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# Wine Tourism in Island Destinations: The Case of Crete

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Wine tourism is a type of special-interest tourism which has recorded a remarkable growth over the past few years, creating challenges and opportunities for wineries and wine regions to diversify and gain a competitive advantage. Many wine regions around the world – including several island destinations such as Tenerife, Sicily, Santorini, Corsica, Sardinia – have recognised the economic benefits of wine tourism, although much effort is needed to transform a wine region into a wine tourism destination. Within this framework, this paper aims to explore the level of wine tourism development in the Greek island of Crete. To achieve this objective, a survey was conducted in the wineries which participate in ‘Wines of Crete’, a network of 32 wineries operating in the island. Results indicate that most wineries in Crete have engaged in wine tourism, providing multiple experiences to their visitors, as their owners recognise significant benefits to their wineries and the island. However, they have not managed yet to exploit the full potential of wine tourism, proposing specific measures for its further development. Findings and discussions of this study are useful both to wine industry practitioners and to academic researchers interested in wine tourism.

**Key Words:** wineries, wine tourism, island destinations, tourism development, Crete

## Introduction

In recent years, wine tourism has grown to represent a significant segment of the tourism sector. As modern tourists have a variety of motives when travelling, being in search of authentic experiences, travelling in wine-producing countries and visiting wine regions is becoming more common. Gomez and Molina (2012:353), defined wine tourism as

*a form of travel, which is based not only on a visit to the wineries and wine areas but also on carrying out other complementary activities.*

In the same context, wine tourism is referred to as visits to vineyards, wineries, wine festivals and wine shows for which wine tasting and/or discovering the attributes of a grape / wine region are the prime motivating factors

for visitors (Hall *et al.*, 2000). It is obvious that wine tourism is associated with many tourism activities, such as cultural events, heritage and gastronomy festivals, agricultural activities, educational seminars, etc. (Alebaiki *et al.*, 2014; Hall & Mitchell, 2000; Yuan *et al.*, 2005). As a result, it appeals to more than just wine enthusiasts or wine experts, thus, attracting many different visitors. This aspect has positive effects for both the wineries and the wine regions.

The connection between the wine and tourism sectors is very important at a regional level, as it contributes to the strengthening, revival and promotion of regional brands (Sigala & Bruwer, 2016), thus, reinforcing regional economic development (Hall *et al.*, 2000). Wine tourism offers localities a wide range of benefits,

including foreign exchange earnings, creation of full-time jobs and part-time ones, as well as generation of secondary economic activity (multiplier effect) (O'Neill & Charters, 2000; Wargenau & Che, 2006). Also, wine tourism brings considerable benefits to the wineries (Dodd, 1995; Gomez *et al.*, 2015), notably the creation of relationships and the provision of different experiences such as the introduction of types of grapes into the wine raw material. It also offers brand acknowledgment, the discovery of the quality and variety of wines of a certain region, an enhanced brand image locally and internationally (Musso & Francioni, 2015), enhanced direct sales opportunities and the possibility of creating new profitable partnerships, to name but a few.

Within the wine tourism literature, several researchers have analysed the critical factors for success in wine tourism for wineries and destinations (Alebaki *et al.*, 2014; Alebaki & Koutsouris, 2019; Bonarou *et al.*, 2019; Getz & Brown, 2006; Gomez *et al.*, 2015; Hall *et al.*, 2000; Kyriakaki *et al.*, 2019; O'Neill & Charters, 2000; Sigala, 2019; Sigala & Bruwer, 2016; Stavrinoudis *et al.*, 2012; Wargenau & Che, 2006). The current paper contributes to the growing empirical supply-side literature on wine tourism, by adding research evidence from the island of Crete.

The tourism sector in Crete is massively organized around the '3S' (Sea, Sun, Sand) model, thus generating significant revenue and a large number of jobs. Even though the island has a long tradition in wine production and seventeen different vine varieties (Wines of Crete, 2019), it is still in the development stage as a wine destination. In this perspective, the present paper aims to investigate the supply characteristics of wine tourism development in the island, by examining the winery owners' perceptions of their involvement with tourism activities, the type of services they offer to their visitors, their promotion activities, the benefits from their involvement with tourism, as well as the factors that could encourage the development of wine tourism on location.

