

TRENDS IN WINE TOURISM IN HUNGARY

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Abstract:

This study examines the role and development potential of wine tourism in Hungary, with a particular focus on its economic significance and current trends. Tourism is a key sector of the national economy, contributing significantly to GDP and employment. The research presents the current state of domestic wine tourism and the characteristics of wine regions, while highlighting the significance of the Tokaj wine region as a World Heritage Site.

The study emphasizes the role of innovation, storytelling, and digital solutions in developing wine tourism offerings, and highlights the importance of cooperation among tourism stakeholders. In conclusion, it states that wine tourism has significant development potential in Hungary, but its long-term competitiveness depends on conscious product development, strengthening an experience-centered approach, and coordinated action among industry stakeholders.

Key words: trends, wine tourism, Hungary

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the most significant and rapidly growing economic sectors today, playing a key role not only economically but also socially and culturally. In Hungary, tourism makes a substantial contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP) and plays a significant role in employment. Consequently, it is particularly important to examine individual tourism sub-sectors, explore their development opportunities, and enhance their competitiveness.

Wine tourism is a complex tourism product that straddles the boundaries of multiple sectors, linking agriculture, gastronomy, cultural heritage, and tourism. Hungary possesses favorable natural conditions and significant winemaking traditions, which provide an excellent foundation for the development of wine tourism.

Globalization and changing consumer habits have a significant impact on tourism. Tourists are increasingly seeking experiences rather than just services, which is leading to a transformation of the tourism industry. This is particularly important in the case of wine tourism, as wine as a product is no longer a sufficient draw on its own; there is a need to develop comprehensive, experience-based, authentic, and personalized services.

This study aims to explore current trends in wine tourism in Hungary and to identify development directions that can contribute to the sector's long-term competitiveness. The study focuses in particular on the rise of experience-based tourism, the transformation of consumer demands, and the importance of cooperation among tourism stakeholders.

The relevance of the topic is further reinforced by the fact that tourism has undergone a transformation due to recent global challenges—particularly the COVID-19 pandemic. This has created new opportunities for more flexible, smaller-scale forms of tourism that offer authentic experiences, including wine tourism. Accordingly, the development of wine tourism is of paramount importance not only from a tourism perspective but also from a rural development perspective.

THE ECONOMIC ROLE OF TOURISM

One of the indicators used in international practice to measure economic processes is gross domestic product (hereinafter: GDP), which includes the sum of goods and services produced by a given country's various industries and sectors, as well as the balance of product taxes and

subsidies. (HCSO, 2020)¹ Tourism, as a complex system, represents a separate sector within GDP, as it has demonstrable economic, social, and environmental impacts.

According to WTTC data, in 2024 the tourism and travel sector accounted for 10% of global GDP, which amounted to approximately USD 10.9 trillion. In terms of employment, approximately 357 million people work in the tourism services sector worldwide. (WTTC, 2024)²

In Hungary, the Hungarian Tourism Agency (hereinafter: HTA) is responsible for collecting and providing tourism data, and this organization prepared the National Tourism Development Strategy for 2030 in 2017. In 2023, the strategy was reviewed and updated, and it includes the tourism sector's share of Hungary's GDP for the past 12 years. (HTA, 2023)³.

