

WINE TOURISM DESTINATION IN THE KAKHETI REGION

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Meri Ososhvili

PhD Candidate in Agricultural Economics
Faculty of Agrarian Sciences and Biosystems Engineering
Georgian Technical University
meri.ososhvili@gmail.com

RESUME

Kakheti is the most important winemaking region in Georgia, accounting for 65% of the country's total vineyard area. Moreover, 80% of the grapes used in the wine industry come from this region. Kakheti produces both high-quality European-style wines and traditional local wines made using ancient methods, such as qvevri winemaking, which is widespread across the region. According to viticulture and winemaking experts, one of Kakheti's strengths lies in its original winemaking methods, as well as the opportunities for diversifying wineries and processing enterprises. Another strong point of the region is the high export potential of wines made from its widespread grape varieties. The development of viticulture and winemaking is further supported by the historical, cultural, and traditional factors that motivate the local population. The diversity of protected areas, cultural heritage monuments, and recreational zones in the region creates a significant resource for the development of agritourism, including wine tourism.

Keywords: Tourism, Wine Industry, Marketing Activities, Winemaking, Promotion.

INTRODUCTION

Winemaking is one of the oldest and most significant sectors of agriculture in Georgia. The rich history of Georgian winemaking is internationally recognized. Since July 2012, Georgia has held the exclusive right to promote its wine in the European Union under the phrase "Georgia – the Cradle of Wine." The history of vine cultivation is closely tied to the history of the Georgian people. The creative spirit of the Georgian nation and their profound love for vine and wine are vividly reflected in Georgian culture, traditional customs, art, music, and other forms of expression. Winemaking is one of the ancient traditions that Georgians have preserved to this day. Archaeological excavations confirm that grapes were cultivated in Georgia as far back as 8,000 years ago, making it the earliest known region for winemaking.

The longstanding tradition of Georgian winemaking is still alive today. In addition to large wineries, wine is often produced at home, particularly in rural areas, using grapes grown in private vineyards. Recently, wine production has expanded beyond local and export markets to new areas such as wine tourism, wine therapy, and wine tasting. This diversification has been supported by the rich cultural and culinary heritage of Georgia's regions.

In 2023, one of the largest wine digital platforms, VinePair, recommended traveling to Georgia and tasting wine in Kakheti.

"The ancient technique of winemaking originates in Georgia. It's no surprise that Georgia is now a popular wine region. With an 8,000-year history of wine production, Georgia is considered the birthplace of wine. Today, Georgian wine is rapidly gaining popularity, and its exports are reaching record

highs every year. This growth promotes Georgia's international visibility, a tourism boom, and economic development. So, if you are a wine enthusiast, book your trip to Georgia." _ Remarkd Their writer, Hannah Staab.

MAIN TEXT

It is well known that Georgia stands out for its historical legacy in viticulture and winemaking, its centuries-old expertise in the field, and the diversity of its climatic zones and landscapes. However, compared to countries where wine tourism is highly developed, this sector in Georgia is still in its early stages of development. To achieve success in this field, it is crucial for Georgia to learn from **the** experiences of countries that have long been involved in wine tourism, such as France, Italy, Spain, Germany, Portugal, Cyprus, Greece, and Austria.

Notably, in recent years, the development of wine tourism has become one of the main priorities of the Georgian government. As is well known, the development of any branch of tourism begins with a thorough study of the relevant field, and wine tourism is no exception. In this regard, Kakheti is the leading region in Georgia. Approximately three-quarters of the country's vineyards are located there, featuring grape varieties such as Rkatsiteli, Kakhetian Green, Saperavi, and others.

In recent years, significant progress has been made in Kakheti to enhance the role of winemaking in the tourism sector. Numerous new wineries have been built, and many historical cellars, which are considered national treasures, have been restored. These efforts have made the region even more attractive to tourists.

Recent trends also show that Georgian wine is increasingly participating in international wine and alcoholic beverage exhibitions worldwide, achieving significant success. This can be supported by the following data:

1. With the support of the National Wine Agency, Georgian wine was presented at 14 exhibitions, 20 festivals, and 100 professional tastings in 2023 across 15 countries: the United States, Japan, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Denmark, South Korea, China, Poland, Latvia, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Iceland, Italy, and Turkey.

2. On February 27, 2024, an exhibition titled "Georgia – The Wine Country" opened in Portugal, dedicated to the unique Georgian method of wine production in qvevri.

In a wine culture-rich region like Kakheti, one of the most important aspects of enotourism is the type that is especially popular among so-called non-organized tourists. For example, travelers on foot or by private car can see signs along the roads indicating the "Wine Route," pointing to nearby wineries. Often, tourists take an interest in these signs, visit the indicated places, and subsequently promote them. This, in turn, contributes to the popularization of local wines and the development of enotourism. In recent years, such signs have become more common on the roads. Additionally, a Georgian wine tourism guide has been created, which includes information about wine tourism wineries and Georgian wine companies, their addresses, and informational pages of the companies and wineries, as well as data about wine shops, bars, and restaurants.