## Literature Review

Analysis of the international and Greek supply-side literature on wine tourism reveals that a wide variety of aspects have been examined, such as wine destination management, business and destination branding, business planning and wine networking. In this context, Gomez *et al.* (2015) point out that wine destinations can be regarded as integrated systems containing the wine product and the services provided by co-producing actors and stakeholders. Carlsen and Charters (2006), also indicate that wine tourism promotes wine exports, provides for unforgettable visitor experiences, influences the destination's image and contributes to sustainable development. A number of studies, such as those by Hall *et al.* (2000), highlight the importance of wine tourism in boosting local economic development, but they also point out that many wine producers do not consider themselves as being part of the wine tourism industry. In their study, Byrd *et al.* (2016) conclude that the characteristics of wine production must be related to different types of tourism experiences and that in terms of winery visitors, core product elements are more important than hospitality or leisure activities. In the context of local development and entrepreneurship, Sigala (2019) provides a case study of the Ultimate Wine Experiences Australia in order to investigate the concept and the practice of competition as a business model for developing, managing and marketing a wine destination. In the same context, Wargenau and Che (2006) investigated the successful model of the Southwest Michigan Wine Trail. The trail's member wineries have formed strong horizontal relationships, which include joint advertising, co-promotion and co-production. They have also built vertical relationships with tour operators, hotels and restaurants that promote individual wineries as well as the wine destination.

In the last decade, several empirical research projects have been undertaken at Greek wine tourism destinations. In their paper, Stavrinoudis *et al.* (2012) attempt to present and evaluate the extent of wine tourism development in Greece, the specific characteristics, as well as the main business choices related to wine tourism supply, aiming at highlighting the necessary key elements that can play a decisive role in its further growth. Alebaki *et al.* (2014) in researching the profile of the wine industry in Northern Greece point out that the majority of winemakers have

been engaged in wine tourism in recent years in an attempt to gain promotional benefits, and they emphasise the need for greater synergy and collaboration among the key stakeholders, including various tourism entities, policy makers, and the host community. Focusing on networking in the wine industry, Kyriakaki *et al.* (2019) aim to understand how a wine network is established, operates and evolves. In relation to both entrepreneurial and regional development aspects of wine tourism, Alebaki and Koutsouris (2019) attempt a comparative evaluation of three wine tourism destinations, namely Northern Greece, Peloponnese and Crete on the basis of the Life-Cycle stage they are at, as well as their spatial and network development characteristics. Finally, in their evaluation of wineries' communication skills, Bonarou *et al.* (2019) detail how new technological mediums can enhance the ability of the Greek winery collectives in narrating textual and visual stories in order to promote their businesses and the destinations, and they also identify good practices for optimal effectiveness within the wine tourism framework.

The concept of wine tourism was adopted only very recently (in 2014) within the Greek institutional legal framework and the 'Winery Open to the Public' certification became available a year later, in 2015. At present, there are approximately 1,000 active wineries

located in Greece, half of which can be visited. However, so far only 80 of them have been awarded the certified logo 'Winery Open to the Public' by the respective tourism authorities, which indicates that the main objective of the wineries remains the sale and promotion of wine rather than the related tourism activities (Kyriakaki *et al.*, 2019). Data analysis (Ministry of Tourism database and archives) has shown that the allocation of 'Wineries Open to the Public' throughout the Greek territory is mainly related to the viniculture tradition of the area rather than its touristic development. Therefore, most wineries are in Peloponnese (13 wineries open to the public), Crete (10), Attica (8) and East Macedonia-Thrace (7).

