



The Wine Routes in France

Carmen Mihaela Man¹ 
Camelia Slave² 

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Abstract: *Wine is much more than a simple agricultural product or a vague raw material that is traded on the markets of London or Chicago. Wine accompanies, enhances, completes and sometimes sublimates our table. However, it cannot be confined to the gastronomy sector alone because it is much more than that. Wine has a cultural, historical and heritage dimension, it also occupies a decisive place in the economic and social fields. France and wine... A long story that has caused a lot of "ink to flow". It was the Greeks who, around 600 BC. AD, planted the first vines in southern Gaul. From the 2nd century BC. AD, the Romans and then the Gallo-Romans gradually developed wine production throughout the territory of present-day France. During the Middle Ages and the centuries that followed, the wines were perfected. This movement resulted in the emergence of very different beverages, which current producers continue to improve.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In France, viticulture is located in certain regions, on well-defined territories. It is from geography, history and terroirs that wine diversity has been built. Since the first establishment of the vine, in the south of France, and its development throughout Gaul by the Romans, winegrowers have sought the plants that were best suited to the climate and the soil to always obtain a better wine. Today, each region has its particular characteristics and wines. Appellation d'origine contrôlée (AOC) means that wines are produced in delimited areas and subject to strict and precise regulations defined according to "local, loyal and constant customs". AOC wines are identified with the cultural products of a specific region, with its landscapes, history, winegrowers and their know-how. AOC wines have been very successful; there were 70 in 1935, and there are more than 470 today (<https://www.lecese.fr>).

Today, in the context of globalization, new tastes are being expressed. Varietal wines and local wines were then developed and currently many new categories are available to consumers (<http://www.winepassport.fr/fr/page/route-des-vins-et-tourisme-viticole-decouvrez-nos-sejours-256>).

New consumers, both on the international market and the French market appreciate wines with a good image, guaranteeing a uniform taste and displaying a fair price. Some consumers also ask for fruitier and more aromatic wines. Other countries (Chile, Australia, Spain, Italy, etc.) have risen to this challenge and won significant market shares replacing the French producers. French viticulture benefits from all the necessary potential, through its public and professional research structures, to market wines that are more suited to the demand of new consumers and to position itself more forcefully on the markets.

¹ University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Bucharest, 59 Mărăști Blvd, Bucharest, Romania

² University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Bucharest, 59 Mărăști Blvd, Bucharest, Romania

In recent years, numerous initiatives have been developed in the wine regions: cultural routes, direct sales, tasting courses, celebrations and festivals, etc. It is worth emphasizing the essential role of restaurateurs in the knowledge and distribution of wines provided that they remain at affordable prices. More and more, viticulture professionals are showing their strong desire to get involved in this new niche as tourists are there.

To make themselves better known to consumers, viticulture professionals have created tourist itineraries allowing travelers to reconcile the pleasures of discovering their treasures and regions. In France, the number of wine tourists is estimated at 5 million French people and 2.5 million foreigners (survey by Atout France). Many tourist routes crisscross the vineyards of France. Between the 140,000 cellars and the thirty museums, these routes allow one to taste wines, and meet professionals in the area, but also to appreciate the local landscapes and architecture; this is how wine tourism was created in France (Gaubert-Turpin et al, 2021, (<https://www.vinotrip.com/fr/route-des-vins>)).

Aromas, perfumes, and colors... The wine route is above all a multi-sensory experience. In 2016, more than 10 million tourists practiced wine tourism by discovering the wines of France. The term “wine tourism” refers to wine tasting, but also to visiting the cellars, and accommodation that offers immersive stays in the heart of the vineyards (Gaubert-Turpin et al, 2021).

2. WINE ROUTES

The French vineyard has been established for centuries, in some regions for several millennia. The notoriety of these wines has been built on the diversity of terroirs and grape varieties, which has given rise to numerous wines with designation of origin, some of which have become legendary. These wines, and all the other less famous but just as typical, carry the characteristics of their region, both geological, climatic, and human, as well as the wine-growing landscapes which have been shaped over time, are part of the tourist and cultural heritage from France (<https://www.routard.com/contenu-dossier/cid136048-les-routes-des-vins-en-france.html>).

2.1. The Loire Valley Wine Route

Vineyards of France cover the Nantes region, Anjou, Touraine and the Centre. The perfect opportunity to delight taste buds while visiting the castles! The temperate climate that reigns in these regions is the ally of Muscadet and Chinon.

Characteristics of the vineyards: surface area of 63,000 ha, 5,009 farms, 68 appellations (52 AOC and 16 VDQS).

