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Brits drink more wine, pay less

UK wine imports reach 1.26 billion liters in 2024 as bulk shipments surge

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LONDON, April 24 — The United Kingdom's wine market navigated a volatile 2024 with a mixture of recovery and reconfiguration, according to Vinetur's newly released report "The Wine Market in the United Kingdom: Analysis and Outlook 2024". The year was marked by rising price sensitivity among consumers, increased reliance on bulk wine imports, and a sharp drop in domestic wine production due to adverse weather conditions. Despite this, overall consumption volume rose slightly, and the sector continued to attract investment and expand its viticultural base.

The UK remains one of the largest global importers of wine by both volume and value, though a shift in consumer behavior was reflected in import data. Total wine imports increased 2.4% in volume to 1.26 billion liters, recovering from the low levels of 2023. However, the total value of these imports dropped by 3.7% to £3.91 billion, indicating a growing preference for more economical sourcing. Bulk wine imports rose significantly in both volume and value, while bottled wine declined, suggesting importers turned to lower-cost formats to mitigate supply chain and fiscal pressures.

Average import prices dropped from £3.29 per liter in 2023 to £3.10 per liter in 2024. In contrast, the average consumer price increased slightly to around £16.67 per liter, highlighting the strain placed on the value chain by increased duties, inflation, and other downstream costs. The discrepancy between lower import costs and higher end-user prices indicates that consumers bore much of the fiscal burden, potentially influencing future demand.

On a per capita basis, wine consumption rose marginally to 18.2 liters per person, up from 17.9 liters in 2023. While this suggests some stability or recovery, industry analysts caution that moderation trends remain, and real consumption behavior may still be flat or declining. Surveys suggest fewer drinking occasions, especially in hospitality venues, with a shift toward more selective and premium consumption habits.

In the domestic arena, UK wine production fell drastically following a record 2023 harvest of 21.6 million bottles. The 2024 harvest is estimated at just 6 to 7 million bottles, affected by persistent rainfall, fungal disease outbreaks, and autumn frost. The industry's growing maturity was demonstrated in its ability to rely on accumulated reserves from the previous year, while the overall quality of grapes remained high due to longer ripening periods.

Despite this setback, the expansion of viticulture continued. Vineyard area exceeded 4,400 hectares by mid-2024, with over 1,000 registered vineyards and more than 221 wineries operating across the UK. Investment in the sector totaled over £80 million in 2023 alone, driven by rising land values and increasing international recognition of British sparkling wine.

France and Italy remained the UK's primary wine suppliers, though Chile emerged as a significant growth market, increasing its wine exports to the UK by over 17% in both volume and value. Meanwhile, imports from Spain and France declined in value, suggesting a shift toward suppliers offering better price-to-value ratios.

The wine market also saw significant movement in the non-alcoholic category. No-alcohol wine grew by 8% in volume, continuing a trend fueled by health awareness and lifestyle shifts. Meanwhile, low-alcohol wines saw a decline, indicating a stronger preference for total alcohol removal among consumers.

The report also highlights structural changes ahead, particularly the planned reform of the UK's alcohol duty system in February 2025. The new system will tax wine based on its alcohol content to the nearest 0.1% ABV, introducing complexity for producers and importers, and possibly leading to a narrower range of products offered.

Looking forward, the value of the UK wine market is projected to continue rising. IMARC Group estimates it at £21 billion in 2024, with a forecasted compound annual growth rate of 3.65% through 2033. While volume growth may be more modest, the emphasis on premium offerings, local production, and sustainability is expected to shape the market's future direction.

British wine producers, particularly those focusing on sparkling wines, remain central to the industry's future. With vineyard area forecast to grow to 7,600 hectares by 2032 and domestic production projected to reach up to 29 million bottles annually, the UK wine sector is positioning itself as a key player not just in consumption, but increasingly in high-quality production.