Crete, with 623,065 inhabitants (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2019), is the largest Greek island and the fifth largest in the Mediterranean, divided into four Regional Units: Heraklion, Chania, Rethymnon and Lasithi. The island is mainly a mass tourism destination: In 2018, 4,536,192 tourists arrived at the airports of Crete, 22% of the total international arrivals by air to Greece. In addition, 308 cruise ships with 453,677 passengers arrived to the ports of the island last year (SETE, 2019). Crete is currently considered to be an active and dynamic destination for quality wine production. With 4,200 hectares of vineyards, 33 wineries and an annual production of 46,200 tons of wine grapes and 300,000



hectoliters of wine, Crete is rapidly becoming a wine destination of high added value. The large number of local traditional varieties, the diversity and uniqueness of various wine areas, as well as the long Cretan wine tradition, document Cretan wine's high-quality standing and ongoing growth. The 'Wines of Crete' initiative was started in 2006 by the Winemakers Network of Heraklion Prefecture (16 wineries) to promote the Cretan wine. After two years, the Winemakers Association of West Crete (Chania and Rethymno) was created. Then the 'Wines of Crete' network was set up as an 'umbrella' over these two networks. Today, the network comprises 31 wineries from the four prefectures in Crete (Wines of Crete, 2019).

### Methodology

The main objective of this research is to investigate the level and the characteristics / features of wine tourism development on the island of Crete, which is widely known as a mass tourism destination. In order to achieve this aim, the researchers investigated:

- a) local wineries' involvement in tourism activities,
- b) the type of services they offer to their guests,
- c) the promotion activities being used,
- d) the winery owner's perceptions of the benefits that arise from their involvement in tourism activities, and finally,
- e) their perceptions of the factors that could boost further development of wine tourism on the island.

The study adopted a quantitative research approach – as it is considered essential to collect numerical data to

explain specific phenomena / trends (Muijs, 2004) – by using a structured questionnaire sent to the owners / managers of the 31 wineries that participate in the 'Wines of Crete' network. The use of a questionnaire as a means of collecting research data can offer high reliability and validity (Bird *et al.*, 1999). The survey questionnaire comprises 10 closed questions and a 5-point Likert scale, to align with the previous literature (Alebaiki *et al.*, 2014; Stavrinoudis *et al.*, 2012), and is divided into 2 sections. The first section includes questions about the main characteristics of the winery. In the second section, the questions focus on the involvement of wineries in tourism activities, the type of services that they offer to their visitors, their marketing activities, the advantages and opportunities that tourism offers, and finally, the factors that will contribute to further development of wine tourism on the island. The questionnaire was emailed to the 31 wineries in August 2017. A total of 17 valid questionnaires were collected. This corresponds to 55% of the total population, which – given the nature and challenges of the research – is considered an acceptable percentage. The collected data were statistically analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24.0.

### Results

As illustrated in Table 1, the respondents represent winemakers from all four prefectures of Crete. However, most of them (76.5%) are based in the Prefecture of Heraklion, which is not surprising, since 22 out of the network's 31 wineries (70.9%) are active in this Prefecture. Regarding the wineries' year of establishment, the wineries can be classified into three time periods:

Profile	Classification	No.	%
Location (Prefecture)	Heraklion	13	76.5
	Chania	2	11.8
	Rethymnon	1	5.9
	Lasithi	1	5.9
Year of Establishment	Before 1990	3	23.1
	1990-2000	3	23.1
	2001-2010	7	53.8
Total annual wine production (in litres)	<50,000	2	11.8
	50,000-100,000	8	47.1
	100,001-500,000	5	29.4
	>500,000	2	11.8

**Table 2: Reasons for getting involved in wine tourism**

<i>Our winery is involved in wine tourism to...</i>	Mean	SD
Raise the brand recognition of the winery and its wines	4.71	0.588
Improve the image / profile of the winery	4.65	0.606
Achieve cellar door sales / Increase profit margins	4.65	0.606
Contribute to the tourist development of Crete and the enrichment of the offered tourist product	4.65	0.606
Contribute to the sustainability of Crete (environmentally friendly and community-based development)	4.65	0.606
Maintain agricultural production and increase exports	4.59	0.618
Attract new customers / increase customer base	4.53	0.800
Get in contact with the consumers / Get feedback	4.47	0.717
Strengthen the local economy through increased agricultural production and employment	4.35	0.786
Contribute to the seasonality mitigation and extension of the tourist season	4.18	1.131
Offer jobs to local population	4.12	0.857

