products from local producers and own farm and milk factory.

²⁹ Villa Justina was founded at the end of 2006, with the idea of building a small winery that would process its own grapes into boutique wines and develop wine tourism. The park among the vineyards is a favourite destination during the summer months for both cultural events and private tastings and picnics. Since 2020, a hotel part has been built in close proximity to the winery for connoisseurs of fine wine and the authentic Bulgarian atmosphere. It consists of 4 villas, a small boutique hotel and a restaurant.

³⁰ The Starosel wine and spa tourism complex is located under the southern slopes of Sochtinska Sredna Gora, at the foot of the historic hill near the village of Starosel. In 2000 the largest Thracian royal cult center was discovered nearby. The guests of the complex enjoy unique wine therapies in the Spa center of the complex along with rich culinary and wine temptations.

³¹ The terroir of Karlovska Dolina combines the unique specifics of the region — soils, climate, topography, sunlight and heating. Kopsa Wine Cellar has 450 acres of its own vineyards. 45 % of them are occupied with the old Bulgarian variety Red Misket. The remaining varieties are Muscat Ottonel, Chardonnay, Merlot and Cabernet. In the

close proximity is the Sopot Wine Cellar, established in October 2013. It is located at 510 m above sea level in the heart of the Rose Valley, south of the city of Sopot. It is located in one of the most favorable climatic zones for viticulture in Bulgaria, between Stara Planina and Sredna Gora in the Sub-Balkan region.

³² Regional interaction is aimed at strengthening the available resources by combining them and achieving a complex, competitive tourist product. Promoting Bulgaria as a tourist destination for wine tourism, uniting tourist areas that are diverse in nature, allow a variety of opportunities to practice different types of alternative tourism. The expectations of potential customers from different market segments can be met to a greater extent. Combining the wine tourism with another alternative forms of tourism has the potential for development in the following several directions: cultural and educational tourism; river cruise tourism; adventure and ecotourism; city entertainment and shopping tourism; religious and pilgrimage tourism.

³³ **Perspectives to represent Bulgaria as a leading destination for wine tourism.** Domestic tourism is particularly important for the development of Bulgaria as a year-round destination. Tourists with a higher educational qualification are active in the global network, use electronic services and new technologies and aim to satisfy additional needs through their travels and look for additional products and different types of tourism, as well as the combination of several types of tourism. The choice of type of tourism depends on the age and level of activity of the traveller. With increasing age, the share of those practicing a form of specialized tourism increases. This is especially true for travellers over 50, many of whom avoid mass destinations even in the summer months. The possibility of a full rest and peace of mind are of primary importance in the formation of satisfaction. Good weather also contributes to good ratings, as does easy access to the destination. On the basis of the available resources in the examined areas, the traditions in wine production and its reconciliation with other types and forms of tourism, we can determine the following perspectives for the development of wine tourism. They are crucial for the promotion of the Bulgarian tourism destination and are associated with:

- Increasing the benefits of the rich cultural heritage and raising the role of the Bulgarian cities and reducing depopulation in rural areas;

- Establishing of hotel complexes, guest houses, dining and entertainment facilities, development of existing attractions to contribute the overall positive appreciation of the product;

- Increasing seasonal and permanent employment, and increasing the population, through the development of alternative tourism practices and forms of tourism. This also means take measures of human resource development, personnel qualification, training of oenologists, managers, technologists, sommeliers, tour guides, designers, engagement of representatives of the local population, thereby providing additional employment in the region;

- Increasing the income of wine producers by enriching the product range (that contribute local economy as well) by including culinary and local nature products in the offer of the wine cellars;

- Increasing the awareness of producers and processors regarding new technologies in the sector, its financing possibilities under various operational programs and projects;

– Coordination of the local government and the non-governmental sector in the direction of common efforts for the promotion of DTR. The owners of vineyards and wine cellars with an orientation towards wine tourism actually organize and offer services for information, wine tasting, animation, meals, overnight stays and others. However, at the moment they are taking an individualistic approach and are not coordinating their efforts to assemble a complete picture of the offer of opportunities for wine tourism in Bulgaria.

– Development of common strategies, network partnership and innovation through wine tours in the regions promoted by the Ministry of tourism and the regional tourist centres is an attractive addition to other types of tourism (cultural, rural, educational, vacation, etc.). Provision of specialized tourist packages adapted to the natural and anthropogenic resources, as well as the lifestyle of the local communities;

– Expansion of markets, by promoting the utility of wine and by segmenting consumer demand - not mass, but boutique production. More active participation in international tourist exchanges and fairs for the presentation of new specialized products related to wine tourism.

– Least but not last perspective is the diversification of the offer in the area and of health tourism with the use of grapes, wine and their derivative products, for which conditions have already been created.

³⁴ **Conclusions.** Based on the theoretical research and the results of the situational analysis, we could outline the following conclusions regarding the perspectives for the development of wine tourism in Bulgaria: the studied area acquires substantial natural resource potential, well-preserved and valorized cultural and historical heritage of international, national and regional importance. There are highly developed hotel and restaurant establishments compounding the superstructure — factors that favour the overall development. Good practices and traditions in viticulture and winemaking are recognized, as well as availability of a sufficient number of wine cellars. Destination Bulgaria has the potential to evolve as one of the most preferred destinations for wine tourism and the perspectives outlined have the power to fight the difficulties and establish the grounds for new tourist routes and development.

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Leading perspectives to present Bulgaria as a destination for wine tourism

Hristina Santana

*Doctor of Economics and Management, Travel Consultant, University of Economics - Varna
Bulgaria, Varna*

Abstract

The current paper's goal is to outline some leading perspectives for destination Bulgaria to develop wine tourism as an alternative form of tourism attracting specific tourist segment. Wine and gastronomic tours are gaining great popularity around the world. They gain significant recognition in the Bulgarian travel and tourism industry as an alternative to mass tourism practices. Wine tourism creates new opportunities for the development of certain regions that remain off the side of the traditional tourist routes and contribute local communities' incomes. The interest in this type of tourism is growing due to the fact that it is associated with a series of events that improve the image of destinations. All these circumstances determine the importance of the topic. To fulfil the goal set at the beginning, various research methods were comprehended, such as: research of theoretical studies; processing, analysis and systematization of statistical data; empirical methods and studying. The first part of the publication examines main definitions of wine tourism, giving a short historical review of this alternative form of tourism. The second part of the report is dedicated to the results of the analysis — revealing the resource potential and some significant wine cellars, distinct for visitors and wine professionals. The final part consists of outlined possibilities and perspectives for development, summarizing some research results.

Keywords: wine tourism, alternative tourism, resource potential, perspectives

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