



## FACTORS AFFECTING VISITORS' MEMORABLE WINE TOURISM EXPERIENCES AT THE URLA VINEYARD ROUTE (TÜRKİYE – AEGEAN COAST)

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### ABSTRACT

This paper aims to identify the key factors that contribute to a memorable wine tourism experience for visitors to the Urla Vineyard Route (UVR). This route the second most important wine tourism route in Türkiye after the Thrace Vineyard Route, was created by seven vineyard owners in 2015. In the research 378 comments of visitors posted on TripAdvisor between 2016 and 2023 were collected and the data was analyzed using MAXQDA Analytics Pro 2020 software. This research employed the netnographic research process. Results show that six factors affect visitors' wine tourism experiences: the scenery and atmosphere of the vineyard and winery, winery staff, grape variety, food taste, wine tasting and price. Scenery is the most influential factor, while the price is the least in visitors' wine tourism experiences.

### KEYWORDS

wine tourism, experience, wine route, vineyard, winery, Urla

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Wine tourism or oenotourism has grown to be a very popular and rapidly expanding segment of the tourism market in wine-producing regions across the world (Barth & Salazar, 2011; Charters & Ali-Knight, 2002; Hall & Mitchell, 2000; Qiu et al., 2013). The terms “wine tourism” and “oenotourism” are frequently used interchangeably but in travel contexts, “wine tourism” is the more prevalent term. Meanwhile, “oenotourism” – derived from the Greek *oinos* (meaning ‘wine’) – tends to be used more in professional, academic or European contexts conveying a more scholarly or culturally

embedded perspective. Oenotourism emphasizes a more educational and immersive experience centered on wine, as well as the exploration of the region's natural beauty, history and heritage (Gündoğan & Yankı, 2021). According to Süer and Keskin (2024), oenotourism involves not only wine tasting but also appreciating the cultural and natural richness of the wine-producing area.

Wine tourism offers unique experiences in an atmosphere surrounded by distinctive natural landscapes and cultural heritage (Quadri-Felitti & Fiore, 2013), encompassing a wide range of different experiences, such as wine-related travel (Santos et al., 2020),



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as well as cultural, rural, community and natural attractions. Regarding the literature review, the most popular wine tourism activities are wine tasting and winery and vineyard visits (Brochado et al., 2021). According to Sekulić et al. (2016), visiting vineyards, wine tastings, trying a variety of wines, learning about winemaking, and planning the trip are the main reasons for tourists to engage in wine tourism.

Visits to vineyards allow tourists to take in the unique scenery and its aesthetic qualities and wineries provide visitors with a variety of immersive experiences during their trips. According to Madeira et al. (2019), the wine tourism experience usually involves the concurrent interactions of the cellar, wine, staff, education, entertainment and aesthetics.

In a natural setting like a vineyard, tourists may learn about terroir – unique environmental factors shaping a wine's character – while taking a break from everyday life. During the visit to the winery, tourists are given explanations about the various techniques used for aging and elaboration, the varieties of wine made, and some of the traits unique to each one. Additionally, visitors can partake in tastings as well as wine-related fairs and festivals (Brochado et al., 2021; Carlsen, 2004; Marzo-Navarro & Pedraja-Iglesias, 2009). At tastings, visitors usually try many wines, and they can also pair them with local food specialties. Wine tourism has become a viable and sustainable kind of trip that improves visitor interactions with the environment and with local customs such as winemaking.

In the literature on wine tourism, Alebaki et al. (2014, pp. 228–229) distinguished two important, overlapping streams: a “winery” focus and a “region” focus. “Winery” focuses on wine culture, quality, the marketing of specific wines and wineries, and tourists' behavior. “Region” refers to the area where wine is produced, the appeal and life of a destination and the administration of tourism based on wine's allure. While the analysis in this study was predicated on winery evaluations, it leans more toward a “region” perspective.

It is well acknowledged that wine tourism experiences have a significant influence on consumer behavior and attitudes, and this can influence customers' purchasing decisions (Velikova et al., 2015). As noted by Cohen and Ben-Nun (2009), wine perception is significantly influenced by prior wine tourism experiences with positive attitudes arising from those if they are seen positively, while negative attitudes may arise from an unpleasant experience (Bagozzi et al., 1999; Mano, 2004). Therefore, future purchases will be influenced by favorable customer perceptions (Alant & Bruwer, 2010; Bruwer & Lesschaeve, 2012), while positive ones will also boost brand loyalty (Quadri-Felitti & Fiore, 2013). Accordingly, most wine tourism experiences involve a substantial educational component that visitors will remember when making future purchases (Lee et al.,

2017; Sönmez & Graefe, 1998). Therefore, understanding the factors that influence the wine tourism experience is essential, since it can lead to more sales, more tourists, and more money spent in a region (Saayman & A. van der Merwe, 2015).

According to Ali-Knight and Carlsen (2003), wine experience marketing helps to advance the idea of wine tourism with exceptional experiences from the wineries providing strong feelings of emotion. If the wine tourist has a positive experience, they will tell their friends and peers about it, which is beneficial to the winery. Leri and Theodoridis (2019) explored how the emotions of tourists influence their willingness to visit and recommend a winery. According to Bruwer et al. (2013), wineries that have a beautiful physical and natural landscape provide tourists with enjoyment that is linked to such emotional experiences. As a result, from the time a tourist enters the winery for the first time until they leave, their experiences are determined by their unique internal reactions (such as feelings).

