

**POSSIBILITIES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF WINE
TOURISM IN SHUMEN REGION**

**POȘIBILITĂȚI PENTRU DEZVOLTAREA UNUI TURISM
OENOLOGIC ÎN REGIUNEA SHUMEN**

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Abstract: Shumen county is a traditional region for wine industry in Bulgaria. The most popular wineries are situated in the villages of Osmar and Khan Krum. The purpose of the report is to show the possibilities of developing this kind of tourism together with the wine industry. The author also suggests an itinerary for wine tourism that could affect the development of this segment.

Key-words: tourism, wine, Shumen region

Cuvinte cheie: turism, vin, Regiunea Shumen

Introduction

Wine tourism is a form of dynamically developing tourism. The term ‘oeno-’ or ‘wine’ tourism appears in the 1990’s, and surprisingly the creators of this fashionable branch are not the traditional European wine powers, but the countries of the New World (Markov, 2007). The combination of the wine industry and tourism is a happy whim of producers from Australia and California. The small wineries there (between 100,000 and 300,000 bottles annually) do not rely on the big trading companies but on organizing wine weekends and tours, they manage to increase their cellar door sales. Currently about 35% of the wine production of most Australian cellars has been thus realized and the annual rate from wine tourism is about 3.6 billion US dollars (Markov, 2007).

The wineries in the region of Napa Valley in California are annually visited by 18 million tourists most of which Americans. It is true that the inclusion of well-known wineries in the tourist itineraries in Europe is much older practice, but it was developed not so much as a separate business rather than as a part of a broader conception of tourism as travelling for pleasure. The ground-breaking experience of the Australian and Californian wineries proved infectious and in the late 90s

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almost all winemakers oriented themselves to this new type of tourism. Wine tours became a highly capitalized tourist product in Argentina, Chile, and South Africa as well as in the old wine powers like France, Spain, and Italy. Even Turkey, a country of no traditions in wine manufacturing, made fast progress in this field (Mileva 2004).

Surveys in Australia show that the basic motivation for participation in the vineyard and wine tours is connected with the following factors:

- Interest in wine (tasting, technology, purchase);
- Events and traditions connected with wine manufacture;
- Visiting relations;
- Desire to visit the village area including the places where wine can be tasted;
- Desire to meet the wine manufacturers;
- Desire to broaden the knowledge of wine and its production, etc.;
- Desire to meet local people, take part in the organized events connected with grapes and wine;
- Desire to visit other tourist sites (cultural) and seek new forms of tourist travelling.

In Europe, as it was mentioned above, the vineyard and wine tourism is very popular in the countries of highly developed wine culture, production and consumption like Germany and the countries of southern Europe. Recently it has also become popular in UK, the Netherlands and other countries.

Wine producers in Italy consider the vineyard and wine tourism as consequence of the following factors:

- The growing prestige of various kinds of wines, especially the high-quality ones;
- Stimulation of wine consumption;
- The increase of incomes of wine producers;
- Activities connected with preservation of the local cultural sites, national cuisine traditions and rituals, etc. (Markov, 2007, 62).

The path breaking work in wine tourism in Bulgaria was done in the 90s. Then several wineries like Damyanitsa, Lyaskovets, Osmar, Dimyat-Varna began offering organized wine-tasting sessions as well as other attractions.

Observations show that four or five years ago wine tourists in our country were predominantly foreigners, while today the ratio is 1:1, which is a clear indication of the good perspectives of this new field. Most new cellars have their own vineyards and rely on quality wines, which they sell at cellar door to restaurants and keen clients. Winery owners are well aware that wine tours are precisely one of the keys towards success and higher profits.

