

ASPECTS OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN UZBEKISTAN: WINE TOURISM

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Abstract: *The aim of this article is to define what is wine tourism, discuss the top wine tourism related countries worldwide, explore wine tourism development in Uzbekistan, and provide recommendations for the further development of the wine tourism.*

Keywords: *Tourism, Uzbekistan, Highway signs, Road signs, Wine tourism.*

Аннотация: *Целью данной статьи является рассмотрение актуальности развития винного туризма в Республике Узбекистан путем изучения зарубежного опыта – а именно, винный туризм позволяет познакомиться с достопримечательностями страны и региона, в котором производятся вина различных сортов. Также, в статье предоставлены рекомендации по улучшению винного туризма в стране.*

Ключевые слова: *туризм, Узбекистан, дорожные знаки, дорожные знаки, винный туризм.*

Introduction

This article is going to contribute to the development of the tourism industry of Uzbekistan, as it is aimed at addressing Uzbekistan’s Development Strategy for 2017-2022 section 3.2 pertaining: “Improving the competitiveness of the economy through deepening of structural reforms, modernization and diversification of its leading industries” with the sub-category of “achieving accelerated development of the tourism industry, enhancing its role and contribution to the economy, diversification and improving the quality of tourist services, upgrading of tourism infrastructure” (The Tashkent Times, 2017).

Literature Review

What is wine tourism? Various authors provide different definitions of wine tourism. Some authors define it as “visitation to vineyards, wineries, wine festivals and wine shows for which grape wine tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of a grape wine region are the prime motivating factors for visitors” (Hall, 1996, p.109 as cited in Johnson, 1997, p. cited in Carlsen J., 1998). While Getz and Brown define wine tourism as ‘an example of consumer behavior, a strategy for regional development and development of its wine market, and an opportunity for wineries to promote their wines and therefore sell their products directly to consumers’ (2006, cited in Lopez-Guzman T. et.al., 2011, pg.376).

No matter how many definitions there are, one thing is clear that it has become one of the important tourism spheres in different countries all over the world (Hall et al., 2000; McKERcher and Chan, 2005; O’Nel et al., 2002; Yuan et al., 2005 cited in Marzo-Navarro M. & Pedraja-Iglesias, 2012). Countries such as Spain, France, Italy, Germany and Portugal are traditionally known as traditional wine producers and consumers (Marzo-Navarro M. & Pedraja-Iglesias, 2012). According to the Italianwinecentral (2017), top three wine producers around the world are Italy, France and Spain. Italian wine is referred to as

‘world class finessee’; while Spanish wine is known for its distinct taste, with ‘Spanish winemakers emphasizing flavor’; while French wine is known for its distinct quality with high-end wines being exported to foreign markets (Worldatlas, 2013). For tourists from Canada, French and Italian wineries were among the top list for their destinations for wine tourism (Brown and Getz, 2005 cited in Lee K. et. al., 2016).

One may be thinking how wine adds value or contributes to the development of the tourism industry? Authors suggest that there are at least three (3) reasons why wine is potentially interesting to the tourism industry, in particular: (1) it positively affects the flow of tourists to the country; (2) it creates ‘an image of quality’ and (3) ‘acts as a way of developing the local area’ (Szivas, 1999 cited in cited in Juan Rodríguez-García, Sandra Sánchez-Cañizares, María José Luján-García, 2011).

Research Methodology

The article is going to conduct the analysis of the wine industry through the personal evaluation of the researcher, open to public online resources and literature and open to public resources, using the qualitative method. The study takes place during the period of September – November, 2018 period. The objective of the study is to investigate and discuss the further development of the wine industry in Uzbekistan, using the international experience and practices of countries, where wine industry is well developed and is growing.