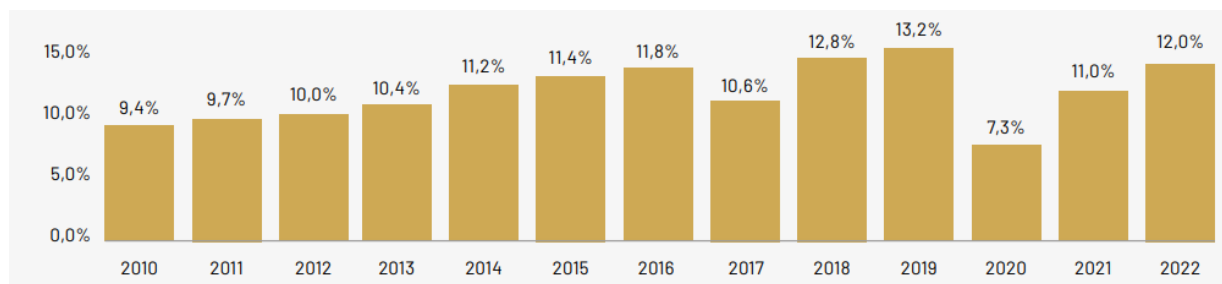


Figure 1: Tourism's Contribution to GDP
Source: (HTA, 2023)⁴

Over the past 12 years, tourism's share of GDP has fluctuated between 7.3% and 13.2%; a steady increase was noticed between 2010 and 2016, In 2017, a slight decline was observed, which was not due to a weakening of the tourism sector but rather to the exceptional growth of GDP, which was driven to a greater extent by other sectors. In the following years, 2018–2019, significant growth is again evident, returning to the previous upward trajectory, followed by a significant decline of nearly 6 percentage points in 2020, caused by the COVID-19 pandemic that began in November 2019. Due to the pandemic, the survival and continued operation of many tourism service providers became uncertain, but tourism businesses that weathered the pandemic began to slowly recover in 2021, thanks to which the tourism sector accounted for 11% of the country's GDP in 2021, and 12% in 2022. And the growth did not stop there; according to data released by Portfolio in February 2026, the tourism sector contributed 14% to the country's GDP in 2025, indicating that it not only reached pre-COVID-19 levels but also exceeded them by 0.8%. (Portfolio, 2026)⁵.

When analyzing the tourism sector's impact on the national economy, an important indicator—besides its effect on GDP—is the number of people employed in the sector; the HTA's estimate for 2022 predicts that the number of employees could rise above 400,000. This represents 8.7% of Hungary's total workforce. (HCSO, 2026).⁶ The number of people employed in the tourism sector stood at 422,000 in 2023; by 2024, the number of employees had reached 441,000, representing a further 4.3% increase compared to the previous year. (Trade Magazine, HCSO,

¹ Hungarian Central Statistical Office. (2020). Fenntartható fejlődés indikátorai. <https://www.ksh.hu/ffi/4-1.html>

² World Travel&Tourism Council. (2024). Travel & Tourism Economic Impact Research (EIR). [Travel & Tourism Economic Impact Research \(EIR\)](https://www.wttc.org/Research/EIR)

³Hungarian Tourism Agency. (2023). Turizmus 2.0. kiegészítés. https://mtu.gov.hu/dokumentumok/NTS2030_Turizmus2.0-Strategia_kiegeszites.pdf?v=0.160

⁴Hungarian Tourism Agency. (2023). Turizmus 2.0. kiegészítés. https://mtu.gov.hu/dokumentumok/NTS2030_Turizmus2.0-Strategia_kiegeszites.pdf?v=0.160

⁵Portfolio. (2026). Rekordévet zárt a magyar turizmus, túlszárnyalta a terveket. <https://www.portfolio.hu/gazdasag/20260201/rekordevet-zart-a-magyar-turizmus-tulszarnyalta-a-terveket-815058>

⁶Központi Statisztikai Hivatal. (2026). A munkavállalási korú népesség gazdasági aktivitása, nemeként. https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/mun/hu/mun0004.html

2025)⁷. Overall, it can be said that the tourism sector is a key component of the Hungarian economy in terms of both GDP and employment.

TOURISM – WINE TOURISM

Tourism, the tourism sector, is a multidimensional field and can be classified according to various criteria. Based on the purpose of travel, the two main branches of tourism are business tourism and leisure tourism. Business tourism refers to travel related to one's job or intellectual activities, while leisure tourism occurs based on an individual's independent decision for the purpose of personal time use. In terms of form, the phenomenon of tourism can also be divided into two major groups: one is mass tourism, and the other is alternative tourism. Additionally, a third form of classification is based on the destination of the trip, which distinguishes between domestic and international tourism. (Lenkey, n.d.)⁸

Forms of tourism can also be defined in terms of the tourism product—that is, the services that enhance tourism appeal, expand reception capacity, and stimulate spending. Based on this, wine tourism can also be distinguished, which is “a specialized branch of tourism that, with wine as its central theme, showcases the results of viticulture and winemaking in a given wine region, while also presenting the area's historical, cultural, and gastronomic characteristics.” (Piskóti, 2019)⁹

Taking into account the above classification framework for tourism¹⁰, the definition of wine tourism, and the relevant literature, it can be stated that wine tourism falls under the category of leisure tourism; in terms of its form, it is an alternative tourism service, with a diverse clientele, and as a wine-focused branch of gastronomic tourism, it constitutes an important part of the tourism system.

