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Sicilian Wineries Report a Surge in Wine Tourism

The island’s producers say visitors are rising fast, with foreign travelers driving new revenue from tastings and guided tours

Tuesday, May 12, 2026



Wine tourism in Sicily continued to expand in 2025, with 61.4% of wineries reporting more visitors and 74.7% saying their clientele was mostly foreign, led by travelers from Europe and the United States, according to a new report presented in Palermo during Sicilia en Primeur, the annual showcase organized by Assovini Sicilia.

The findings, based on a survey of 85 Sicilian wineries by the Ceseo research center, show that wine tourism is becoming a real source of revenue for the island's wine sector. For 58.3% of the companies surveyed, it accounts for 10% of total turnover, excluding direct wine sales. Guided visits and tastings are now seen as increasingly important commercial tools for wineries trying to turn visitors into customers.

The report also points to a sector that is already deeply tied to sustainability. Among the wineries surveyed, 86.7% produce energy from renewable sources, 56.2% cover at least 40% of their energy needs with green power, 88% have eliminated single-use plastic in hospitality areas and 7 out of 10 use lightweight bottles. Organizers and researchers said those choices are no longer just marketing claims but part of a broader production model that is already international in scope.

The presentation took place at the Oratorio dei Bianchi in Palermo as part of the 22nd edition of Sicilia en Primeur, which runs through May 15 and brings together more than 100 Italian and international media outlets, 56 wineries and more than 1,000 wines for tasting. The event also used other historic sites in the city, including the Real Albergo delle Povere, Santa Maria dello Spasimo and Palazzo Sant'Elia, as backdrops for meetings on tourism, culture and wine.

Andrea Amadei, host and voice of "Decanter" on Rai Radio2 and Rai1 and curator of "The Art of Wine," said Sicily's long history has made it a place where many civilizations left traces that still shape the island's identity. He described Sicily as a "continent" that contains many cultures within it, a theme echoed throughout the conference.

Antonello Maruotti, scientific coordinator of Ceseo and a statistics professor at Lumsa University in Rome, said wine tourism still has room to grow because its economic impact remains limited in many wineries. He said the most advanced companies are only seeing an impact that does not exceed 10% of turnover from wine tourism. He pointed to weak customer targeting, underused data and uneven development of experiences as areas where wineries can improve.

The study found that many wineries now offer tasting rooms, wine shops, visitor routes and dedicated staff. Basic digital tools such as websites, e-commerce platforms and mailing lists are widespread. But more advanced tools remain less common: only 20% of companies have a structured wine club, and 30.6% say they use artificial intelligence, mainly for marketing and communication.

That technology was one of the main themes of the conference. Edoardo Colombo, president of Turismi.AI, said travelers increasingly ask machines to plan trips and make bookings rather than searching on their own. He said artificial intelligence is changing how tourism businesses are found online and argued that wineries need to make themselves visible to AI systems if they want to capture demand.

Colombo said AI-driven travel traffic has risen sharply in recent years and that major platforms including Meta, Google, Uber, Expedia, Amazon and Alexa are already relying on it. He said winery websites are no longer just starting points for consumers but often the final destination after an AI recommendation.

Filippo Galanti, co-founder of WineSuite, said wineries that perform above average tend to rely on strong teams rather than just strong brands or products. He said wine tourism can help smaller producers cope with pressure from climate change, shifting consumer habits and tighter margins. In Italy, he noted, only one bottle out of 10 is sold directly to private consumers, compared with one out of five in France and two out of three in Napa Valley.

The report also examined younger consumers. Vincenzo Russo, who leads the Neuromarketing Lab at Iulm University in Milan, said Generation Z does not drink less wine than older groups did at the same age but drinks differently: more occasionally and more often outside meals. He said wineries need to create experiences that appeal quickly and emotionally because younger audiences respond less to traditional product-focused messaging.

Russo said communication now has only a few seconds to capture attention among younger consumers and must rely on clear storytelling and sensory engagement. That means using games, music, art and interactive formats to make visits memorable.

Mariangela Cambria, president of Assovini Sicilia, said wine in Sicily is inseparable from travel because it connects landscape, food culture, communities and local identity. She said Palermo was chosen for this year’s edition because it reflects the island’s layered history and cultural mix.

Luca Sammartino, Sicily’s regional agriculture councillor, said wine tourism is becoming one of the pillars of the island’s economy and called Sicily Italy’s second-largest food-and-wine destination after Tuscany. He said demand for authentic experiences tied to place continues to rise.

Alessio Planeta, chief executive of Planeta and newly elected president of the Consorzio della Doc Sicilia, said Sicily’s complexity is both a challenge and an asset because it gives producers many stories to tell through native grapes, landscapes and traditions.

Alberto Tasca of Tasca d’Almerita and president of Fondazione SOStain Sicilia pointed to projects involving lighter bottles, biodiversity monitoring through beehives in vineyards and weather stations across the island as examples of how sustainability is becoming part of daily vineyard work.

The report showed visitor numbers rising steadily among participating wineries: up 12.7% from 2022 to 2023, up 22.6% in 2024 and up another 15.3% in 2025. Sales made at the winery also increased over the same period by 16.7%, then 29%, then 18.8%, helped by higher average spending per guest and purchases made after visitors returned home.