

The concept of alternative tourism and the study of the potential for wine tourism in Azerbaijan

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Abstract. Alternative tourism has gained considerable attention in recent years as travelers seek unique and authentic experiences outside of traditional tourist destinations. One form of alternative tourism is enotourism, which focuses on the exploration of wine and the culture surrounding it. Wine tourism represents a growing niche within the broader field of alternative tourism, attracting people passionate about wine, culture, and sustainable travel. Alternative tourism aims to provide authentic and meaningful experiences, often involving smaller, less-visited destinations or unconventional activities. The main goal is to move away from standard tourism by encouraging sustainability, cultural exchange, and deeper connections between travelers and the places they visit.

Keywords: Wine tourism, wine making, viticulture, vineyards.

1 Introduction

Alternative tourism aims to acquaint the tourist with various activities and customs carried out in local communities of countries very different from his own, where he can participate in village activities, taste the products of different countries, and learn about their religions. Alternative tourism is a trip to regions with a tense, critical or catastrophic ecological situation in order to implement measures to improve the quality of the environment, increase the diversity of landscapes and increase natural conditions [15]. This unique form of tourism allows travelers to explore vineyards, taste regional wines and immerse themselves in local culture. At a time when the tourism society is developing in our country, visiting new areas, getting to know their culture and traditions, and getting new impressions has become a human need. Thus, travel becomes a way to satisfy the cognitive and entertainment needs of a person, becoming a factor in the progress of the population, bringing it to a state of tranquility, satisfaction and comfort [17].

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2 Methodology

Alternative tourism has recently gained potential attention, seeking unique and original experiences. One such form of alternative tourism is enotourism, which revolves around the study of wine and its associated culture. Enoturizm represents a growing area of high, alternative tourism for people passionate about culture and sustainable travel. Different methods were used in writing this scientific article. Thus, analysis and synthesis methods, comparative analysis methods, graphic method, which is one of statistical analysis methods, were used.

Table 1. Sustainable characteristics of alternative tourism.

Features	Mass tourism	Alternative tourism
Tourist type	passive, static, alien, low-level training	active, dynamic, creative, cultural
The main reason for the trip	sun and beach, snow, low prices	contact with nature, culture and local cuisine;
Request type	organized by tour operators	designed for individual, very specific groups
Advertising setup	tourism infrastructure	gain experience and relaxation
Tourist behavior	to observe without interaction	participate in local events
Attendance pattern	seasonal	exclusive and confidential throughout the year depending on environmental load
Separation type	standardized, large and complex hotels, apartments, residences	Alternative accommodation options (eco-campings, cottages)
Events in the tourism space	group excursions, beach holidays	seeing flora and fauna, walking, visiting museums, visiting protected natural areas
Cost	high to create infrastructure and equipment	it is necessary to create comfort and buy appropriate equipment
Behavior and environmental impact	uncontrolled exploitation of resources, extensive growth, short-term benefits	resource assessment and conservation, development, medium and long-term benefits

Alternative tourism products are those that exist in harmony with the local environment, society and culture, i.e. they benefit and do not harm the development of tourism. The concept of sustainable tourism is a relatively recent development in connection with the global concept of sustainable human development. In 1987, the report “Our Common Future” was published, which introduced the concept of sustainable development, which is understood as the development of society based on sustainable and ecologically effective management of the environment [14].

2.1 The concept of wine tourism

Wine tourism, also known as ecotourism, is a type of tourism that involves traveling to regions renowned for wine production. This form of tourism offers visitors the opportunity to experience the wine production process firsthand, visit vineyards and wineries, and taste local wines. Wine tourism also allows tourists to learn about the culture and history of wine, gain insight into the winemaking craft, and discover the nuances of the industry.

Table 1. Wine Tourism Regions and Characteristics.

Region	Country	Features
Napa Valley	USA	High-quality wines, luxury hotels, scenic roads
Bordeaux	France	World famous wine gardens, historic wine houses
Tuscany	Italy	Rustic wineries, traditional Italian cuisine
Barossa Valley	Australia	Unique Shiraz wines, cultural events
Mendoza	Argentina	In the foothills of the Andes, a variety of Malbec wines
Cape Winelands	South Africa	Beautiful views, Pinotage and Chenin Blanc wines
Douro Valley	Portugal	The world's oldest wine regions, the famous Port wine

Australia is one of the countries that takes wine tourism very seriously, including developing strategies at the national, state and regional levels and creating the position of "Wine Tourism Development Manager" within the Wine Industry. In Canada, which concentrates its exports on ice wine, wine regions such as Niagara in the East and the Okanagan Valley in the West have become popular[18]. Local people in wine-producing regions are also proud of their role in producing high-quality wines and welcoming tourists. This sense of identity and pride can have a unifying effect, fostering a stronger sense of community and cooperation among residents[19]. Wine tourism is especially popular among travelers because the experience combines knowledge and cultural richness with relaxation and entertainment in a comfortable environment. This type of tourism is usually enriched with wine festivals and other local events, which allow tourists to have more colorful and interesting experiences.

