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American Tourists Spent 2.55 Billion Euros in Italy, the Top Foreign Market

Wine industry leaders say tastings alone will not keep U.S. visitors seeking private, local food-and-wine experiences

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American travelers are becoming more important to Italy’s wine tourism industry, but industry executives and analysts say the country will have to sell more than tastings if it wants to keep winning their business.

New spending figures and survey data presented around Vinitaly.USA 2026 in New York pointed in the same direction: U.S. visitors remain one of Italy’s strongest tourism markets, and many of them are looking for food-and-wine trips built around local culture, private service and a sense of place rather than a simple cellar visit.

According to the Nexi report on tourism spending, foreign tourists spent 16.2 billion euros in Italy in the first eight months of 2026, up 5% from the same period in 2025. The report is based on in-person transactions made at Italian points of sale with foreign payment cards. The United States remained the top source market, with spending of 2.55 billion euros, up 7.3%.

Those numbers help explain why American demand is drawing close attention from wineries, hotels and travel planners. They also help explain the growing interest in wine tourism, especially outside Italy’s best-known art cities.

A separate report on the U.S. market and wine tourism, prepared by the Italian Association for Food and Wine Tourism, or AITE, for Vinitaly Tourism, found that 79% of surveyed Americans see Italy as a destination able to offer authentic food-and-wine experiences. The study also found that 47% said a trip to Italy including at least one wine tourism experience would be desirable in the next 24 months. Among the regions that attracted the strongest interest, Sicily ranked first at 82%, followed by Tuscany at 81% and Piedmont at 56%.

Speakers at Vinitaly.USA 2026, which ended Tuesday, October 27, in New York, said those results reflect a broader shift in what U.S. travelers want. Wine may be the initial draw, they said, but it is rarely enough on its own. What matters more is whether wineries and destinations can connect wine to landscape, local history, food, art and hospitality.

Sara Magro, a travel and lifestyle journalist, said the appeal of wine must be linked to the appeal of the destination itself, and that this requires practical support as much as storytelling. She said destinations need infrastructure, transportation links, accessibility and simpler booking systems, along with stronger ties between wine and culture.

Phillip Peña of Virtuoso, the luxury travel network, said there is a strong relationship between fine wine and high-end travel, but he argued that wineries need to work much more closely with luxury hotels, travel advisers and destination managers. For many American travelers, he said, customization is essential. They want simple itineraries, but tailored ones, with private visits and services that feel personal. In his view, travelers must trust the operators handling their trips, and that trust depends on the quality of the full hospitality experience, not only the quality of the wines being poured.

Susan Kostrzewa, former editor in chief of Wine Enthusiast and now a columnist for Resplendent Ink, said authenticity is central to the American market. She said many Americans want to experience something they could not find elsewhere and that Italy is well placed to meet that demand because it can offer not only wine, but also history, art, sports, culture and family stories. In her view, those elements need to be presented as connected parts of one experience.

That point was echoed by writer and journalist Fred Plotkin, who argued that many wineries still rely too heavily on marketing language when American visitors are increasingly looking for education. He said travelers want to return home having learned something about Italian culture and history. A winery visit, he said, should engage all the senses. Rather than moving directly to the tasting room, wineries should begin in the vineyard, explain local food traditions and build a meal around regional dishes and their own wines. That, he said, creates a lasting memory rooted in local identity.

Mattia Moliterni of Roscioli New York described a similar strategy through the Roscioli Italian Wine Club in New York, which he said has about 2,000 members. He said part of his staff’s work is to travel in Italy, build direct relationships with producers and then pass those relationships on to customers in New York. He said that approach is less about marketing than about creating a cultural bridge. It can also help direct travelers toward lesser-known wine areas that are gaining popularity.

The focus on authenticity comes at a time when Italy’s wine sector is trying to widen the map of destinations visited by Americans. Tuscany and Piedmont remain strong draws, but survey results suggesting high interest in Sicily indicate room for expansion

beyond the most established itineraries. Industry figures said that can happen if wineries treat hospitality as a broad service business rather than a side activity attached to production.

Cristina Mariani-May, owner and chief executive of Banfi, said the American connection to Italy is also shaped by the long history of Italian communities in the United States. Speaking in New York, she said many American consumers approach Italian wine through a wider image of Italy that includes food, people and place. For wineries, she said, selling a bottle or welcoming a guest means presenting an image of Italy itself. In Banfi’s case, she said, that also means presenting Montalcino, Brunello and the estate’s own hospitality model.

Her comments underscored a larger message from the New York discussions: U.S. demand for Italian wine tourism is solid, but the strongest opportunities may lie in experiences that go beyond the glass. For American visitors, operators said, the most valuable product is not only the wine, but the chance to feel part of a local story.