Five grape varieties cover nearly most of the grape varieties:

- In blacks: Cabernet franc (52%); black Gamay (16%).
- In whites: Melon (39%); Chenin (27%); Sauvignon (20%).

There are many names. For red wine: Anjou (including rosé d’Anjou), Cabernet d’Anjou, Touraine, Chinon. For white wines: Muscadets, Sancerre, Touraine, Vouvray. More than three-quarters of the surface area of the vineyard is devoted to AOC or VDQS wines. It is the third vineyard of appellation wines in France.

2.2. The Champagne Wine Route

Only the pinot noir, chardonnay and pinot meunier grape varieties, lovers of limestone soils, deserve to receive this royal name. To discover the great houses with names that make one dream, one has to travel the roads between Reims and Épernay. From the Saint-Thierry massif to the Montagne de Reims, a plateau strewn with vines awaits its tourists!

Characteristics of the vineyards: area of 32,341 ha, 11,670 farms, 1 AOC.

The expression “wine of champagne” appeared around 1600, before the wines of the coasts around Reims were marketed under the general name of “wines of France”.

Champagne is a legendary product. It is a festive wine, which is drunk on the occasion of significant life events or is drunk to highlight and promote certain events (sports, politics, boat launches, etc.) and to maintain its own fame.

The Champagne myth would result from the conjunction of three assets: its terroir (northern climate, chalky subsoil, relief of hillsides), a blend of wines from different grape varieties, vintages and even years, which makes it possible to have consistent quality and taste, mastery of effervescence.

Originally, there would have been a local sparkling wine, the “tocane” of Aÿ. At the end of the 17th century, the people of Champagne put their wines in bottles to better preserve and transport them. The natural effervescence was gradually brought under control.

The grape varieties are Pinot noir (39%), Pinot meunier (33%), Chardonnay (28%). Mechanical harvesting is prohibited because the grapes must arrive intact at the press, in order to prevent the colour contained in the skin of the black grapes (Pinot noir and Meunier) from colouring the must. The grapes are pressed, vintage by vintage, variety by variety. It is at this time that most of the harvest is taken care of by the Champagne houses. Champagne vineyards are small: 2.72 ha of vines, on average. They are the smallest among French wineries. A third has an area of fewer than 50 areas, and 15% have an area of between 50 areas and 1 ha. The Champagne vineyard employs 122,000 seasonal workers, mainly for the harvest, on average ten days a year. The Champagne region is also characterized by a very large grape market since it concerns more than 50% of its production. A partnership exists between winegrowers and merchants and this thing limits imbalances between supply and demand.

2.3. The Alsace Wine Route

On the podium of white nectars proudly dominate the Sylvaner, the Riesling and the Gewurztraminer whose identities differ thanks to the diversity of the soils of the region. From Haut-Rhin to Bas-Rhin, there are flowery villages and medieval towns. Invented in 1953, the “Alsace wine route” is the oldest in France. For more than 170 kilometers, it winds along a north-south axis through hills covered with vineyards. Located on hills, the Alsatian vineyard is sheltered from oceanic influences by the Vosges mountains and enjoys plenty of sunshine. It is about a hundred kilometers long and covers approximately 15,000 hectares spread over 119 municipalities.

Characteristics of the vineyards: surface area of 15,450 ha, 5,150 winegrowers, 3 AOCs.

After the First World War, winegrowers began to produce white wines made from typical grape varieties: Riesling, Pinot Gris, Gewurztraminer, Muscat d'Alsace, Sylvaner, Pinot Blanc, Klevener. To this list, Crémant d'Alsace must be added, which stands out for being sparkling, and the Edelzwicker, which is a blend of several grape varieties. Pinot Noir is the only red or rosé variety in the region. These wines obtained their controlled designation of origin (AOC) in 1962. There are three of them: Alsace, Alsace grand cru, Crémant d'Alsace. Marketed in an exclusive type of bottle, the Alsatian flute, wines from this region are normally drunk in long-stemmed tulip glasses.

The producers, for their part, provide one with tasting cellars. Marked by signs and information terminals, this road gives access to 38 wine trails, also dotted with information panels. Crossing the vineyards, these paths lead up the hills where breathtaking views await.

2.4. The Burgundy Wine Route

In Burgundy, one finds the prestigious route des grands crus which takes from hill to hill from Dijon to Santenay. The Burgundy wine family extends its territory between Auxerrois and Mâconnais.

Characteristics of the vineyards: area of 30,600 ha, 3947 farms, 101 AOC.