In today's competitive market, offering tourists a positive travel experience is crucial for the success of wine tourism (Back et al., 2020) and it is essential to comprehend the wine experiences of tourists to gain insights into their characteristics, motivations and preferences when visiting wine regions. This understanding is crucial for the development of wine tourism, effective marketing of wine destinations, and maintaining competitiveness within the wine tourism market. By analyzing tourists' experiences, stakeholders can tailor their offerings better to meet the demands of this niche market. Regarding the influence of wine tourism experiences on consumer behavior, this study aims to explore those of tourists visiting Urla Vineyard Route (UVR).

Türkiye's wine tourism has not received much attention from researchers but it adds significance to this article's contribution to the wine literature. Results offer valuable insights for stakeholders such as local authorities, winery owners and marketers to enhance tourists' wine experiences as well as develop and promote the wine route.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarly research on wine tourism first appeared between 1990 and 2000 (Getz, 2000; Mitchell & Hall, 2006) focusing on three themes: destination strategies, actors in the wine tourism sector, and the behavior of wine tourists. Research on destination strategies examines the promotion of wine regions, associated costs and benefits, and the impact these campaigns have on the destination's image (Hojman & Hunter-Jones, 2012). The second focuses on the tourism strategies of

wine producers (Dawson et al., 2011), while the third examines the choices and actions of wine tourists when selecting a wine region (Carlsen & Boksberger, 2015).

Studying the experiential aspect of wine tourism has been the focus of work in more recent years (Cohen & Ben-Nun, 2009; Pikkemaat et al., 2009; Quadri-Felitti & Fiore, 2012, 2013), and is positioned at the core of tourism consumption in studies on marketing. Experience in tourism has emerged as a key notion both for scholars and practitioners (Bosangit et al., 2015). Although the wine tourism experience has been extensively researched from a number of dimensions, including wine involvement, winescape – the entire attributes of a wine region – the experience economy, service experience quality and experiential marketing, scholars still disagree on what the fundamental elements of the wine tourism experience are (Zhang & Lee, 2022).

Research results indicate that the wine tourism experience is a multidimensional concept and Mitchell et al. (2000) have proposed an experiential viewpoint regarding wine tourism. They emphasize that the appealing imagery associated with wine extends beyond just the mere consumption of a drink; it encompasses a broader experience that transcends the senses and emotions related to the wine itself. Wine tourism, like many other tourism types, involves a rich tapestry of elements. These include the characteristics of the individual visitor, the environment in which the experience takes place, interactions with the personalities involved in winemaking, and connections with other integral aspects such as food, accommodation and fellow visitors. It is the combination of these varied components, rather than each element in isolation, that constitutes the overall winery experience.

Wine tourism is seen as a hedonic experience but Crespi-Vallbona and Mascarilla-Miró (2020) found that, besides hedonism, factors such as nostalgia, tasting, involvement, knowledge, significance, novelty and local culture are important in a memorable and satisfying wine tourism experience. It has been discovered that the most crucial factor generating tourists' satisfaction is wine tasting.

Attractiveness and authenticity are also crucial elements in producing a remarkable wine tourism experience (Getz, 2000; Roberts & Sparks, 2006), even though high-quality wine is something that many winery visitors take for granted. General winescape elements like the production facilities, vineyards and tasting rooms are other factors (Bruwer & Lesschaeve, 2012; Galloway et al., 2008; Johnson & Bruwer, 2007).

The traditional focus of wine tourism has been on the senses (smell, taste, touch, hearing and sight), emotions and the pleasure of pastoral environments. Getz (2000) claims that wine tourism is a fully immersive sensory experience, encompassing the following five senses:

1. Smell: grapes and the land, the fresh air of the countryside, wine fermentation, cellars where the wine ages, and fresh herbs and roses from the garden.
2. Taste: local food and wines, as well as fresh grapes and other products.
3. Touch: from the perception of the procedures involved in making wine, to the bottle and glass, to cooking with wine and harvesting grapes.
4. Sight: the bright sky and vineyards, the distinctive local architecture, people having a good time, traditional festivals and the color of the wine.
5. Hearing: the act of bottling, the opening of a bottle, joyful music, the wine production machinery, and the kitchen and cooking.

Studies have focused on rural landscapes and the natural environment (Bruwer & Alant, 2009; Bruwer & Lesschaeve, 2012). According to Cohen and Ben-Nun (2009), a wine tourism experience encompasses more than just the pleasure of seeing a winery and sampling its offerings; it also includes other activities like taking in the surrounding area's scenic beauty and other local tourism attractions. Konuk (2013) categorized the experiences of consumers visiting Sensuswine under five factors and named them as lifestyle, emotion, belonging, atmosphere and satisfaction.

Singh and Hsiung (2016) determined the crucial elements for Napa Valley's wine tourism using importance-performance analysis (IPA). The top five factors that are important for wine visitors are the scenery, high-quality wines, fine-dining and gourmet restaurants, pleasant and attentive staff, activities, and opportunities for relaxation. Wine-related items that scored highly include quality, purchase options, and a consistent image. Additionally, using IPA, Stergiou (2018) studied service quality during trips to Greek wineries. According to the survey, the top factors drawing wine tourists are the scenery, wines, food, people and activities other than wine tasting and/or drinking. The staff scored the highest in terms of performance.