This segment of tourism is also listed as one of the 8 priority tourism products¹¹ in the 2030 development strategy prepared by the HTA, specifically under the umbrella term “Gastronomic Tourism (Wine and Gastronomy).” (HTA, 2023)¹²

A journey involving the tasting, consumption, and learning about the production of wines (Várhelyi 2012¹³, Gál 2020¹⁴), i.e., the product of wine tourism is the wine route itself, which can only develop in a wine region and is formed by a tourism product and community associated with a specific area. (Piskóti et al., 2019)¹⁵ We can distinguish three types of wine routes: open, thematic, and classic wine routes. The type of wine route characteristic of a region develops depending on the wine region's location and characteristics, as one of the features of an open wine

⁷ Trade Magazin. (2025). Statisztikai helyzetjelentés 2025. <https://trademagazin.hu/hu/statisztikai-helyzetjelent-es-2025/> <https://www.ksh.hu/turizmus-vendeglatas>

⁸Lenkey, G. (n.d.) Szabadidő turizmus. Nyíregyházi Egyetem Turizmus és Földrajztudományi Intézet. <https://foldrajz.nye.hu/sites/foldrajz.nye.hu/files/Szabadid%C5%91%20Turizmus%20online.pdf>

⁹ Piskóti, I. (2019. 09). Borút, Borturizmus, - Integrált fejlesztési koncepció.

¹⁰Alapítvány, K. T. (2021, 12.). Hazai borturizmus kutatás. https://bor.hu/media/uploads/prezentaciok/2022_prezentaciok/Borturizmus_kutatasi_jelentes_bor-hu.pdf

¹¹ The other 7 priority tourism products are: Cultural tourism (World Heritage sites, festivals); Health tourism (health resorts, wellness); Active tourism (cycling, water sports, hiking); Ecotourism (national parks, nature); Religious tourism (pilgrimage sites); MICE tourism (conference and business tourism); Rural tourism (rural experiences)

¹²Hungarian Tourism Agency. (2023). Turizmus 2.0. kiegészítés. https://mtu.gov.hu/dokumentumok/NTS2030_Turizmus2.0-Strategia_kiegeszites.pdf?v=0.160

¹³ Várhelyi T. (2012): Borturizmus. Líceum Kiadó, Eger.

¹⁴Gál Z. (2020): A hazai borfesztiválok közönségének vizsgálata. Turizmus Bulletin. 20(3). pp. 43–52. <https://doi.org/10.14267/TURBULL.2020v20n3.5>

¹⁵ Piskóti I. – Bene Z. – Marien A. – Nagy K. – Szakál Z. (2019): Borút, borturizmus – Integrált fejlesztési koncepció, módszertan és menedzsment-gyakorlat. Turisztikai és Vidékfejlesztési Tanulmányok. 4(3). pp. 21–35. <https://doi.org/10.15170/TVT.2019.04.03>

route is that the vineyards are scattered, with a small number of tourism service providers, making it difficult to traverse as a coherent unit. Thematic wine routes go beyond simply visiting wineries to incorporate other tourist attractions; this type of wine route requires a high degree of cooperation between wineries and other tourism service providers. The classic wine route category includes wine regions where the area is small but has a long history and reputation, as the wineries in these towns are located close to one another, making it possible to tour them; when combined with other tourism services (such as accommodation), they prove to be more attractive destinations. (Piskóti et al., 2019)¹⁶

The strategy developed by the HTA comprehensively defines numerous aspects related to various wine tourism products (wine routes) with the aim of enhancing the integrator role through cooperation with other sectors of the national economy, while also prioritizing destination-based development. The strategy thus highlights the need to strengthen the elements of the value chain. It emphasizes that development must pay particular attention to preserving authenticity and to wines under various forms of protection. It also considers it particularly important that a unique, easily distinguishable, and diverse range of offerings be available to visitors to the wine regions. (HTA, 2023)¹⁷

HUNGARIAN WINE REGIONS

Hungary's geographical conditions are favorable for wine production; grape growing and, consequently, wine production take place throughout the country. In Hungary, wine regions and wine districts are defined by law. We distinguish a total of six wine regions, comprising 22 wine districts, based on climate, topography, soil conditions, and their unique histories. Some regions include six wine districts, while others contain only one.