From the grape varieties, which are mainly pinot noir, chardonnay, gamay, aligoté, we get red, white and rosé (clairet) wines. It was the monks who, in the Middle Ages, began to structure wine production, creating “clos” (properties) and “climats” (specific production areas) around their abbeys; the best known being Cluny and Cîteaux.

The Dukes of Burgundy and the Kings of France then reinforced these bases on which the Burgundy wine-growing economy still largely relies today, to which four thousand estates all highlight their characteristics (subsoils, microclimates, etc.). The Burgundy wine archipelago has four major tourist routes that can be followed separately or continuously. Next, they are presented in the north-south direction.

The “Yonne vineyard route” crosses as its name suggests, through the Yonne department. One of the main wines of this course is Chablis.

The “route des grands crus de Bourgogne” is considered to be a royal route. It crosses the part of the Côte-d'Or where the most prestigious vineyards are located. After visiting Dijon, one reaches the old village of Marsannay, then the canton of Gevrey-Chambertin and the vineyards of Nuits-Saint-Georges where the castle (12th century) of Clos de Vougeot is, the seat of the famous Brotherhood of Tastevin (the tastevin is the cup in which the wine is tasted in the cellar). Then there are Côte de Beaune, Pommard, Volnay and Meursault...The “route des grands vins” extends from Santenay. To Saint-Gengoux-le-National, it makes one discover the Chalonaise coast passing from one charming village to another: vineyards, bocage, Romanesque churches, castles, Canal du Centre...

The “Mâconnais-Beaujolais wine route” takes one to Saône-et-Loire; it is lined with “Follow the cluster” signs. This is where the wines of Mâcon come from, Pouilly, Saint-Véran,

Passetoutgrain, Viré-Clessé (many are white wines, juliénas, chénas, windmill, fleurie, chiroules, morgon, régnié, côte de brouilly, brouilly), sometimes associated with the divine Burgundian beverages, and other times considered separately. Beaujolais is largely due to the Gamay grape variety. From Saint-Amour to Lyon, 140 km of vineyards are spread over a multitude of different soils.

2.5. The Rhône Valley Wine Route

These vineyards invite one to explore lavender fields and hills and set off on an adventure through six departments. From Avignon to Vienne, the Rhône serves as a breadcrumb trail. In this way, one can feel the taste of a red Châteauneuf du Pape from the Domaine de Fontavin, or try a white Saint-Péray with a floral scent.

Characteristics of the vineyards: surface area of 79,870 ha, 6,800 farms, around twenty AOCs.

88% of AOCs in the Rhône Valley (94% of Côtes du Rhône) are red wines, 8% rosé and 4% white. Whether for the AOC wines of the Rhône Valley or for the AOC wines of the Côtes du Rhône alone, the cooperative cellars represent more than 60% of the production, the private cellars of the order of a third and the wine merchants, about 3%.

2.6. The Provence Wine Route

From the Alpilles to the Esterel massif, the Provençal vineyard stresses the importance of generous rosés. The three dominant appellations are Coteaux d'Aix-en-Provence, Côtes de Provence and Coteaux Varois. For lovers of marine scenery, the southwest of the Massif des Maures invites one to taste a Côtes de Provence La Londe.

Characteristics of the vineyards: the surface of 90,972 ha, 7473 farms.

The main black grape varieties used are Grenache (44%), Syrah (16%), Carignan (12%) and Cinsault (9%).

Among the VQPRD, mainly red and rosé wines, the main appellations are the Provençal part of the Côtes du Rhône, the Côtes de Provence; then come, with a smaller share, the Côtes de Ventoux, the Coteaux d'Aix and the Côtes du Luberon.

The region's VQPRD production amounted to 2.868 million hl, including a large proportion of local wines (vins de pays from the Var, local wines from the Portes de la Méditerranée, Vaucluse, Bouches du Rhône, of the Moors, of the Principality of Orange).

2.7. The Languedoc-Roussillon Wine Route

The vineyards of Banyuls offer exceptional natural sweet wines in a dazzling atmosphere between the Mediterranean and the Pyrenees. The vine has been present in the region since Roman times. But it is from the 19th century that the conjunction of several factors - a fall in the price of wheat, and the building of the railways - will allow the shipment of wines to the consumption centers. A more remunerative wine price will lead to rapid development of the vineyard, the area of which will reach 450,000 ha in 1860 (260,000 ha in 1840).

It was in 1874 that phylloxera (aphid that attacks the roots of vine stumps) appeared in the Gard. The vineyard was rebuilt thanks to the grafting of French grape varieties on American plants.

Characteristics of the current vineyard: area of 268,188 ha, 19,106 farms.