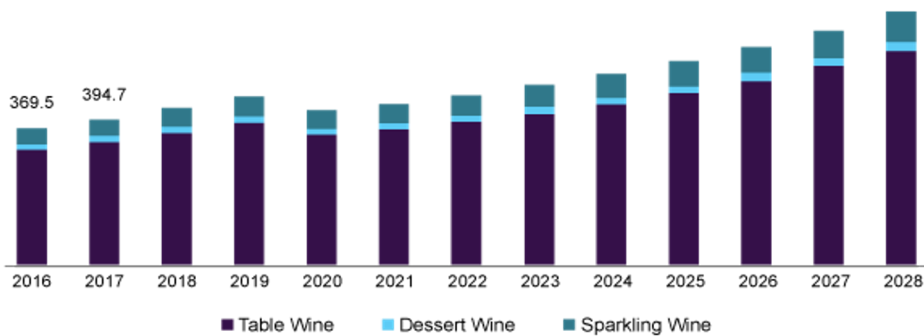


Fig.1. Global wine market size, by product, 2016-2028 (USD Billion).

3 Analysis of the results

Azerbaijan is known for its rich geographical and climatic features, and these features create a favorable environment for enotourism, that is, wine tourism. Different climatic zones, soil types and geographical regions of the country allow the cultivation of unique grape varieties, which can be considered as a country with an ancient and rich history of wine production. The wine tourism sector of Azerbaijan plays an important role in the integration of tourism and wine industry of the country. This integration creates a favorable environment for both sectors to create synergies and maximize their economic benefits. In parallel with the development of the wine industry, innovations and investments are also increasing in the tourism sector, which helps to enrich the tourism offer of the country in general. [12]

Shamakhi, Ismayilli, Gabala and Tovuz regions are among the regions that play the main role in the wine production of Azerbaijan. Both local grape varieties and international varieties are grown in these regions. For example, in Shamakhi and Ismayilli regions, more concentrated and intense tasting wines are obtained from grapes grown in continental climate. Tovuz and other western regions create ideal conditions for sour and fresh wines due to their cooler climate. At the same time, Azerbaijan is also strengthening its international relations in order to further expand wine tourism. Collaborations, joint projects and knowledge exchange programs are carried out with world winemaking leaders. Such activities help local wine producers learn from international experiences and increase the competitiveness of Azerbaijani wine in the world market [11].

Azerbaijan's wine tourism sector is developing as a new and dynamic field in the country's tourism portfolio. The statistics show how the sector has expanded in the last few years and how it has recovered after the pandemic period. The area of vineyards is constantly increasing, which leads to an increase in the volume of wine production. The increase in production volume plays an important role both in meeting the demand of the domestic market and in increasing export opportunities.

Table 3. Basic data and trends related to the wine tourism sector of Azerbaijan.

Indicator	2019	2020	2021	2022	Disclosure
Total area of vineyards (hectares)	8,000	8,200	8,400	8,600	Expansion of vineyards in Azerbaijan.
Wine production (thousand liters)	10,500	9,800	11,000	12,500	The change in production volume reflects the impact of the pandemic.
The number of tourists visiting wine tourism	120,000	80,000	150,000	180,000	The increase in the number of tourists shows the revival of the sector after the pandemic.
Export of wine (thousand dollars)	1,200	1,000	1,300	1,500	The increase in wine exports shows the popularity of the product in international markets.

Azerbaijan's wine tourism sector stands out with its potential for sustainable development in the field of wine production and tourism. This development, in addition to contributing to the country's economy, strengthens its position in the field of world winemaking culture [13].

Positive changes in wine production, especially the sharp increase in wine production in 2021 and 2022, show how the country's wine industry is developing technologically and methodologically. At the same time, the promotion of Azerbaijani wines in international markets and the increase in export volumes open up new opportunities for wine producers of the country to enter wider markets. The wine tourism sector of Azerbaijan is an area that enriches the tourism portfolio of the country and is an important support for its economic development. The continuous development of this field strengthens the position of Azerbaijan in the world tourism scene and makes the country more competitive in the global tourism market [8].

Azerbaijan's wine tourism sector plays an important role in promoting cultural and historical values. Visits to wine gardens organized for tourists, live demonstration of product production processes, promotion of grape varieties with deep cultural roots make this type of tourism even more interesting and educational. The activity of wine gardens also contributes to the economic development of the regions, increases the employment of the local population and brings new job opportunities to the regions [9].