The "Wine Route" project was planned by the Georgian government in collaboration with the international organization USAID and launched in 2011. The signage uses the symbols of vine and grape, with the color representing Saperavi. This is currently the only large-scale enotourism project in Georgia supported by the government. It includes family-owned wineries and businesses involved in wine tourism, particularly in Kakheti. According to the National Tourism Administration, by 2023, 213 out of the 352 wineries participating in the "Wine Route" project have been identified. Many winemakers have developed new tourist services through the project, and tourist clubs have been established. For example, to promote the development of wine tourism, a blog about wine and gastronomy, vinoge.com, has led to the creation of the "Wine Club," which brings together not only winemakers but also people from vari-

ous professions. The club's goals include: increasing knowledge about wine and elevating the culture of Georgian consumers, promoting high-quality wine, reviving Georgian viticulture and winemaking traditions, supporting innovative initiatives, providing complete information about Georgian and foreign wines available on the market, refining Georgian cuisine according to local wines, and contributing to the development of wine tourism.

To develop small wineries, regional wine tourism, and tourism in general in Georgia, a new educational project called "Wine Village" was launched in 2020 with the financial support of USAID/Georgia's "Economic Security Program" and in cooperation with the Wine Club. This project focuses on educating winemakers, and many of them have already marked their wineries on tourist maps and are ready to welcome visitors. It is also noteworthy that the most common agritourism facilities in Kakheti are wineries, which make up the core of the region's agritourism sector. Currently, farmers involved in agritourism and wine tourism are mostly operating informally, with many of their activities being one-off experiences.

It is important to emphasize that one of the goals of the new project is to address the shortcomings of the "Wine Route." This project aims to further develop wine tourism and could help solve many important economic problems: creating new jobs, fostering small and medium-sized businesses, improving regional infrastructure, protecting nature, and preserving historical and cultural heritage.

However, it is also worth mentioning that, to date, there is no legal framework in Georgia that regulates activities and legal relationships related to agritourism and wine tourism. Agritourism and wine tourism are closely connected to both tourism and agricultural activities. Therefore, the existing tourism legislation cannot fully regulate these issues and requires specialized management. Additionally, there is no unified database for agritourism or wine tourism facilities, which would allow tourists to learn about the available sites in Georgia and select their desired destinations.

CONCLUSION

Our analysis reveals several issues facing the development of wine tourism in the Kakheti region: the region's small share in the global wine market, the insufficient quality of wine, inadequate infrastructure, high tour prices, the lack of training institutions for highly qualified personnel, and the corresponding shortage of skilled workers. It is also noteworthy that most of the producers of traditional Kakheti wine, made in clay vessels (qvevri), are small-scale wineries. To address these challenges and support the development of wine tourism, it is essential to focus more on this sector. Tourism agencies should offer visitors a comprehensive range of services, which will promote the further growth and recognition of Kakheti's wine industry.

Wine tourism should become a key component of the tourism strategy in Georgia, similar to other leading wine-producing countries. Wine tours—such as tastings, learning about the stages of wine production, visiting vineyards, and attending wine festivals—are a great way to spread awareness about Kakheti's wine culture. In addition, tourism should highlight the region's uniqueness, local traditions, cuisine, and historical, cultural, and natural landmarks.

To reach this goal, it's important to understand what motivates potential wine tourists. Along with promoting wine tourism, Georgia must focus on producing high-quality wines to build a strong brand and secure a solid position in the international market. Participation in exhibitions and tastings is crucial to increasing the recognition and popularity of Kakheti wine, which, in turn, will boost exports and attract more tourists.

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მელვინეობის ტურისტული მიმართულება კახეთის რეგიონში

მერი ოსოშვილი

საქართველოს ტექნიკური უნივერსიტეტის
აგრარული მეცნიერებებისა და ბიოსისტემების ინჟინერინგის
ფაკულტეტის, აგრარული ეკონომიკის დოქტორანტი
meri.ososhvili@gmail.com

რეზიუმე

საქართველოში მელვინეობის უმთავრეს რეგიონს წარმოადგენს კახეთი. ქვეყნის ვენახების მთლიანი ფართობის 65% კახეთში მდებარეობს. მრეწველობაში გამოყენებული ყურძნის 80 % ამ რეგიონიდან არის. აქ მზადდება, როგორც მაღალი ხარისხის ევროპული, ისე ადგილობრივი ტრადიციული წესით დაყენებული ღვინოები, ამის დასტურია ქვეყრაში ღვინის დაყენება, რომელიც ვრცელდება კახეთის მთელ ტერიტორიაზე. მევენახეობა-მელვინეობის ექსპერტთა აზრით, კახეთის რეგიონის ერთ-ერთი ძლიერი მხარეა ღვინის დამზადების ორიგინალური მეთოდები, ღვინის ქარხნებითა და გადამამუშავებელი საწარმოების დივერსიფიკაციის შესაძლებლობები. რეგიონის ძლიერ მხარედ მიიჩნევა, ასევე, გავრცელებული ჯიშებით მიღებული ღვინის მაღალი საექსპორტო პოტენციალი, მევენახეობა-მელვინეობის განვითარებით მოსახლეობის ისტორიული, კულტურული, ტრადიციული ფაქტორებით მოტივაცია, დაცული ტერიტორიების, კულტურული მემკვიდრეობის ძეგლებისა და რეკრეაციული ზონების მრავალფეროვნება აგროტურიზმის, მათ შორის ღვინის ტურიზმის, განვითარებისათვის მნიშვნელოვან რესურსს წარმოადგენს.

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