One interesting itinerary offered in Bulgaria was designed by the BalkaNova tourist agency and is called 'Wine, folklore, history'. The tour starts in Sofia where the guests are introduced to the best Bulgarian wines. The Rila Monastery is visited on the second day where wines from the Logodazh (Broad

Melnik vine) and Damyanitsa cellars are tasted. Trips to Melnik and Bansko and a visit to Peshtera cellar are planned for the third day. The fourth day is dedicated to Plovdiv and Asenovgrad with visits to Vimprom Asenovgrad and Todoroff cellar and tasting of Mavrud and Merlot. On the fifth day there are trips to Starosel and the ancient Thracian cult complex there, Kazanlak, the Kazanlak Thracian Tomb and the Rose museum with an evening devoted to tasting of the local Menada varieties. The sixth day is allocated for the cellar in Elenovo and the Old Cellar in Yambol. The seventh day is spent in Nessebar with a walking tour and a trip to Via Pontiacca cellar in Pomorie. From there the trip goes on to Varna and the Archaeological museum with the unique exhibition Treasures of Bulgaria. On the eighth day the guests visit Shumen, Madara Horserider, Osmar cellar and then they continue their trip on to Veliko Turnovo and taste wines from Lyaskovets winery. The ninth day is left for the Loviko-Suhindol winery with tasting of a selection of fine Gamza wines (Fig. 1).



Figure 1. Wine itinerary

Wine tourism is a specific product. It combines travelling whose leading purpose is drinking wine, with culture, history, beautiful nature and good cuisine. All these things usually go together to provide a true wine experience. Wine has always been apprehended as related to a particular historical, cultural and gastronomic context. Wine tourism relies precisely on this feature for which reason the profile of its clientele is also specific. These are most often educated, intelligent and solvent people over there. Wine tourism belongs to the specific group of specialized types of tourism offering untraditional specific tourist products (Stoikova, 2009, p. 20).

It is defined as theme travelling (wine tours) whose purpose is visiting vine-growing regions, wineries and cellars combined with tasting of wines. However, certain authors define it as part of the village tourism, but it can also be a separate activity.

The participants in the wine tours can arbitrarily be classified as:

- 1/ Casual or curious tourists;
- 2/ Interested tourists;
- 3/ Initiated (devoted) tourists.

It is typical for the casual or curious tourists that they consider the wineries as attraction and the visit as a possibility for socializing. They do not have any good grounding in wine and vine-growing. The intensity of entertainment, animation, information on the wine and the region are the keys for keeping the attention of this kind of tourists.

The interested tourists have medium to high interest in wine and knowledge of vine-growing and wine manufacture. The visits to wineries are considered an attraction, but rarely a justified motive for travelling. They usually have certain experience in this: they have visited cellars, etc. It is enough for them to get information on the wines so as to excel among friends. They are usually ex curious tourists who were so impressed as to become interested.

The initiated are wine connoisseurs who often visit vine-growing regions. Their desire to visit a cellar or vine-growing region is a sufficient motivation for travelling. They have thorough grounding in wine and are interested in the manufacture and the kinds of wines. They buy wines, assess the special reserve wines of the oenothèques. The devoted tourists seek detailed information and possibilities to enrich their own knowledge.

The British, Germans and Scandinavians are among the keenest wine tour tourists. Data show that our cellars are visited by tourists from all over the world of various social status and position (Aleksieva & Stamov, 2003, 65-67).

The happy marriage between the pleasure of wine-tasting and travelling serves the interests of restaurant keepers, producers, traders, tourist agencies, hotel keepers, advertisement agents, etc. All that turns wine tourism into a prosperous branch of tourist business.

Bulgaria could turn into one of the most attractive destinations in this field not only for the good wines but also for its rich history. The memorials found in our lands connected with wine (mural paintings, bas-reliefs, ritual vessels and other archaeological monuments associated with wine from all historical eras encountered in the country.

Wine tourism in the Shumen region

Shumen region in particular can offer such monuments as well. It is located in the central part of north-eastern Bulgaria and the north-eastern tourist region. Its administrative and territorial division includes 10 municipalities and 151 towns and villages. The population of the region is 2.6% of the country's population. The territory covers 3,390.2 square km. or 3.05% of Bulgaria's territory. It is extremely

valuable strategic point in north-eastern Bulgaria. The centre of the region, the town of Shumen, is situated 100 km from the big maritime centres Varna and Burgas and at the same distance from the Danubian ports Russe and Silistra.