Using Pine and Gilmore's four stages of economic progression, Quadri-Felitti and Fiore (2012, 2013) applied the "four realms of an experience", the 4Es (entertainment, educational, esthetics and escapism), to wine tourism activities. Their study on the Lake Erie Wine Country Trail revealed that aesthetics had the greatest influence on establishing a memorable wine-tourism experience. Sensual environments such as winescapes, boutique hotels and wines, countryside drives with vineyards alongside, and winery art and craft fairs enhance the traveler's experience. Similarly, Amaral et al. (2024) discovered that the most important component of the wine tourist experience is entertainment (winery, wine, heritage, festival, etc.) utilizing the 4Es. Aesthetics, which includes things like cuisine, art and landscape, is the second



most influential component. The third is educational (tasting, pairing, guided tour, etc.), while the final dimension is escapism. Wine tourists can participate in a genuine wine experience at wineries by witnessing the production process in an on-site setting, which is followed by bottling and labeling. After that, visitors can learn more about specialized information, like the vintage.

Mason and O'Mahony (2007) highlighted six themes: cuisine, lifestyle, regionalism, environment, rurality and health – all of which are crucial for a memorable culinary tourist experience on the food and wine route. Some other studies have identified factors such as the event's atmosphere, nature, wines, scenery, the opportunity to engage in activities beyond wine tasting, the uniqueness of the experience, education about the wines, interaction with the wine maker, meeting new people, signage, complimentary wine-related gifts, child-friendly activities, live entertainment, and the quality of amenities and entertainment provided by the winery (Saayman & A. van der Merwe, 2015).

In their research conducted on one of South Africa's greatest routes, the Robertson Wine Route, Saayman and P. van der Merwe (2015) identified four key factors that impact tourists' wine experience: the quality of the route, food and entertainment, information dissemination and amenities. The study revealed that, among these factors, the quality of the route had the least influence, while amenities had the most significant impact.

Carmichael (2005) investigated the experience of wine tourism in relation to two factors: the regional rural experience and activity-place experiences. The regional rural experience refers to the atmosphere, ambience, surrounding environment, local wine styles and varieties, and regional culture and food, which are just a few that come together to make up this experience (Williams, 2001). Therefore, the rural landscape is a crucial component of the wine tourism experience. Activity-place experiences are linked to the factors that influence the quality of a tourist's experience at the winery while according to Dodd and Gustafson (1997), four categories may affect a visitor's attitude: service, wine characteristics, winery environment and price.

According to Pivac (2012), an "overall wine experience" consists of the following ten features: (a) wine tasting and purchasing; (b) socializing with friends; (c) enjoying the rural setting and vineyards; (d) spending time outside; (e) learning about wine; (f) learning about wine production; (g) winery tours; (h) wine tasting at restaurants; (i) relaxation; and (j) experiencing other attractions and activities.

In order to investigate their effects on the wine tourism experience, Gu et al. (2019) proposed a model that incorporates perceived wine tourism facilitators and constraints and tested the moderating role of

involvement in these effects. This study, which used a sample of Chinese outbound wine tourists visiting Australia, found that the perceived facilitating factors were local attractions, interpersonal facilitators and winery fame. The constraining factors were personal language and transportation barriers, time and information barriers, and winery fame. This last had a negative impact on the wine tourism experience, whereas both interpersonal facilitators and local attractions had a positive impact. According to the study, involvement moderated the influence of facilitators and constraints on the experience of wine tourism. Local attractions have a significant impact on high-involvement wine tourists; however, interpersonal facilitators have a negative impact on their experience.

There are few academic studies on wine tourism in Türkiye, especially on its experience. Güzel et al. (2021) explored the strategic success factors for wine tourism entrepreneurs in the Elmalı (Antalya) region, highlighting that success relies not merely on economic and legal structures but also on providing visitors with a compelling experience that reflects the region's distinctive identity, encompassing its geographical and cultural richness, climate, preserved architectural heritage and vibrant religious traditions. In this context, Güzel et al. (2021) highlighted several key elements vital to the wine tourism experience, including location, authenticity (alignment with brand and local values), physical appearance (well-designed spaces, stylish owners, adequate car parking and overall property aesthetics), branding, accommodations, restaurants and cafes, event management and guided tours.

Meanwhile, in their study of local and international tourists visiting the Thrace Vineyard Route, Bekar and Benzergil (2025) characterized visitors as experiencers who are eager to learn, thereby underscoring the significance of the educational aspect of the wine experience and participants' attitudes towards wine tourism as seekers of information.

A study conducted by Akyürek et al. (2024) identified four key factors that shape the visitor experience: gastronomic elements, the conduct of business owners and employees, the overall atmosphere (music, scenery, landscaping, etc.), and various additional factors such as cleanliness, hygiene, parking and pricing. Soylu (2022) analyzed the holiday experiences of tourists visiting food and beverage venues along wine routes, categorizing these experiences into seven distinct categories of which four – atmosphere, service, product quality and price – play a crucial role in defining the wine tourism experience. Oyan and Akdağ (2020) compared the wine tourism experiences of Turkish and Portuguese wine tourists and organized their findings into four main aspects: tasting, interaction with staff, wine purchasing and pricing.

