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Sicily launches a sparkling wine network to lure tourists across the island

The initiative links 140 wineries to archaeological sites, nature reserves and historic towns in a bid to give the category a stronger identity

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Sicily’s regional wine institute and local sommeliers have launched a new network aimed at turning the island’s sparkling wines into a stronger tourism draw, linking wineries with archaeological sites, coastal landscapes, nature reserves and historic towns across the region.

The project, called the Sicilian Sparkling Wines Network, was presented in recent days during the “Sicilia in Bolle” conference, promoted by Irvo, the Regional Institute of Oil and Wine, together with the Sicilian section of the Italian Sommelier Association. The initiative is built around a manifesto that maps wine tourism routes across Sicily’s main sparkling wine areas and ties them to local food, cultural landmarks and natural attractions.

According to Irvo’s observatory, Sicily has 140 wineries producing sparkling wines across Doc, Igt and varietal categories, with 330 labels sold in domestic and international markets. The institute said 54% of Sicilian sparkling wine production uses the Charmat method and 46% uses the traditional method. By appellation, 49.1% of production falls under Igt Terre Siciliane, 29.3% under Doc Sicilia and 20.4% under Doc Etna. White sparkling wines account for 86% of the category on the island, while rosé makes up 14%.

Irvo said Doc Etna has posted the strongest production growth in recent years, rising from 9.8% of Sicily’s sparkling wine output in 2018 to 20.4% in 2025. Within that denomination, Etna Spumante Bianco is the most widely made style.

The broader goal is to give Sicily’s sparkling wines a clearer collective identity while using them as an entry point for slower, place-based travel across the island. For the beverage sector, that matters because it shows how a relatively small wine category can be used to build demand not only through retail sales but also through tourism, hospitality and direct winery visits. If the network gains traction, it could offer a model for other regions trying to connect beverage production more closely with destination marketing.

Giusi Mistretta, Irvo’s commissioner, said Sicilian sparkling wines have developed a distinct identity in recent years through a mix of native and international grape varieties, producer investment and work on quality, innovation and sustainability. She

said that reality now needs to be promoted in a more organized way so the category can present a stronger and more recognizable image.

Mistretta said Irvo’s mission, in line with regional agriculture and rural development strategies, is to help Sicily’s wine system grow in a competitive and coordinated way in Italian and foreign markets. She described the manifesto as an open collective project designed to create a dedicated, coordinated wine tourism offering centered on sparkling wines and supported by producers’ groups and consortia.

Francesco Baldacchino, president of AIS Sicilia, said the manifesto shows how dialogue and cooperation can become a shared vision for the future of Sicilian wine. He said building a network means creating culture, strengthening ties to place and giving Sicilian sparkling wines a single voice that consumers can recognize.

Sparkling wine remains a small part of Sicily’s overall wine output. Irvo said it represents about 1% of all bottled wine produced on the island. Even so, the category is expanding as more wineries enter it. Some producers have already received international awards, while others are targeting consumer demand for lighter and more effervescent wines.

The network’s map stretches across several distinct production zones. On Mount Etna, where vineyards sit on volcanic soils in a Unesco-listed landscape, Nerello Mascalese plays a central role in traditional-method sparkling wines made as white or rosé styles and aged on lees for at least 18 months. Carricante, Chardonnay and Pinot Noir also contribute to production there. The tourism route in this area includes the Etna Park, Valle del Bove, Catania, the Alcantara Gorges, Taormina, Naxos, Randazzo, Castiglione di Sicilia and castles such as Aci Castello and Calatabiano.

In western Sicily, including Trapani, Marsala, Menfi and Agrigento, both Charmat and traditional methods are used with grapes such as Grillo, Catarratto, Inzolia, Zibibbo, Grecanico, Chardonnay and Chenin Blanc, along with Nero d’Avola, Pinot Noir and Pinot Grigio. The route connects wineries with the Stagnone Islands reserve near Marsala, the salt pans of Trapani and Paceco, Zingaro and Torre Salsa nature reserves, Scala dei Turchi and the Valley of the Temples. It also includes Mozia, Segesta, Selinunte, Erice, Sciacca and towns in the Belìce area.

In central Sicily, between Caltanissetta, Enna and inland Agrigento province, vineyards spread across hills where both traditional-method and Charmat sparkling wines are made from Nero d’Avola, Pinot Noir, Grillo, Catarratto, Inzolia and Chardonnay. Stops highlighted in that area include Villa Romana del Casale, Lake Pergusa, the Erei Mountains, Morgantina, Sabucina and historic towns such as Mussomeli, Mazzarino and Sperlinga.

In the southeast, between Ragusa, Syracuse and Noto, Moscato Bianco is used for aromatic sparkling wines while Nero d’Avola appears in rosé versions. Irvo said traditional-method production is growing there. The route combines wineries with Syracuse and Ortigia, the Temple of Apollo, the cathedral built on the Temple of Athena, the Neapolis archaeological park, the rock necropolis of Pantalica and the late Baroque towns of Val di Noto. Natural sites include Vendicari, Cavagrande del Cassibile and the mouth of the Irminio River.

Pantelleria also has a central place in the plan. The island is known for its harsh landscape and for its Unesco-recognized traditional bush-vine cultivation method. There producers make pure Zibibbo sparkling wines mainly with the Charmat method. Organizers present Pantelleria as one of the clearest examples of how local grape growing traditions can be tied to tourism experiences shaped by landscape, food culture and island identity.

By framing sparkling wine as a gateway to Sicily rather than only as a product category on store shelves or restaurant lists, regional organizers are trying to widen its role in the local economy. The effort brings together producers, institutions and consortia at a time when many wine regions are looking for new ways to attract visitors beyond peak summer travel and to turn niche categories into stronger brands with year-round appeal.