Azerbaijan's wine tourism sector enriches the country's tourism portfolio from both

cultural and economic points of view, making important contributions to the future development of tourism and winemaking industries. The development of this sector has a positive effect on the country's economy and makes Azerbaijan even more prominent in the world tourism and winemaking market. [10]

Historical and cultural significance of grape and wine production in Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan is a country known for its deep history of grape growing and wine production. Archeological findings show that the history of grape cultivation and wine production in Azerbaijan dates back to the Neolithic period, about 7000 years ago. These findings provide strong evidence that the Caucasus is the cradle of wine production in the world. [5]

Vineyards are widespread in different regions of Azerbaijan, especially in regions such as Shamakhi, Ismayilli and Tovuz. These regions are known for their unique climatic conditions and soil composition, which allows for the development of the unique taste and aroma of the grape varieties grown in those regions. [6]

There are many well-known names among wine producers operating in Azerbaijan. These include established wineries such as Ganja Sharab, as well as newer but rapidly gaining customers such as Fireland Vineyards and Savalan. These producers offer a wide range of wines to local and international customers [4].

Wine tourism also plays an important role in strengthening the foreign image of Azerbaijan. The opening of wine gardens and production areas to tourists acts as a platform to promote the country's cultural and historical wealth to the world. This contributes to the recognition of Azerbaijan in the international tourism markets and increases the income of the tourism sector [7].

Strategies and policies for the development of wine tourism in Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan is adopting various strategies and policies to fully utilize the potential of wine tourism. The country aims to create an attractive destination for both domestic and international tourists by promoting the integration of the winemaking and tourism industries. These strategies are carefully designed to improve the quality of wine production, develop tourism infrastructure, and preserve and promote the cultural heritage of Azerbaijan. [3]

The government of Azerbaijan is modernizing roads, transport and communication infrastructure to facilitate the wine tourism experience. This makes it easier to visit the wineries and production facilities. Also, the establishment of tourism information centers and recreation areas aims to provide tourists with a more complete and comfortable travel experience. Azerbaijan's wine regions, including Ganja-Gazakh, Shabran-Khachmaz and Ismayilli, have different terrains and microclimates that support the cultivation of different grape varieties. This variety allows visitors to discover the unique taste and characteristics of Azerbaijani wines. Varieties such as Madrasa, Bayanshira and Saperavi are a few examples that showcase the country's rich viticultural heritage [1].

Sustainability, social impacts and perspectives of wine tourism in Azerbaijan.

Wine tourism in Azerbaijan has had important social effects on the country's culture, economy and society. Wine tourism has helped showcase and celebrate this heritage, which is important for cultural preservation. Combining enotourism with elements of ecotourism to provide tourists with a tourism experience that embraces the natural beauty as well as the processes of wine production. This approach promotes a sustainable tourism model and enhances tourist interest [2]. The growth of wine tourism in Azerbaijan has driven the development of significant infrastructure in regions known for their vineyards and wineries.

4 Conclusion

- Wine tourism, also known as enotourism, has grown significantly in popularity in recent years as travelers seek immersive experiences that combine culture, history and gastronomy. With its rich winemaking heritage and diverse landscapes, Azerbaijan has the potential to become an outstanding wine tourism destination. In this study, we discussed various aspects of the development of wine tourism in Azerbaijan, including its historical background, current situation, challenges, strategies and prospects. Finally, we will summarize the main findings and make suggestions for the successful development of wine tourism in the country.
- Azerbaijan has a long and multi-year history of winemaking, which goes back to ancient civilizations thousands of years ago. Despite the periods of decline during the Soviet rule and the war years, the wine industry in Azerbaijan has made significant progress in recent years. The country has different grape varieties, different winemaking traditions, modern vineyards and wineries. However, there is still untapped potential in terms of introducing Azerbaijani wines to the world.
- A comprehensive marketing campaign targeting both domestic and international tourists should highlight Azerbaijan's winemaking history, cultural richness and unique wine experiences;
- Cooperation between the government and the private sector should focus on improving roads, transport options and developing wine-related infrastructure;
- The development of wine tourism in Azerbaijan faces a number of problems and obstacles. These are the following:
 - a. Many potential tourists remain unaware of Azerbaijan's winemaking heritage and its potential as a wine tourism destination;
 - b. The country should invest in infrastructure such as visitor centers, transportation and accommodation options near vineyards and wineries;
 - c. The wine industry must follow complex regulations and stronger promotional efforts are needed to attract tourists;
 - d. Azerbaijan competes with established wine tourism destinations, which is important to differentiate and highlight its unique offers.
- Ensuring the quality of Azerbaijani wines is the main issue. Winemakers must strive for excellence, and certification systems can help maintain high standards;

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