I. Upper Pannonian Wine Region: Sopron, Pannonhalma, Neszmély, Mór, Etyek-Buda

II. Balaton Wine Region: Nagy-Somló, Zala, Balaton Uplands, Badacsony, Balatonfüred-Csopak, Balatonboglár

III. Pannonian Wine Region: Tolna, Szekszárd, Pécs, Villány

IV. Danube Wine Region: Hajós-Baja, Csongrád, Kunság

V. Upper Hungary Wine Region: Mátra, Eger, Bükk

VI. Tokaj Wine Region: Tokaj (Borbázis, 2025)¹⁸

The Tokaj wine region is of outstanding importance and is also recognized as a World Heritage Site. Its unique natural conditions enable the production of special wines, such as Tokaji Aszú, which is internationally recognized. (Magyar Bor, n.d.)¹⁹ The wine region is the most frequently visited by those interested in wine tourism.

TRENDS IN WINE TOURISM SERVICES

In 2021, the Századvég Public Life Knowledge Center Foundation conducted a comprehensive study²⁰ on wine tourism in Hungary, analyzing the consumer habits of both domestic and foreign tourists. The study used a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to uncover the specific characteristics of demand for wine tourism. Based on the results

¹⁶ Piskóti I. – Bene Z. – Marien A. – Nagy K. – Szakál Z. (2019): Borút, borturizmus – Integrált fejlesztési koncepció, módszertan és menedzsment-gyakorlat. Turisztikai és Vidékfejlesztési Tanulmányok. 4(3). pp. 21–35. <https://doi.org/10.15170/TVT.2019.04.03>

¹⁷ Hungarian Tourism Agency. (2023). Turizmus 2.0. kiegészítés. https://mtu.gov.hu/dokumentumok/NTS2030_Turizmus2.0-Strategia_kiegeszites.pdf?v=0.160

¹⁸ Borbázis. (2025). Magyarország borvidékei – 6 borrégió – 22 Magyar borvidék <https://borbazis.hu/magyarorszag-borvidekei-6-borregio-22-magyar-borvidek/>

¹⁹ Magyar Bor. (n.d.). Tokaji borvidék. <https://bor.hu/tokaji-borvidek/>

²⁰ Alapítvány, K. T. (2021, 12.). Hazai borturizmus kutatás. https://bor.hu/media/uploads/prezentaciok/2022_prezentaciok/Borturizmus_kutatasi_jelentes_bor-hu.pdf

of this study, the analysis below identifies the most important trends and outlines potential directions for product development.

The results clearly show that wine tourism is becoming increasingly experience-oriented. Wine consumption alone is no longer a sufficient draw; guests are increasingly seeking complex experiences that engage multiple senses. Tourists no longer visit wine regions solely for the wine; their decisions are significantly and collectively influenced by the natural environment, cultural attractions, and other program options.

The demand for authenticity is growing, as evidenced by the increasing emphasis on local characteristics, unique and irreplaceable experiences, and services with a more personal touch. At the same time, knowledge-based consumption is becoming increasingly prominent. Visitors are interested in the winemaking process, the origins of wines, and the stories associated with them, which indicates a growing appreciation for the educational aspect of wine tourism.

The social experience is also a key factor, as wine tourism activities are typically communal in nature, where sharing experiences enhances their value. Furthermore, the research highlights a growing demand for spontaneity and flexibility, as program participants prefer more informal, less structured programs. The role of storytelling is also gaining importance, as the winemaker's personality and the narratives surrounding the wines significantly contribute to deepening the experience. Another trend is that wine tourism is increasingly evolving into a multi-day leisure activity, during which visitors view their stay in the wine region as a comprehensive experience package.

Based on the trends identified, it is necessary to rethink the approach to developing wine tourism.

It is particularly important to strengthen an experience-centered approach. One possible direction for this is the development of a narrative-based, innovative wine tourism model that transforms traditional services into story-driven experiences and places an emphasis on actively engaging visitors. As a result, tourists will become not merely consumers but participants and shapers of the experience, leading to a stronger emotional connection to the destination.

Among the development priorities is the introduction of solutions that support flexible experience organization, enabling the creation of programs tailored to individual needs. In addition, it is important to consciously strengthen community experiences, for example by organizing smaller-scale, interactive programs.