The following five wine cellars occupying a deserved high place in the country and world wine market located in Shumen region are: Shumen Domaine Boyar, Preslav Vinex, Osmar wine cellar in the village of Osmar, Khan Krum cellar in the village of Khan Krum and Slunchev Zamak and Slancheva Dolina cellars in the village of Dragoevo.

Shumen Domaine Boyar is located in one of the well-known white wine regions in Bulgaria. It is a successor of Shumen Vinprom created in 1948. In the late '90s, the winery underwent overhaul, expansion and modernization. The large winery is located at the foot of Shumen plateau. After the acquisition of ownership on the fifty-year-old cellar in 1997, Domaine Boyar AD invested in leading wine technologies as to provide high quality for each bottle of wine reaching the consumers. Along with the innovative approach, there is also special consideration for preservation of the winery's traditions for the following generations. Grape varieties for the well-known wines like Chardonnay, Traminer, Muscat, Sauvignon Blanc and Merlot baric are grown in some vineyards around Shumen. Baric is a wine produced in casks according to the old tradition. The company exports wine to England, Sweden, the Netherlands, Norway and the eastern markets. These days the Russian market has been particularly successful.

The cool cellar for aging wine is at the guests' disposal. There is also a special room for tasting the wines with photos of the old cellar, the vineyards and vine-growing events showing the path of wine from the grapes to the glass. Traditional Bulgarian cheeses are offered along with the selection of wines. In addition, tourists are offered photos with the old basket press and tasting lists with information on the wines (www.infobulgaria.info, www.novinar.net).

Vinex Preslav is located within the boundaries of the second Bulgarian capital Veliki Preslav (893-971). A winery, which functioned from the 7th to the 10th centuries was discovered in the outskirts of the town. Since that remote age vine-growing and wine manufacturing have been the occupations of the population from this region. It is extremely favourable for growing white grapes. The good climatic conditions and the successful technology yield the unique white wines of the Preslav region leaving unforgettable memories with both consumers and connoisseurs.

Vinex Preslav was created in 1948 under the name of State Spirit Monopoly with initial capacity of 600 tons of grapes and equipment of hand grape crushes and decanting pumps. Today the company has at its disposal modern technological equipment whose annual grape processing is 12,000 tons. The cellars have storage capacity of 15 million litres of wine. Near Veliki Preslav there is another cellar where Pino Gre, the first wine from a declared geographical region, was created in 1979. The production of Vinex is currently exported to Russia, Estonia, Latvia, Germany, Poland, The Czech Republic, Slovakia, USA, Japan, Israel and Austria.

The winery is one of the most dynamic and well-recognized wine producers (especially of white wines) and burnt wine (brandy) (www.domaineboyar.com).

The other winery in Shumen region which deserves special attention is Osmar in the namesake village. It is situated 17 km from Shumen and Veliki Preslav, 30 km from Targovishte and 100 km from Varna. The name of the village and wine are associated with the best Bulgarian pelin (unique wormwood wine, a beverage of forest herbs placed in aged wines). Fourteen years ago, in 1994, the traditions in pelin making were revived by the Vichevs brothers and today the winery produces its best production. In addition to pelin, Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot are also made here. Today the vineyards cover 2,000 square meters. The winery offers wonderful opportunities for wine tasting and wine tourism. It is annually visited by 6,000 Bulgarian and foreign tourists. They are offered to taste four kinds of wines, traditional Bulgarian cheeses, handmade bread in the accompaniment of Bulgarian folk music. There is also a wine shop where the guests can purchase the products of the cellar at special prices. There is also luxury accommodation offered to the guest at the Osmar residence.