As a result, the findings of studies that concentrate on the wine experience are subject to change. Wine tourists' expectations vary from region to region, according to Charters and Ali-Knight (2002), and are based on a number of crucial success criteria that are implemented in certain locations, such as particular geographical and cultural characteristics. After examining the crucial success factors for wine tourism destinations, Getz and Brown (2006) came to the conclusion that the combination of three core elements – the cultural product, the core destination appeal and the core wine product – as well as their adjacent dimensions result in the success of the experience.

### 2.1. THE URLA VINEYARD ROUTE (UVR)

Wine production in Urla is as old as the history of the region. The ancient city of Klazomenai, where Urla was first mentioned, existed in 2000 BC and inhabited by the Ionians, who originated in Greece in the first century BC and moved into Anatolia, establishing new cities in the region that stretched from Izmir Bay to the Mandalay Gulf. The oldest olive oil workshop ever discovered was in ancient Klazomenai while the microclimate there and its terrain made it suitable for viniculture so wine production developed and expanded. Anciently, amphorae were used to store

the wines made in this region ("Urla Vineyard Route: A rhapsody of colors", n.d.) and during that period, wine was a significant commercial item in a large geographic area that included the Western Mediterranean and Black Sea coasts.

Wine trade and production in these regions stretch back to 4000 BC, as seen from archeological evidence (Urla Şarapçılık, n.d.). According to the travelogue of the renowned traveler Evliya Çelebi, "Ulice", the daughter of the King of Kıdafi, created the city, which was then given the name "Urli" before becoming more commonly known as "Urla" (T.C. Urla Kaymakamlığı, n.d.). Today, the regional wine labels use these names and due to the significance of wine in historical events and its connections to culture, this area is now a popular destination for wine tourists.

To promote Turkish wines and preserve the long-standing Anatolian winemaking tradition, Urla winemakers created the UVR in 2015. Urla Bağcılık ve Şarap Üreticileri Derneği (The Urla Viticulture and Wine Producers Association) was formed by seven vineyard owners: Limantepe, MMG Şarapçılık, Mozaik, Urla Şarapçılık, Urlice, USCA and Urla Bağ Evi (Urla Vineyard House) (see Table 1). The owners of the vineyards hope that the UVR will help the area become a well-known wine tourism destination, comparable to Tuscany and Bordeaux.

