

WINE ROUTES OF BULGARIA



THE
Wine
routes
OF THE WORLD

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REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA
Ministry of Tourism



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WINE ROUTES OF BULGARIA



HISTORY OF BULGARIA WINE CULTURE

Wine production has a tradition spanning over a thousand years in Bulgaria.

The ancient Thracians—one of the earliest civilizations in the region—worshipped the gods Zagreus and Dionysius and used wine in their religious rituals. Bulgaria is home to some of the most important archaeological discoveries, including gold and silver Thracian artifacts, many of which were part of exquisitely crafted sets used for serving and consuming wine.

The use of the Orphic drink in religious rituals is closely associated with ancient traditions in viticulture and winemaking. Even Homer praised the superior quality of Thracian wines in his works, underscoring their historical

prestige. Numerous examples feature intricately crafted gold and silver artifacts—elaborate wine sets designed for ceremonial use—attesting to the cultural significance and deep-rooted heritage of viticulture across Bulgarian lands.

The foundations of modern Bulgarian winemaking were established in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, marked by the introduction of more professional techniques. Today, Bulgaria is a proud producer of high-quality wines made from unique indigenous grape varieties that captivate wine connoisseurs around the world. The country's wines consistently earn international recognition and awards, impressing global oenophiles with their exceptional quality and refined character.

SOME KEY FACTS

VINEYARDS



Vineyard Surface Area: 56,200 ha
Harvested Vineyards: 28,402 ha
Grape Production: 147,804 tonnes
Average Yields: 5,165 kg/ha

WINES



Wine Production:
675,740 hl



White:
405,246 hl



Red and Rose:
270,494 hl



Registered Winemakers: 340

PGI (Protected Geographical Indication): 2
PDO (Protected Designation of Origin): 52



GRAPE VARIETIES

- Merlot: **16%**
- Cabernet Sauvignon: **14%**
- Pamid: **9.7%**
- Muscat Ottonel: **9%**
- Red Misket: **7.2%**
- Chardonnay: **6.7%**
- Dimyat: **4.8%**
- Sauvignon Blanc: **2.8%**
- Mavrud: **2.3%**
- Broad Leaf Melnik: **2.3%**
- Gamza: **2.2%**
- Others: **23%**

EXPORT

Export Total:
119,691 hl

EU: 88,800 hl

Outside EU: 30,891 hl



BRIEF HISTORY OF VITICULTURE IN BULGARIA

3000 BC. The Thracians began vine-growing and winemaking, closely tied to the worship of Dionysus.

1393. Ottoman rule halted viticultural progress.

1878. Liberation from the Ottoman Empire sparked a revival in winemaking.

1900. Phylloxera destroyed most vineyards.

1909. New grape varieties and winemaking techniques were introduced; cooperatives were formed based on the South of France model.

1947. The state established a monopoly on wine production and trade through Vinprom and Vinimpex.

1952 . Development of new hybrid varieties like Rubin, Melnik 55, and Ruen.

1960. Five official viticultural regions were created.

1980. Bulgaria became the largest wine producer in the Eastern Bloc and ranked 4th globally.

1990. Post-communist liberalization allowed private winemaking and investment.

2007–Present. EU programs support vineyard renewal, modernization, and promotion of Bulgarian wine internationally, with a focus on terroir and both native and international varieties.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE SHAPING BULGARIA'S WINE LANDSCAPE

BULGARIA'S DIVERSE GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE SHAPE FIVE KEY WINE REGIONS.

1 DANUBE PLAIN *(Northern Wine Region)*

Nestled between the Balkan Range and the Danube River, this region produces reds like Rubin, Gamza, Pamid, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Pinot Noir, as well as quality whites such as Vrachanski Misket, Chardonnay and Tamyanka. Known for its dry whites and sparkling wines, the region is home to some of Bulgaria's oldest winemaking hubs - Vidin, Belogradchik, Ruse, Pleven, Veliko Tarnovo and others - honors deep-rooted viticultural traditions.