The village of Osmar itself is also a tourist destination. It has been a member of BAVT (Bulgarian Association of Village Tourism) since 2004. It offers great opportunities for eco and village tourism. The famous Osmar rock monasteries are located here. In addition, esoterics organize their meetings there because of the particularly strong energy field. Osmar villagers are the only villagers in Bulgaria who have moved their trellis vines outside their yards onto the pavement so that they form a tunnel of vines along the main street. Trifon Zarezan (the Bulgarian wine holiday) is the best time to visit the village. There is an annual contest for the best pelin and wine and combined with the other attractions this would furnish the guests with unforgettable memories. Tourists can find accommodation at Sveshtarovs houses offering peace and tranquillity. An old cooperage of 70-year-old history can be seen in one of them. Some other attractions are the ride around the village in a donkey cart as well as Sts Constantine and Helena church known for its curative icons (www.vinex.bg).

One of the smaller cellars producing high quality wines is Khan Krum located in the namesake village a few km from Veliki Preslav. It was created in 1939 but its production today is much smaller than before. It is specialized in processing white grapes since the climatic conditions are favourable for growing white wine varieties, but it can bottle both red and white wines. Traminer from Khan Krum is a wine of recognized quality both in the Bulgarian and foreign market. It impresses with its exclusive gustatory qualities. The winery produces other quality wines as well, which are often winners of international awards: Muskat, Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay (www.segabg.com).

The last two wineries under discussion are located in Preslav village of Dragoevo. Slunchev zamak (Sunny castle) is relatively new, created in 1972 as an affiliate of Vinprom Preslav. In 2001, it was privatized and since then it produces wines of its own trade mark: Muscat, Chardonnay, Misket, Traminer, Rkatsiteli, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Ugni Blanc.

The other company which works with Slunchev zamak winery is Sluncheva Dolina OOD also located in Dragoevo. It was founded in 1998. The primary processing of the grapes is done in Slunchev zamak winery. Sluncheva dolina (Sunny valley) produces, processes, bottles and sells high-quality white and red wines. Since 2000, the company has also used the Bag-in-box type of packaging for 1 to 10 litres. The winery produces wines from the following grape varieties: Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Gamza, Traminer, Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc, Ugni Blanc, etc. The grapes come exclusively from the Black Sea region. The winery sells its production through long-term contracts with twelve countries in Europe and Asia. The basic trade orientation of the company is the foreign market, which covers 95% of the total production (www.bulgarianside.com, www.sunvalleywineri.com).

The village population is exclusively Bulgarian and has preserved the traditions for growing and processing of grapes thus making it very attractive for wine tours. Some authentic Bulgarian rituals of particular interest to the foreign tourists are also preserved. More over, it has guesthouses that can accommodate the tourists.

Conclusion

Tourism provoked by wine industry is one of the fast-developing forms of specialized tourism, which has had a considerable share in the national tourist product in recent years. However, it has relatively low coverage in Shumen region. It is obvious from the fact that only 6,000 people visit Osmar cellar, which is a tiny portion of the massive stream of tourists visiting northern Black Sea coast. Guests are expected here only in summer vocation season and they usually come from this region. As a consequence, for example, the Sveshtarovs houses accept guests only form May to October. This is one drawback of the wine tourism practiced in the Shumen region. However, combined with eco and cultural tourism it could be practiced throughout the whole year. Special attention should be paid to the last itinerary. Many cultural monuments were preserved in Shumen region as a centre of the Bulgarian state in the early Middle Ages: the first capitals Pliska and Preslav, the cult settlement Madara, the Osmar rock monasteries, Shumen fortress and many others that could be used as additional attractions.

The term winescape has recently become popular. It defines a unique agricultural landscape combining three elements: grape production, activities connected with grape growing, places for wine production and storage. The preserved authentic ethnographic rituals and collections available in the discussed villages would certainly be very attractive especially to foreign visitors not only in the summer season. This combined with traditionally good wines from the region, Bulgarian cuisine, a good infrastructure (roads and accommodation) and, last but not least, the Bulgarian hospitality can make the wine tours in the region into an additional economic device for the increase of the population's welfare both in the municipality centre and the smaller town and villages discussed above.

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