Discussion of Results

motivation of tourists

If wine tourism positively affects the flow of tourists to the country and at the same time acts as an area which could be tremendously developed and improved, what on the other hand, makes a tourist want to visit the wineries and vineyards with all pertaining to it facilities? Bruwer (2003), for instance, lists main motivational factors of the tourists, namely: ‘wine purchasing; wine tasting/sampling; country setting/vineyards winery tour; learning about wine and winemaking; meeting the vintner socializing with family/friends; festival or events; eating at a winery; and entertainment in general’ (cited in Marzo-Navarro M. & Pedraja-Iglesias, 2009). While, Getz and Brown (2006) suggests three (3) main dimensions critical to wine tourism such as (1) wine product, (2) appeal of the destination and (3) cultural product; where, by ‘wine product’ they refer to the overall opinion of the tourists who visit the wineries, service received and events related to wine; by ‘destination appeal’ they refer to the pleasant climate, views and landscape; by ‘cultural product’ they refer to the lifestyle of inhabitants in the rural places such as accommodations, gourmet restaurants, villages, etc. (cited in Marzo-Navarro M. & Pedraja-Iglesias, 2009). Among other rationales for visiting the wineries are educational enjoyment, entertainment and aesthetics of wine tourism, according to Quadri-Felitti and Fiore (2012, cited in Morrish S, et. al., 2017).

At the same time, other authors suggest that wine tourism provides tourists with the unique sensory experience of taste, smell, touch, sight and sound (Getz, 2000 cited in Lopez-Guzman T. et.al., 2011). According to Charters and Ali-Knight (2002) when studying behavior of tourists visiting vineyards, one of the main factors in making a purchase at a winery was taste, followed by the price (cited in Lee K. et. al., 2016). Speaking of taste, compared to other products such as automobiles, cellphones, personal computers, etc., quality of which can be measured based on speed, conformance to specifications, power

and other dimensions - quality of wine, on the contrary, is concerned with the taste, which varies from one individual to another, thus, making it hard to measure (Morrish S. et. al., 2017).

If wine tourism is in general, has positive impact for the development of the country, and if there are tourists who actually prefer to visit the wineries, another question arises. Are all of those tourists who visit the wineries, actually fond of wine or they do it out of interest and love for learning something new? As it reveals, some authors help us answer this question, that, actually not all winery visitors are considered to be as ‘true’ wine tourists, in fact, there is a great portion of visitors that simply undertake such trips for the sake of leisure and tourism (Alant and Bruwer, 2004 cited in Grybovych O. et al, 2013). Wine tourists have a special desire to know and experience the wine production process, place of origin, people, thus wineries present their history in order to create a quality image in the minds of visitors (Beverland, 2006 cited in Morrish S, et al., 2017).

what wineries are offering?

Wineries, on the contrary, are trying to provide their visitors with an unforgettable and unique experience. Let’s take an example of famous Napa Valley winery located in California (USA), which offers its visitors unforgettable wine tourism experiences beyond direct winery products and services which include ability to have a tour by limousine, plane, hot air balloon, historic Napa Valley train tour; tourists also can hike, bike, kayak, participate in the cooking lectures and exhibitions, golfing, attend spas and mud baths (Napavacationhomes, 2018). In California (USA) alone, according to the Wine Institute (2017), there are about 24 million wine tourist visits annually. If we look at the world’s ranking for the top wineries, according to CNN Travel (2017) there are fifteen famous wineries which include:

1. Hunter Valley, Australia
2. Napa Valley and Sonoma, California
3. Alentejo, Portugal
4. Cape Winelands, South Africa
5. Route des Vins, Alsace, France
6. Santorini, Greece
7. Maipo, Chile
8. Okanagan, Canada
9. Tuscany, Italy
10. Bento Goncalves, Brazil
11. Mendoza, Argentina
12. Rioja, Spain
13. Moselle Valley, Germany
14. Bordeaux, France
15. Vayots Dzor, Armenia

wine tourism in Uzbekistan

Can Uzbekistan be included in the list of the world’s most visited wineries? It obviously could, because there is a potential for growth and development because of the favourable climate conditions. In fact, during the Soviet Union times, more than half of the Central Asian region (58%) have been located in Uzbekistan, with ‘85% of the total amount of kishmish and raisins grapes produced in the country’; however, in a view of fighting

substance abuse i.e. to alcohol, Soviet Union administration decided to take away most of its vineyards. (LetsgoUzbekistan,2018).

According to the World’s Top Exports (World’s Top Exports, 2018) Uzbekistan is in the list of top 15 countries which exported fresh grapes during the year of 2017 (\$98.6 million), also it is worth noting that among the fastest-growing grapes exporters since 2013 were Uzbekistan (up to 244.1%), China (up 173.7%), Mexico (up 63.7%) and Australia (up 49.4%).