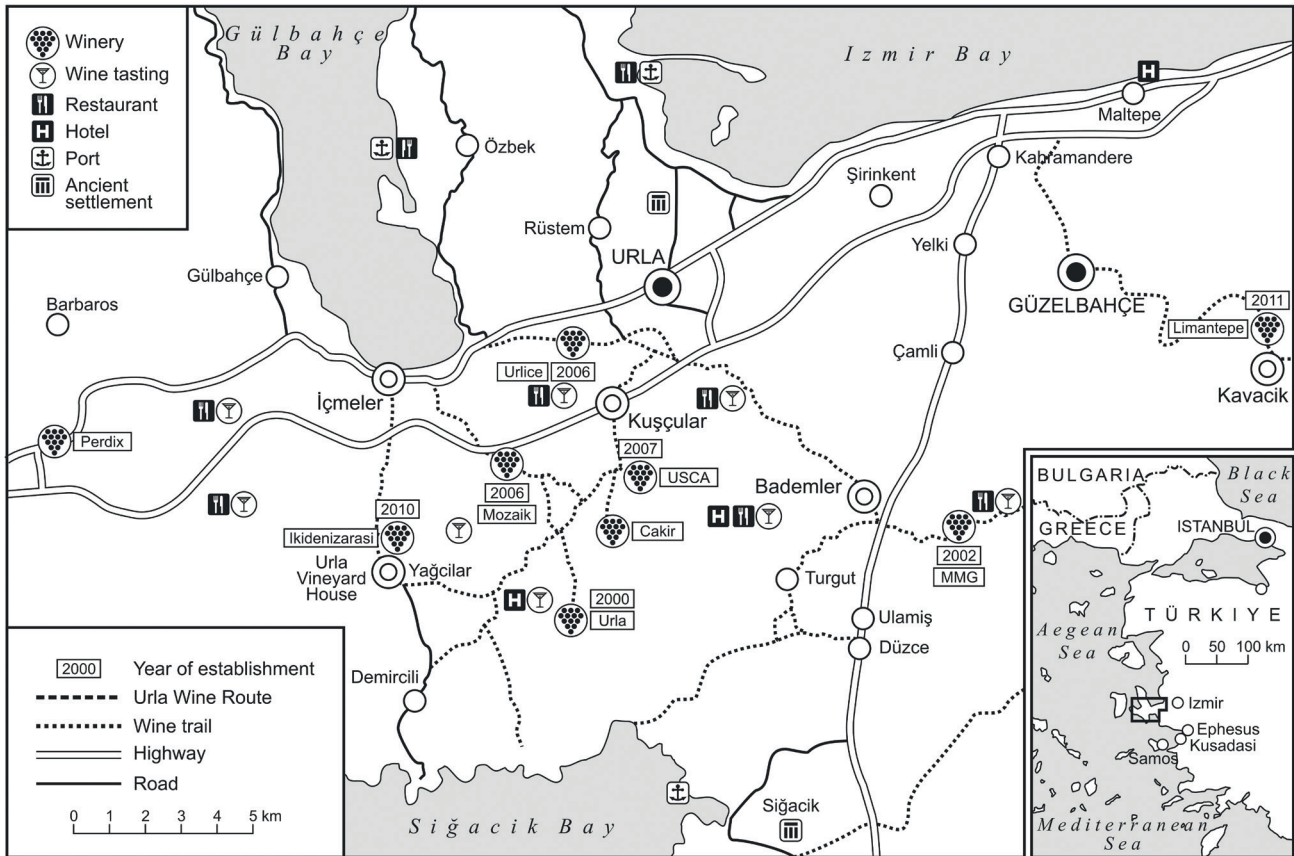


Figure 1. Urla Vineyard (Wine) Route  
Source: Urla Bağ Yolu (n.d.)

Table 1. Wineries in the Urla Vineyard Route

Winery	Location	Year of establishment
Urla Şarapçılık	Kuşçular	2000
MMG Şarapçılık	Bademler	2002
Mozaik Şarapçılık	Kuşçular	2006
Urlice Şarapçılık	İçmeler	2006
USCA Şarapçılık	Kuşçular	2007
Limantepe Şarapçılık	Kavacık	2011
Urla Bağ Evi (Urla Vineyard House)	Kuşçular	2010

Source: author.

Situated in the Aegean Region, the UVR has been a significant wine producer for thousands of years, currently accounting for over 50% of Türkiye's wine production. Urla Vineyard Route is located 50 kilometers from Izmir, which is about a one-hour drive (see Figure 1, p. 145).

The wineries along this route are primarily chateau-style establishments, upholding a rich wine-making tradition by utilizing indigenous grape varieties such as Bornova Misketi, Sultaniye, Boğazkere, Foça Karası, Gaydura, and the almost forgotten Urla Karası which has been successfully revived. In addition to these local grapes, the wineries also produce wines from several international varieties, including Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Sauvignon Blanc, Shiraz, Sangiovese, Chardonnay and Nero d'Avola.

The UVR offers visitors a unique and immersive wine tourism experience that showcases the rich history and culture of the Urla region of Türkiye. Numerous wine-related experiences are available to visitors to the area, including tours of nearby wineries, wine tastings, grape harvesting events and food pairings. Along with wine tasting, the route provides many options for biking and trekking, horse riding, accommodation in boutique hotels where visitors may experience the local culture, and delectable meals at gourmet restaurants. The municipality of Izmir has also developed 20 separate "olive paths" to promote cycling and hiking excursions in the region.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The research employed the netnographic process, which is based on the survey of secondary data that is accessible online in the form of reviews with the assessment of tourists visiting the region (Kozinets, 2010). To determine the factors influencing wine

tourism experiences, reviews posted by travelers on TripAdvisor, which is well known for being a popular review website (Pearce & Wu, 2016), were collected.

Online reviews on sites like TripAdvisor are regarded as reliable sources of information that help wine enthusiasts and wine tourists evaluate various services and facilities (Cassar et al., 2018). Recent research has also shown the benefits of using web reviews to assess visitor experiences and identify satisfaction dimensions (Brochado et al., 2019; Rodrigues et al., 2017).

Thus, the primary goal of the current study is to determine the key elements of wine tourism experiences from visitor-shared internet reviews. The study aims to answer the research question:

RQ: How do visitors explain their wine tourism experiences in online reviews?

In the study, reviews between the years of 2016 and 2023 were collected; 478 (mainly from Turkish travelers) focused on wine tourism experiences (covering wineries, accommodation facilities, restaurants and the wine route). However, only 378 reviews were considered, as some of them were irrelevant to the topic.

In this study, a quantitative approach was adopted, and content analysis was carried out on visitors' comments using the MAXQDA Analytics Pro 2020 program to analyze the data. MAXQDA is software used for qualitative and quantitative data analysis, providing a variety of tools for analyzing and understanding qualitative data, such as the capacity to code and classify, identify patterns and themes, and produce visualizations (MAXQDA, n.d.). MAXQDA is widely utilized in hospitality and tourism research to define visitor experiences, determine their primary characteristics, and examine the core themes.

The analysis of the data included several steps. The initial one involved transferring reviews into a word document and then all were examined by the author and translated into English. In the second step, considering the text against the literature, a coding scheme was determined. Significant and related categories were then grouped using these codes, after which the key themes were identified. Three distinct researchers who are experts in gastronomy and wine decoded the data set to ensure the validity of the study and MAXQDA program's project merge tab was used to combine the codes that were obtained. The consensus tab between encoders was then used to conduct a reliability and validity analysis. After agreement on the codes, sub-themes and main themes were determined.

### 4. FINDINGS

The analytical process identified six themes (factors) that influence the wine experience of visitors. These are



the scenery and atmosphere, winery staff, grape variety, food taste, wine tasting and price. The frequencies of the factors and main themes affecting wine experiences are presented in Figures 2 and 3.

