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Cities go wine tourism

Urban wine tourism grows as cities turn heritage into new attractions

Friday, August 29, 2025



The city of Porto is one of the world's leading examples of urban wine tourism.

Wine tourism, focused on the culture and experience of wine, has become a dynamic and profitable segment of the global tourism industry over the past decades. Traditionally, wine tourism has been associated with rural environments: visits to vineyards, wineries in wine-producing regions, and small towns where wine is central to the local economy. These experiences allow visitors to connect with the land, culture, and landscape of wine in its place of origin. In recent years, however, urban wine tourism has emerged as a growing trend, bringing wine heritage closer to city dwellers through urban vineyards, wine museums, and city-based wineries.

Globally, wine tourism has seen remarkable growth. In 2024, estimates placed the global market value between $10.58 billion and $51.63 billion, depending on calculation methods. Most analyses agree that the market size exceeds $50 billion, with annual growth rates in the double digits. This expansion reflects increasing demand for experiences that combine wine tasting, cultural learning, local gastronomy, and contact with nature.

Europe leads the world in wine tourism revenue, accounting for more than 51% of global income in 2023. This dominance is attributed to Europe's deep-rooted wine culture and a wide range of destinations in countries such as Spain, Italy, and France. France alone boasts 72 certified "Vignobles & Découvertes" destinations that guarantee a comprehensive quality experience for wine tourists. North America represents about 25% of the market, driven by iconic regions like Napa Valley in California and Willamette Valley in Oregon. The Asia-Pacific region is experiencing the fastest growth—projected at nearly 15% annually through 2030—thanks to emerging destinations in Australia, New Zealand, China, and India.

Wine tourism's economic impact is especially significant in rural areas. In Napa Valley, for example, 3.7 million visitors generated about $2.5 billion in revenue and $107.5 million in taxes for the county in 2023. This activity supports around 16,000 jobs locally. Similarly, La Rioja in Spain recorded nearly 880,000 winery visits last year with an estimated economic impact close to €186 million. In France, about 10 million wine tourists visited in 2024—42% from abroad—demonstrating the sector's scale.

Urban wine tourism operates on a smaller economic scale but brings specific benefits to cities. Activities such as visits to urban wineries or museums are often integrated into broader metropolitan tourism offerings. Porto (Portugal) has turned its historic port wine cellars into major attractions within the city environment. The opening of flagship urban wine museums—like La Cité du Vin in Bordeaux or Buenos Aires' Wine Museum—has attracted new flows of urban visitors interested in wine culture.



Urban vineyards are another example of this trend: initiatives like the Urban Vineyards Association have restored old vineyards within cities such as Barcelona and Turin for both production and tourism purposes. These projects diversify urban cultural offerings and attract both residents and tourists to previously underused areas.

Environmental sustainability is a central concern for both rural and urban models. In rural settings, wine tourism can promote landscape conservation and sustainable farming practices but also brings challenges such as increased pressure on fragile environments. Many wineries now highlight organic or biodynamic certifications to attract environmentally conscious visitors. Destinations like Napa or Rioja have implemented visitor flow management measures—such as mandatory reservations or daily limits—to minimize ecological impact.

In cities, urban wine experiences can reduce long-distance travel by allowing residents to access tastings via public transport or even on foot or by bike. Urban vineyards provide green spaces within cities and sometimes restore abandoned lots or historic gardens for productive use. However, urban wineries often import grapes from other regions—a practice that carries its own carbon footprint—though many offset this

through energy efficiency measures and recycling programs.

Sociocultural benefits are also significant for both models. Rural wine routes help preserve traditional viticulture culture by reviving harvest festivals and local crafts while strengthening community identity and cohesion through job creation and cooperative projects. In Georgia’s villages or Argentina’s Mendoza region, these activities have empowered local communities by integrating their heritage into attractive tourist offerings.

Urban wine tourism brings wine culture closer to city dwellers while rescuing historical elements within cities themselves. Urban vineyards like those in Turin or Paris’ Montmartre serve as educational centers where schools and neighbors participate in symbolic harvests or cultural events among the vines. Urban wineries often function as social hubs for young professionals seeking informal after-work tastings or concerts combined with enological experiences.

The profile of today’s wine tourist is increasingly diverse: younger generations are joining traditional middle-aged enthusiasts; international travelers visit classic regions while locals explore their own cities’ offerings; motivations range from learning about terroir to simply enjoying a social outing with friends.

Management models differ between rural and urban contexts. Rural destinations often organize around “wine routes” that group multiple wineries under a common brand with coordinated marketing efforts—examples include Spain’s Rioja Alavesa Wine Route or South Africa’s Stellenbosch Wine Route. These routes set quality standards and facilitate visitor planning through integrated packages.

Urban models are more varied: independent city-based wineries may form local associations for joint marketing (as seen with PDX Urban Wineries in Portland), while some projects are led by municipal authorities or cultural institutions (such as Paris’ Montmartre vineyard managed by the district council). Large urban museums are typically run by foundations involving both public entities and private partners.

Innovation is shaping both rural and urban approaches: digitalization has transformed booking processes (with over a third of sector revenue now coming from online reservations), while virtual tastings and augmented reality tools enrich visitor experiences onsite. There is also a trend toward integrating wine tourism with other activities—gastronomy workshops at wineries, art installations among vineyards, wellness programs like yoga sessions at sunrise—all designed to offer comprehensive experiences that appeal to modern travelers' varied interests.

Events play an increasingly important role: major festivals such as Germany's Bad Dürkheim Wurstmarkt or Argentina's Vendimia attract hundreds of thousands each year and generate significant media coverage for their host regions.

Best practices identified globally include integrating complete offerings (wine plus gastronomy/culture/nature), emphasizing authenticity and service quality (with well-trained guides who can tell compelling stories), adopting environmental sustainability measures (organic farming certifications; efficient water/energy use; sustainable mobility plans), innovating product design (night tours; unusual pairings; mobile apps), fostering strategic alliances (participation in international networks; public-private partnerships), managing visitor capacity responsibly (to avoid overtourism), diversifying source markets (targeting new international audiences), and segmenting promotions according to visitor profiles.

Both rural and urban models face challenges: rural areas must balance economic benefits with environmental protection and community well-being; cities must ensure that urban wine initiatives remain authentic rather than purely commercialized add-ons.

The future of global wine tourism will depend on how well destinations adapt to changing visitor preferences—more digital-savvy, sustainability-minded, younger—and how they balance tradition with innovation while keeping the unique connection between people, place, and product at the heart of every experience offered.