Vineyards in Uzbekistan account for about 127,000 hectares (wine and table grapes combined); Uzvinprom Holding a public organization which is considered to be as one of the main producers of wine and exploits 4% of the vineyards; is in charge of the sector-based policy management, marketing research, export strategies development, and collaboration with the research Institutes with the aim of new product development. (Sommeliers-international, 2015).

Several varieties of grape have been introduced for the past years which include European varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir, Riesling, etc. About 100 km away from Tashkent, there is a Khamkor vineyard located in Namdanak village, at Parkent region craft encompassing 250 hectares which is made of European varieties of grapes and is mainly export oriented to countries such as Japan, Russia, China, Kazakhstan (Sommeliers-international, 2015). As was noted in Sommeliers-international (2015), this cellar with a Francophile culture created brands like Champs Elysées, Joséphine, Louvre, Monte Cristo;

“...The most important cellar Mehnat Group created in 1993 (private capitals) is at Tashkent. Mehnat Group crafts excellent vivid, aromatic, dry wines made with Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon, Saperavi and Hindogni for the red wines, and Riesling, Rkatsiteli, Bayan Shirei and Kuldginskii for the white wines. It currently exports 20% of its production to Russia, Kazakhstan and other republics of Central Asia...”

There is a Tashkentvino winery which produces luxury vodka and aged brandies, they opened their new factory back in 2010 and invested in technologies (Sommeliers-international, 2015). Samarkand includes two wineries Jomboy Sharab and Hovrenko Wine factory with history tracing back to 1868 and 1927 where viticulture has been developed. It is interesting to note, that, the Hovrenko Wine Factory has been cited in the TripAdvisor with a 5-star review by the visitor back in 2016 (TripAdvisor), which is a good indication that tourists do visit the vineries in Uzbekistan and we have to invest in the development of the wine tourism further.

There has been a number of events organized pertaining the wine tourism, in fact, on November 21-23, 2018 there is going to be a Wine Festival and International Wine Tasting Competition named “Wine Art Uzbekistan” at the Uzexpocentre; there will be presentations conducted by winemakers from countries such as France, Italy, Bulgaria, Hungary, including round table discussions, conference, wine tasting master classes and wine tasting competition (Advantour, 2018). On 21 April 2014, as part of the International Uzbek Tourism Exhibition “World of Leisure 2014” there has been offered a vineyard tour by the Khamkor winery, which has been operating in Uzbekistan since 1992 and known not only for its winemaking but also for bottling assembly line; the wine which is produced

using French technology and has been patented in France has several products namely, Saint Marc, pink Josephine, white wine J'adore, Louvre and others. It has been noted that, additional to the vineyard tours there would be offered horseback rides tours, along with the photo session in traditional Uzbek gowns, dinners (Uzdaily, 2014).

Conclusion & Recommendations

After our discussion of the wine tourism across the world and in Uzbekistan, the following recommendations have been provided for the further development of this aspect of the tourism:

▪ **To develop solid roads along with transportation and highway/road signs which would easily navigate both local and international visitors to the wineries.** Tourists use several sources of information before visiting the winery such as highway signage, tourism brochures, wine trail information, internet, recommendations from other visitors (word of mouth), previous visits, newspaper and magazines articles, GPS, guide books and mobile applications (Bruwer and Thach, 2013; Popp and McCole, 2016 cited in Byrd E. et. al, (2017) stresses on the importance of being able to easily 'wayfind' the winery location by the tourists through the use of highway signage programmes by the wineries in the USA, which has been confirmed by numerous studies as one of the reasons leading to the success of winery tourism industry.

▪ **To invest in the design and additional activities to the wineries, as an example of Napa Valley.** Good initiative is proposed by the Khamkor winery discussed above. Activities such as hot air balloon, train tour; hiking, biking, participation in the cooking workshops and exhibitions, golfing, horseback riding, photoshoots in national costumes, wedding events, conferences, open air events, etc.

▪ **To include winery visits and tours into overall country trip schedule offered by tourism agencies, hotels, guides etc.**

▪ **Internet presence is required nowadays, website, or presence in social media by the wineries would increase interest from the local and international visitors.**

▪ **Build or offer accommodation places near vineries, so that both local and international visitors could escape to the village from their busy urban life and enjoy the nature, and leisure and family activities; team-building activities for companies is also a good option.**

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