The findings indicate that the most significant aspect influencing the wine experience is the scenery and atmosphere of the winery and the wine region, mentioned 229 times, followed by winery staff with a frequency of 175, grape variety with 117, food taste 116, wine tasting 113 and price 79.

Scenery and atmosphere include the scenery of the vineyards, wineries and accommodation facilities, the natural surroundings of the wineries, a peaceful environment, the exterior and interior decoration of wineries, the music played in the tasting room, etc. The results suggest that the natural surroundings, the scenery of the vineyards, and the overall ambience of the wineries play a crucial role in shaping visitors' wine tourism experiences.

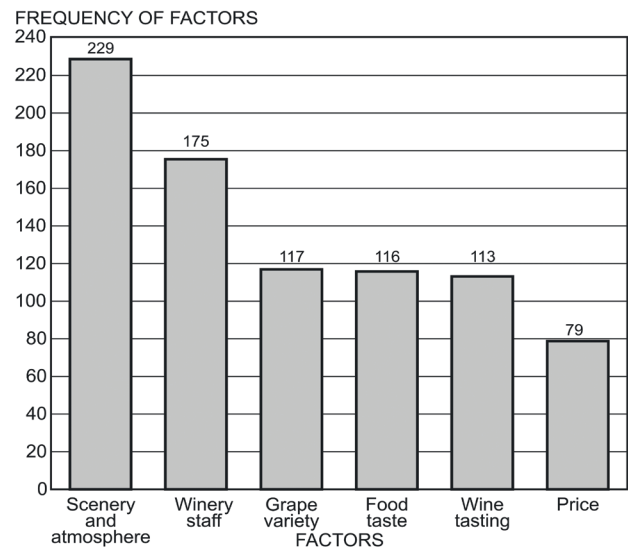


Figure 2. Frequency of themes (factors)  
Source: author



Figure 3. Main themes affecting wine experience  
Source: author

A typical review written by a couple:

When you step into the winery, a magnificent view, landscape, and privileged ambiance welcome you, and you start to be impressed from the very first moment. Our greatest pleasure was to sip our wines in the beautiful view of this place.

A group of female friends who wanted to escape their routine lives wrote:

The decoration of the hotel lobby and dining areas are wonderful; there are cacti, succulents, various plants. The hotel has a bohemian style, a nice area is designed in the middle of the outdoor seating areas where you can light a fire. ... To the left of the hotel, there are vineyards you can take a walk, and in wintertime, you can drink your wine in front of the fireplace, accompanied by nice jazz music.

The winery staff theme is related to the helpful, kind, and friendly behaviors of the winery and the hotel staff and their knowledge about grapes, wine production, serving, and food and wine pairings. Courtesy and helpful behavior, their knowledge about grapes and wine, the production process, etc. are other influential factors in UVR.

A young visitor wrote:

The staff was smiley, helpful, and friendly. ... During the wine tasting, detailed information (from how wine is produced to, how it is drunk, to what food it goes well with) was given about the wines we tasted. It's important to know how the wine you taste is produced.

A Turkish visitor living in the USA said:

The gentleman, who is extremely knowledgeable and works as the winery coordinator, told us the story of the winery, the technologies they use, and the added value they create. ... It was a unique experience to listen to the story of how the Urla Karası grape was brought back.

Grape varieties also affect the experiences of consumers. Wineries on the Urla Wine Route produced wines from local grapes such as Urla Karası, Foça Karası, Misket (Muscat), as well as international ones, i.e. Viognier, Shiraz, Merlot, Chardonnay, etc. A young woman wrote:

Definitely try the wine made from local grapes. Especially Sonnet 5 is great. The winery has named its wines after Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, each wine corresponding to a sonnet. Sonnet 5 wine is made from the local grape, Bornova Muscat. Its smell takes you to different places before you even drink it. A medium-bodied and smooth wine, muscat but not sweet, almost dry.

A man commented:

Foça Karası, which is the grape of these lands, was beautiful, but viognier was awesome. If you like white wine, Viognier is the best; if you say red, Foça Karası is my favourite.

A couple choosing wine for their restaurant:

Among the red wines, Urla Karası and Tempus, which are made from Cabernet Sauvignon, Shiraz, Merlot, Petit Verdot and Cabernet Franc, are excellent. However, Urla Karası is above Turkish standards.

A woman shared her experience:

I tried blush, followed by Viognier & Chardonnay. Viognier & Chardonnay is very nice; you can smell the fresh fig aroma intensely in the front nose. Afterwards, the vanilla aroma releases itself. Viognier & Chardonnay is a nice wine to enjoy with appetizers on summer evenings.

The taste of food that is served at restaurants located in wineries and the snacks consumed during the wine tasting is also an important factor. Visitors typically comment on the quality and the taste of the food, which is regularly praised as being outstanding or delicious and which they thought was fantastic. People expect fresh and delicious food prepared from local ingredients while drinking a glass of wine.

A family living in İstanbul:

If you want to enjoy nature with delicious food and drinks, this is the right address. It's a small and cozy place run by the owners. There is a wine house next to the vineyards. ... You won't be able to get enough of both delicious food and wine. Risotto and pizza were great.

A couple celebrating their wedding anniversary commented:

My wife and I came on the recommendation of our friends for our anniversary. ... The first night, we had excellent food which was served by Chef Kaan Baysallı. Grilled octopus with sauce, goat cheese in kadayıf, and grilled beef were very tasty, and their presentation was very nice.