The vineyard lies down from the eastern edge of the Cévennes to the eastern Pyrenees, on a wide variety of soils and terroirs (schist soils, limestone, stony terraces, alluvial plain...). Languedoc-Roussillon alone produces 80% of French table wines. It provides some 30% of the French wine harvest. It is the world's largest vineyard, despite the loss of 150,000 ha following successive uprooting in the 1980s.

2.8. The Bordeaux Wine Route

Behind the name, “Bordeaux wines” hide some of the most prestigious appellations in the world, such as Pommerol or Saint-Emilion for red wines. Among the itineraries on offer, choose the castles, and route in the Médoc. Bike paths and trails lead to Château Margaux, the flagship location of the vineyard.

In spite of the French national pride suffering, one must admit that it is to the British that we owe the rise of Bordeaux wines. When Aquitaine was under their domination for much of the Middle Ages, they got into the habit of tasting Clairette, a light red wine, and thus favored local viticulture and trade.

Characteristics of the vineyards: the surface of 121,496 ha, 9863 farms, 57 AOC.

The reds are very popular, but the region also produces dry or sweet white and rosé wines made from red grape varieties. The latter, for the most part, are Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Merlot, while the white wines are mainly made from Sauvignon Blanc, Sémillon and Muscadelle grape varieties.

Bordeaux has more than fifty controlled designations of origin, thousands of châteaux (properties) and hundreds of trading houses; it has been calculated that wine-growing provides one in six jobs in Gironde. Some of its wines are among the most prestigious in the world: Pétrus, Yquem, Mouton Rothschild, Cheval Blanc, Laffite-Rothschild, Latour, Margaux.

Taking advantage of the humidity brought by the Atlantic Ocean, the 120,000 hectares of Bordeaux vineyards enjoy a temperate climate (short winter). They are discovered through five tourist routes dotted with wine houses. Their starting point is of course Bordeaux, the streets of its very elegant city center should be explored: already a pretty road to walk on. The Route du Médoc, between the north of Bordeaux and the Pointe de Grave. This is where one finds the Grands Crus Classés and quite a few Crus Bourgeois (Pauillac, Saint-Estèphe, Saint-Julien, Margaux, Moulis, etc.). For the pleasure of the eyes, one has castles and prestigious residences. The Saint-Emilion-Pomerol-Fronsac road is located east of Bordeaux, on the right bank of the Dordogne. The vineyards crossed are those of Saint-Émilion, Fronsac, Côtes de Castillon, Côtes de Francs.

The Blaye and Bourg road north of Bordeaux runs through Blayais and Bourgeois (Côtes de Blaye, Côtes de Bourg, etc.). The Route des Graves, southwest of Bordeaux, runs through

vineyards on the edge of the Landes forest. This micro-region forms the cradle of Bordeaux. The Entre-deux-Mers road runs southeast of Bordeaux in the region, that is to say between Dordogne and Garonne. The wines here are red as well as rosé and white (Cadillac, Haut-Benauges, Loupiac, Sainte-Croix-du-Mont...).

2.9. The Corsica Wine Route

Endowed with numerous microclimates and soils, the Corsican territory displays its oenological flavors all along its coast. To find the wine route, nothing could be simpler: just follow the coast. To the north, taste the Muscat from Cap Corse, and to the south, the wines of Figari. The splendid landscapes are a bonus!

Characteristics of the vineyards: the surface of 6800 ha, 205 farms, 9 AOCs.

The area of the Corsican vineyard is 6,800 ha, a constant figure for several years (it reached 30,000 ha in the 1960s, at the time of the arrival of returnees from Algeria). The AOCs have extended over just under 3,200 ha, the highest level since 1980. The main grape varieties used are, black: Nielluccio, Merlot, Sciaccarellon, Grenache, Syrah; white: Vermentino, Chardonnay, Muscat à petits grains, Chenin, Muscat d'Alexandrie. The local market is an outlet for 70% of the AOC production and for 30% of local wine production. The cost of Corsica-continent transport is a minus.

3. CONCLUSION

The development of wine tourism has a double purpose: to offer an additional source of income to winegrowers and to develop the promotion of wine. Indeed, closer to the production, the consumer is the best to appreciate the wine, the life way, and the conviviality that is attached to it. Wine tourism is a way to promote both wine culture and heritage.

Viticulture is an essential support for tourism and gastronomy in all regions of France. Strong in its traditions and with the support of its research, widely noticed around the world, it must also evolve and adapt for sustainable development and practices that respect the environment.

All together, citizens, professionals, and public authorities have to take up the challenge of competitiveness, while preserving the authenticity of the vine and the wine so that France is always the first wine-growing country in the world.

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