The integration of digital technologies also offers significant opportunities. By linking online and offline experiences, the wine tourism experience can begin even before the trip and be sustained afterward. At the same time, it is of paramount importance to organize the wine region's offerings into comprehensive experience packages that integrate winemaking, gastronomic, cultural, and natural elements into a unified system.

Overall, it can be concluded that the future competitiveness of wine tourism depends on the extent to which service providers are able to develop experience-based, personalized, and authentic offerings that go beyond traditional wine consumption.

A fundamental prerequisite for the widespread application of these trends is strengthening cooperation among tourism stakeholders. The basis for successful cooperation among tourism service providers is the development of a common tourism product strategy that defines clear goals, development directions, and unified marketing activities. The literature offers several models and strategies dealing with tourism product development and innovation; among these, the model developed by Nagy and Piskóti for thematic routes best fits the field of wine tourism (Figure 2).

The essence of this model, which depicts the networked interconnection of various tourism elements, is that visitors should not concentrate exclusively on a single central area but should also take advantage of the wider offerings of the region, thereby promoting a more even distribution of tourism revenue. Cooperation among stakeholders is essential for the development

of such networks, extending not only to wineries and tourism service providers but also to local cultural actors and businesses. (Piskóti et al., 2019)²¹

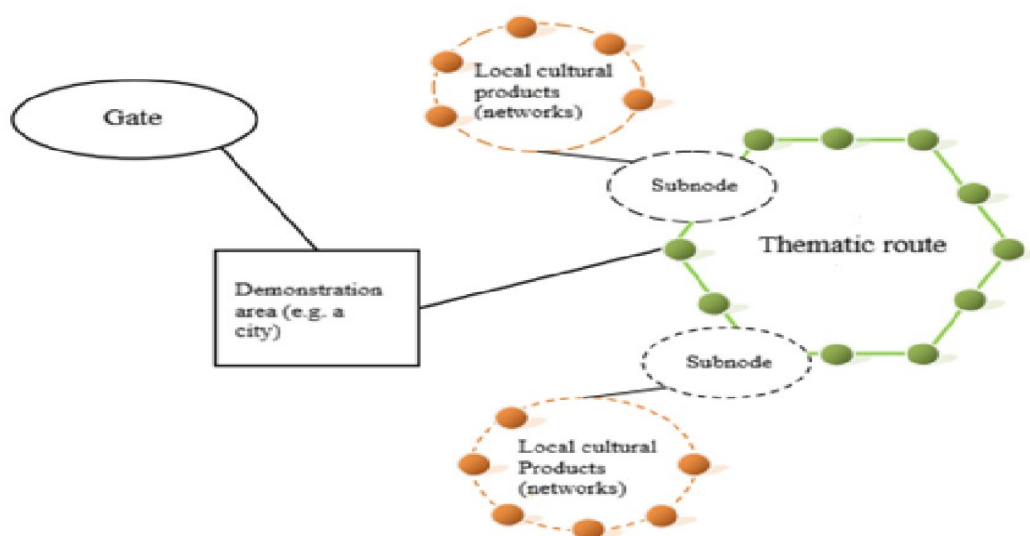


Figure 2: Strategic combinations for thematic routes
Source: Nagy-Piskóti, 2015²²

CONCLUSION

Based on the study, it can be concluded that wine tourism is one of the most dynamically developing segments of Hungarian tourism, with significant potential. It contributes to the economic development of rural areas and helps preserve cultural values.

The shift in demand clearly points toward experience-oriented, authentic, and personalized services. Accordingly, innovation, digital solutions, and collaboration-based operations must play a key role in future developments.

The long-term competitiveness of wine tourism depends on the extent to which service providers can adapt to changing consumer demands and deliver complex, memorable experiences to visitors.

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²¹ Piskóti I. – Bene Z. – Marien A. – Nagy K. – Szakál Z. (2019): Borút, borturizmus – Integrált fejlesztési koncepció, módszertan és menedzsment-gyakorlat. *Turisztikai és Vidékfejlesztési Tanulmányok*. 4(3). pp. 21–35. <https://doi.org/10.15170/TVT.2019.04.03>

²² Nagy, K. – Piskóti, I. (2015): Útvonal-alapú turisztikai termékfejlesztés, mint a társadalmi innováció eszköze: História-völgy a Csereháton. In: Veresné, Somosi M. – Lipták, K. (szerk.): „Mérleg és Kihívások”

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