An owner of a small hotel wrote:

... We loved the food; it was simply perfect. The menu of the restaurant includes wines, especially those from the Urla region. All the ingredients used in the meals are local, and most of them are supplied from the village; moreover, the restaurant chef is very nice and helpful. ... Every dish on the menu is worth exploring and is delicately prepared. As a starter, we ordered bruschetta and goat cheese with kadaifi. As the main course, we preferred seafood, octopus with wine sauce,





The opinions of tourists regarding vineyards are positively impacted by experienced cellar staff (Brochado et al., 2019). Visitors who travel for wine and gastronomy have a curiosity about discovering new things and learning about wine, which is referred to as an educational dimension in the literature and is an important appeal for tourists (Galloway et al., 2008; Leri & Theodoridis, 2019). Sparks (2007) claims that wine tourists consider personal growth as a defining characteristic.

Grape variety is the third factor affecting the wine tourism experience. The main product of wine tourism is wine and as tourists seek out distinctive flavors (Bruwer & Rueger-Muck, 2019), the grape variety is important in the wine tourism experience (Williams, 2001) as grape variety affects the flavor of wine. Winemakers can produce distinctive flavor profiles by combining various grape varieties, including both domestic and foreign. The narratives highlight local grape varieties such as Urla Karası, Foça Karası and Misket (Muscat). Tasting wines produced from international grapes such as Viognier, Shiraz, Merlot and Chardonnay is also mentioned for a good wine tourism experience. Grapes grown in the sunny terroir of the Aegean region produce wines with a distinct flavor and tourists place a high value on wines made from native grape varieties since they typically symbolize the particular region (Bešlić et al., 2012).

Food provides memorable experiences for visitors in a wine tourism destination. As emphasized by Getz (2000), there is a close connection between wine tourism, local cuisine and authentic experiences. High-quality food served in the vineyards' restaurants, cafes and tasting rooms enhances the experiences of visitors. When enjoying a bottle of wine, visitors highlight the fresh and delectable food that is made using local ingredients while the guests can also learn about wine and food combinations. Pine and Gilmore (1999) assert that creating a remarkable wine and cuisine experience requires using genuine, indigenous food and wine that represent the place of origin, and research has indicated that authenticity plays a crucial role in augmenting wine tourism encounters through the appreciation of regional cuisine and distinctive wines (Ali-Knight & Carlsen, 2003; Quadri-Felitti & Fiore, 2012). Food was determined to be one of the most significant aspects of wine tourism experiences in the research of Hernández et al. (2022), examining the comments of wine tourists visiting Mexican wine regions, while in addition, food and entertainment were rated as the second most important factor contributing to a memorable experience on the Robertson Wine Route (Saayman & P. van der Merwe, 2015). This sensory component, which links various interconnected themes and concepts, emphasizes how vital food or flavors are for a memorable wine tourism experience.

Wine tasting is an integral part of visitors' overall wine tourism experience. Visitors who could sample a variety of wines made from both domestic and foreign grapes, each of which is a distinctive expression of the terroir of Urla, expressed their satisfaction with wine tastings which were paired with mouthwatering regional cuisine. According to Pivac (2012), wine tasting is one of the ten components that make up the "overall wine experience". Cohen and Ben-Nun (2009) noted that wine tasting is one of the primary components of the wine tourism experience and the most popular activity for creating good memories and ensuring visitors' satisfaction. When visitors attend a wine tasting, they get to see, smell and taste the wine in addition to hearing an informative discussion of its different characteristics (Quadri-Felitti & Fiore, 2013).

The price of wine affects the experiences of visitors and as stated by McNamara and Cassidy (2015), visitors prefer free wine tastings. Some visitors in this research found the prices high but this is mostly because of the high taxation that the Turkish government has placed on wines, and this has a negative impact on the tourist experience. According to Alant and Bruwer (2010), there are two main reasons why people travel for wine: wine tasting and wine purchasing. Four categories of winery attributes – service, wine characteristics, winery environment and price – that influence visitors' attitudes toward buying wine have been identified by Dodd and Gustafson (1997). These factors may also be indicative of the quality of the visitors' experience.

## 6. THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

From an academic standpoint, the most significant contribution of this paper is the integration of MAXQDA with the netnography approach to analyze the experiences of wine tourists with netnography offering faster, higher-quality opinions than consumer surveys (Kozinets, 2002). Besides, this paper makes several contributions to the literature on wine tourism. Firstly online visitor reviews on the experiences of tourists visiting UVR, which is the second most popular wine route in Türkiye, were used to create the six dimensions of wine tourism experiences. Visitors exchange details about the complete experience, including the surrounding scenery, landscape, winery staff, regional cuisine, wines, wine tasting and price. The findings of this study demonstrate how important web review content analysis is for comprehending such experiences.

Second, although academic studies on wine tourism experience have increased in recent years, studies on

wine tourism and wine routes in Türkiye are quite limited. Because there is virtually no research in the literature regarding the experiences of Turkish wine tourists, this study adds theoretical insights to the field. The research findings of this study have implications that should inspire further investigations into wine tourism experiences on a country-wide basis. New empirical studies that go considerably beyond current research limits are strongly encouraged.