**Note:** 1 = not at all important, 5 = very important

those wineries that were founded before 1990 and which are in fact quite old (three wineries were established in 1927, 1932 and 1966, respectively), the wineries that were founded in the 1990s (3 wineries), as well as a significant number of new wineries that started operating in the decade 2001–2010. The latter can also be associated with a new tendency of young Greek people, many of them with remarkable educational achievements, to return to rural areas and engage in traditional professions. Considering the volume of the annual wine production in wineries, there are 2 wineries (11.8%) that produce more than 500,000 litres of wine per year, 5 wineries (29.4%) that produce wine quantities ranging between 100,001 and 500,000 litres, 8 wineries (47.1%) that produce 50,000–100,000 litres of wine per year and only 2 wineries (11.8%) that produce less than 50,000 litres of wine annually. These data show that the wineries in Crete have large areas of vineyards in their possession, while it should be also noted that some wineries use not only their own vineyards, but they also rent the land of other smaller producers or purchase their grapes, thereby increasing their production capacity.

Of the 17 wineries that participated in the survey, 15 (88.2%) are visitable. The other two wineries cited lack of infrastructure in the winery as the main reason for not being involved in wine tourism. Secondary reasons reported were the high cost required (lack of capital, lack of financing for expansion), the lack of interest, and finally the business philosophy, as emphasis is placed on production and sale (domestic and international) of wine rather than other tourism related activities. Ten of

the visitable wineries are open all year, while the other five open for five to eight months a year. The number of visitors received by wineries varies and is indicative of the level of development of each winery's tourism activities. This exceeds 10,000 visitors just in three cases, with five wineries received less than 1,000 visitors in the last year. It is also noteworthy that five wineries do not maintain data on their number of visitors. With respect to cellar door sales, only 4 wineries reported that they constituted more than 10% of total wine sales, while in three cases this percentage falls below 1%.

Subsequently, participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a set of reasons for getting involved in tourism activities. As shown in Table 2, they recognise multiple benefits and reasons that led them to the decision to develop wine tourism activities. The main reasons for this relate both to the expected benefits for their own business and to Crete as a tourist destination in general. Regarding the benefits to their own business, they expect that by engaging in wine tourism they will raise the brand recognition of the winery and its wines (mean = 4.71), improve the image of the winery (mean = 4.65), and achieve cellar door sales (mean = 4.65). As far as Crete is concerned, they consider that their tourism activities contribute to the tourist development of the island and the enrichment of the offered tourist product (mean = 4.65), as well as the sustainable development of Crete (environmentally friendly and community-based development - mean = 4.65).

**Table 3: Obstacles to the development of wine tourism activities**

Obstacle	Mean	SD
Lack of state responsibility and inclusion of wine tourism in national tourism planning	4.18	1.131
High costs for the creation and maintenance of wine tourism infrastructure / there is no rapid depreciation	3.41	1.064
Need for extra staff / increased operating costs	3.12	1.111
The type of tourism of Crete (mass tourism) is not interested in wine tourism	2.82	1.185
Lack of information and organization among businesses in the industry	2.82	1.074
The profit from direct sales at the winery is quite small	2.65	1.057
The number of visitors is small and does not bring the expected benefits	2.24	0.831
Wasting time during visits	2.00	0.935
The existence of competitive areas in the Mediterranean does not favor the development of wine tourism in Crete	1.82	0.951

**Note:** 1=not at all important, 5=very important

The owners / managers of wineries recognise that there are various inhibitors to the development of wine tourism activities (Table 3). The main obstacle that most winemakers seem to agree on is the lack of state responsibility and inclusion of wine tourism in national tourism planning (mean = 4.18). Other less important factors are the high costs for the creation and maintenance of wine tourism infrastructure, while there is no rapid depreciation (mean = 3.41), and the need for extra staff which means increased operating costs for the winery (mean = 3.12).

Having recognised several potential benefits of wine tourism, the 15 wineries that are open to the public

offer multiple services to their guests (Table 4). Guided tours in the wineries, wine tasting, and cellar door sales are available in all the wineries, while a slightly lower number of them offer also guided tours in the vineyards. Interestingly, some wineries offer complete culinary experiences to their guests enabling them to dine with Cretan flavours, while in two cases Cretan cooking lessons are also offered. Only one winery provides accommodation.

Results show that participants use multiple methods to promote their wineries. A common promotional activity is participation in exhibitions (17/17) and other wine events, such as wine contests (15/17) and 'Open Doors'

**Table 4: Products and services offered to visitors**

Product / Service	No.	Product / Service	No.
Guided tour in the winery	15	Hosting social events (weddings, birthdays, etc.)	6
Wine tasting	15	Hosting cultural and visual events (exhibitions, concerts, dance or theater performances)	6
Cellar door sales	15	Seminars and presentations for wine lovers and professionals	5
Guided tour in the vineyards	13	Educational programs for children, pupils and students	5
Bus accessibility	13	Lunch with Cretan cuisine from a partner restaurant outside the winery	4
Internet access	11	Lunch with Cretan cuisine from a restaurant inside the winery	3
Access for disabled people	10	Audio visual presentation	3
Customized visit packages according to the needs / desires of the visitor	9	Cretan cooking seminars	2
Sales of other products (books, souvenirs, wine items, herbs, cosmetics, olive oil, etc.)	7	Accommodation inside the winery	1
Wine tasting seminars	6		

**Table 5: Promotional activities of the wineries**

Activity	No.
Participation in exhibitions	17
'Wines of Crete' network promotional activities	16
'Wines of Crete' website	16
Social media	16
Participation in wine contests	15
Participation in 'Open Doors'	15
Winery website	15
Road signage (signposts)	14
Brochures	14
Cooperation with travel agents / tour operators	10
Fam trips for journalists	10
Other affiliate business websites	7
Apps for smart phones	7
TV / radio spots	4

(15/17). The majority of the participants (16/17) advertise their wineries through the promotional activities and the website of the 'Wines of Crete' network, while social media (16/17) and wineries' website (15/17) also seem to be popular ways of promoting. More traditional ways of advertising, such as brochures, are still popular (14/17), while some wineries are adopting more innovative marketing tools, such as smart phone applications (7/17).

The participants were asked to rate seventeen factors on a scale from 1 (not at all important) to 5 (very important), concerning the future development of wine tourism in Crete. Winemakers were quite positive in their responses, agreeing that most of the factors are crucial for the future development of wine tourism in the island (Table 6).

More specifically, they believe that the number one factor that could boost wine tourism in the island is the international recognition of Cretan wines and the indigenous varieties (mean = 5.00). Diversification of the island's tourism model (mass tourism) with the attraction of more 'quality' tourists is also considered a very important factor (mean = 4.88). Moreover, the role of the government seems to be very important in that regard with the desired actions being a more favourable legislation with less bureaucracy, the financial incentives for wineries (subsidies, favourable loans, lower taxation, etc.), and finally the creation of a complex tourism product where wine tourism would play an important role (mean = 4.76).

**Table 6: Critical factors for the future development of wine tourism in Crete**

Factor	Mean	SD
Promoting the identity and increasing the recognition of Cretan wine and indigenous varieties	5.00	0.000
Attracting more quality tourism	4.88	0.332
Favorable legislation / Less bureaucracy	4.76	0.437
Financial incentives for wineries (subsidies, favorable loans, lower taxation, etc.)	4.76	0.437
Creating a complex tourism product where wine tourism will play an important role	4.76	0.437
Greater promotion of Crete as a wine destination	4.65	0.606
Greater advertising and promotion of wineries in Crete	4.59	0.870
Networking and developing partnerships with tourism businesses (travel agencies, hotels, restaurants, etc.)	4.59	1.064
Improvement of the island's infrastructure (road network, airports, etc.)	4.59	0.618
Training, courtesy, friendliness of the staff that comes in contact with visitors in wineries	4.53	0.800
Improvement of winery infrastructure	4.53	0.514
Better cooperation between wineries in Crete	4.47	0.624
Greater promotion of Crete as a tourist destination	4.24	0.970
Further development of the 'Wines of Crete' network	4.24	0.831
Greater variety of activities offered to visitors to wineries	4.00	0.791
Increase the quality of products and services offered in wineries	3.94	0.899
Increase the number of exhibitions and events involving wineries	3.82	0.809