Third, the results highlighted the significant impact that the environment and scenery, the wine itself and winery staff have on the wine tourist experience. Positive memories are largely shaped by the winery staff and the wine, and social interactions with winery staff play a major role in the experience, satisfaction and memorability of wine tourists, as well as in their revisiting intention and recommendation of the winery to others.

## 7. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study can be used by wine industry stakeholders, including winery managers, travel companies, policymakers and government organizations, to build strategies and plans that will help promote wine regions, improve visitor satisfaction, and enhance wine tourism experiences through an improved understanding of them. In particular, this research helps winery owners by providing them with the necessary knowledge to improve visitor experiences and increase their satisfaction. Since wine tourists cannot be categorized as generic, a deeper understanding of their expectations and preferences is important in reaching the goal and gaining a competitive advantage for wineries. It also helps to identify the most crucial variables that impact visitors' choices (Giampietri et al., 2018).

It is important to note that visitors to the Urla Vineyard Route typically arrive on day trips, and these influence their assessment of the wine route experience. Therefore, understanding the expectations and experiences of these visitors will be beneficial for wine producers and marketers aiming to promote the region and attract future tourists looking to relax by the sea while exploring the wine trail. Mitchell et al. (2000) emphasize the significance of consumer behavior research in wine tourism for stakeholders, as it offers the crucial insights of wine tourists themselves. This understanding enables marketers and managers to effectively target and develop their offerings on winery tours, guided experiences, wine festivals or purchasing wine. Additionally, they highlighted that the characteristics of wine tourists in one area should not be assumed to mirror those in another, nor should they

be generalized across different wineries. Recognizing variations among visitors is essential for marketers and operators in effectively targeting potential wine tourists.

The most important factor in this research affecting experiences is the scenery and atmosphere. To this end, wine stakeholders should continue to highlight the visual experience because it contributes significantly to the tourists' overall visit while keeping in mind the other five elements.

Due to wine's major role in wine tourism experiences, wineries must offer consistently high-quality wines with a fine taste that are served properly. Wines made from local grape varieties or international award-winning ones should be promoted. These local grapes, which grow in the unique terroir of the Aegean, are different from other regions in their distinctive flavors, while wines blended with international grape varieties also offer fine tastes to visitors. This can create a significant advantage in competition for the wineries on the wine route and can also increase wine sales.

Since attitudes, behaviors, courtesy and employees' expertise about wine are important to the positive experiences of tourists, winery managers should give importance to the training of staff, especially on the wines produced by the company, grape varieties, production procedures, wine tasting, food and wine pairings, the neighboring wine area and effective communication. According to Quadri-Felitti and Fiore (2012), increasing wine knowledge can have a big impact on making tourists feel satisfied and able to create memories.

Importance should be given to food on wine routes. This suggests that such routes ought to prioritize the quality and variety of local cuisine available as well as national or international meals prepared using local ingredients. These should be highlighted on the menus of restaurants and hotels operating in the region. Delectable snacks should also be served at wine tastings. It is recommended for wineries to display reasonable wine prices and make sure that wine tastings are free as the cost of wine can have a favorable or negative impact on the wine tourism experience.

A comprehension of the experience is necessary for the development of wine tourism routes. Local government agencies should ensure that access roads are well maintained and that information on wine routes, trails and other rural activities is easily accessible in order to support the UVR. A wide range of activities (e.g. cultural, wine and vintage events, local gastronomy, rural tourism activities, etc.) will enrich the experiences of visitors. Extending overnight stays at the vineyard accommodation is possible by rounding out the experience with additional activities, such as hiking, cycling or other escapism-focused pursuits like harvesting.

Local administrations and wine producers have great responsibility for improving wine tourism



in the region. Given the region's rich historical and cultural legacy, the stakeholders ought to take into account its wine heritage. Therefore, it is important to promote the region's natural and cultural features, as well as its wine heritage, in order to offer distinctive, memorable and authentic experiences. It is a fact that their marketing and strategy development may draw on this historical context. The construction of new wine hotels in the vineyards will provide a good opportunity for tourists who want to experience the landscape and atmosphere.

## 8. LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

There were certain limitations to this study. The sample was limited to visitors who left reviews for wine tourism experiences was used to determine the factors affecting their experiences. These reviews may not accurately reflect the experiences of all visitors (i.e. those who place a higher importance on things other than scenery). Furthermore, as the research employed a netnographic approach, which limits the sample, participant demographic data were not available. More comprehensive findings will be attained if a tourist's psychographic profile is incorporated into the investigation.

Second, the study's findings might not be broadly applicable because data was collected from a single case study, and it only examined the experiences of tourists visiting the UVR in Türkiye. Collecting data only from TripAdvisor may also be a limitation; using the reviews of multiple social networks and websites to assess wine tourism experiences would be better.

Despite some recent advancements in this field, research on consumer experiences is still quite limited. For future studies, demand-side research on wine tourism is necessary in order to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of visitors in wine tourism. Besides, even if utilizing content analysis taking into account visitor feedback on social media was chosen, measurement scales should be developed to measure wine experience in the context of wine tourism.

This study focused on a single route and a specific region. To confirm the added value of wine tourism route experience and its potential for economic, social and cultural growth, more wine routes in other regions need to be investigated.

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