**Note:** 1=not at all important, 5=very important

## Conclusions

Alternative and special interest tourism has been considered the opponent of the mass tourism model and, at the same time, a type of a sustainable tourism development. One form of special interest tourism that has gained considerable attention lately due to its positive effects in host destinations is wine tourism. Especially for Mediterranean countries which have a long tradition in wine production, the integration of wine and tourism can serve as a tool for regional development (Hall & Mitchell, 2000). In this context, this paper contributes to the existing literature on wine tourism, focusing on island destinations, by providing evidence from the island of Crete in Greece.

The findings present very interesting aspects of the interrelations between wineries and tourism in Crete. More specifically, the vast majority of the wineries offer limited tourism related activities (e.g. tour in the wineries and the vineyards, cellar door sales, wine tasting). This aspect is hardly surprising since wine tourism can be considered a relatively young industry on the island of Crete. This finding also confirms the results of other researchers (Alebaiki *et al.*, 2014; Constantoglou *et al.*, 2020; Stavrinoudis *et al.*, 2012) in other parts of Greece (e.g. Northern Greece, Peloponnese, Aegean Islands) which argue that these regions can be identified as wine tourism destinations in their developing stage. Nevertheless, according to Pratt and Sparks (2014), wineries cannot simply focus on wine tasting to encompass the wine experience, as this is already an expectation of visiting a wine region, and visitors have greater emotional and experiential expectations when visiting a wine region. It would be useful to formulate a plan to relate the winery visits with the rich tradition of Cretan gastronomy. Moreover, as claimed by Byrd *et al.* (2016), wineries would attract more wine tourists by offering additional elements such as customer service, socialising events, wine clubs, and wine education to current wine production and viticulture activities.

The promotion of wineries in target markets is also considered important. Promotional activities of the examined wineries are focused on participation in exhibitions, network promotional activities, website and social media diffusion. These actions may not be enough

to attract a sufficient volume of visitors. To be more competitive and to ensure sustainable development, Cretan wineries should construct a destination brand image (Gomez *et al.*, 2015). Understanding the image and attitudes attached to this leisure activity is critical to increasing visitation to wine regions (Pratt & Sparks, 2014). It is also important to link wineries more systematically with the overall tourism sector to achieve better promotional and economic results.

The wineries of Crete became involved in tourism first because of the latter's benefits, such as heightening brand recognition, reinforcing its image, boosting sales, etc. The positive impacts for the destination were a second thought. The non-inclusion of wine tourism in national tourism planning, the high costs required for its organisation (e.g. infrastructure, staff, etc.) added to the fact that the leading type of tourism in the island of Crete is mass tourism, and the lack of state responsibility, are all substantial obstacles to its development. In this context, operators emphasised the need to find a balance and synergy between mass tourism and the niche product of wine tourism. Among the critical factors for further development of wine tourism in Crete are the diversity of tourism product, the enhancement and reinforcement of wineries via financial incentives, favourable legislation, decreased bureaucracy on the one hand, and appropriate promotion of wine tourism and other alternative forms of tourism on the other. The island of Crete is considered a mass tourism destination and as such it is obvious that its image can be enhanced by wine tourism and its expansion to new market segments with several benefits for regional development facilitated by it. The main findings of the primary research reveal some particularly interesting aspects of the effects of wine tourism both on the wineries and on the island's tourism development. They also afford an opportunity to better understand the general aspects of wine tourism and by the same token be able to assist government bodies, winery owners, and other stakeholders in the short term to maximise benefits.

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