2 THRACIAN VALLEY *(Southern Wine Region)*

Covering Plovdiv, Haskovo, Pazardzhik, Stara Zagora, and parts of Sakar Mountain, the region is shielded by the Balkans, ideal for reds like Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Rubin. The area surrounding Asenovgrad is the birthplace of the iconic Mavrud, one of the most famous Bulgarian grape varieties known for its complexity, full-bodied and fruity wines.



3 BLACK SEA REGION *(Eastern Wine Region)*

Divided into Black Sea, Dobrudzha, and Ludogorie subzones, the region's mild climate is ideal for white grapes like Dimyat, Varnenski Misket, the rare and specific Gergana grape variety, along with Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay. Some areas also grow reds such as Pamid, Merlot and Cabernet Franc. Known for elegant, mineral-rich wines, including the famed Red Misket, its largest wineries are in Varna, Pomorie, Burgas and Shumen.

4 STRUMA VALLEY *(Southwestern Wine Region)*

With a Mediterranean-like climate along the Struma River, the region is ideal for growing the unique Shiroka Melnishka and Melnik 55 grape, along with Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon. This region also produces wonderful white, fresh and mineral wines from the well-known Sandanski Misket grape. Viticulture is centered around Melnik and Sandanski, with key wineries in Damyanitsa and Blagoevgrad.

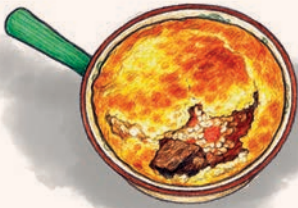
5 THE VALLEY OF THE ROSES *(Sub-Balkan Wine Region)*

The region stretches from south of the Balkan Range to the northern slopes of Sredna Gora. The Balkan Mountains shield it from cold northern winds, creating ideal conditions for Red Misket, Traminer, Chardonnay, Riesling, Pamid, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. Wineries are located around Sliven, Karnobat, Karlovo, Slayantsi, and Sungurlare.

1

DANUBE PLAIN: Northern Wine Region

The route leads visitors through some of Bulgaria's oldest wine-growing regions, steeped in history, tradition, and unique grape varieties. Along the way, key towns such as Belogradchik, Vidin, Pleven, Veliko Tarnovo, Svishtov and Ruse invite guests to local wineries for tastings of both traditional and contemporary wine styles.



*Bulgarian
lamb-liver sarma*

PAIRING YOUR WINE WITH THE LOCAL GASTRONOMY

The ethereal body of the Gamza and its natural fruitiness makes it an excellent match for many dishes, especially if served chilled (around 10°-12°C). Try it with lamb liver-sarma, chicken livers in butter, or fatter fish such as pan-roasted salmon or oven-roasted mackerel. It also pairs beautifully with spinach and cheese pie—hot or cold.

MUST-VISIT IN THE REGION

- **Vidin & Baba Vida Fortress:** a stunning medieval fortress right on the Danube River
- **Pleven Panorama:** famous historical and cultural monument with a huge 360-degree panoramic painting combined with 3D elements, sculptures, and dioramas depicting Bulgarian history
- **Veliko Tarnovo:** Bulgaria's medieval capital, boasting a vibrant old town filled with artisan shops and charming wine bars.



*Tsarevets - Architectural
and museum reserve
Veliko Tarnovo*

MAIN GRAPE

Some of the unique local varieties growing in this area include the delicate Gamza, the fruity Rubin, and the rare Vrachanski Misket, one of the few indigenous Bulgarian white grapes. The area around Veliko Tarnovo is characterized by another typical representative of white wines – Dimyat. All of them are becoming an increasingly important basis for elegant, distinctive wines with a modern appeal.

2

THRACIAN VALLEY: Southern Wine Region

The Thracian Valley is one of Bulgaria's most important and fertile wine regions, located in the southern part of the country. It stretches along the Maritsa River and spans parts of the Plovdiv, Stara Zagora, and Haskovo districts. This region is known for its warm climate, rich soils, and long tradition of winemaking dating back to Thracian times.



Ancient Theatre of Plovdiv



Bulgarian Kavarma

MUST-VISIT IN THE REGION

- **Plovdiv:** one of the oldest continuously inhabited city in Europe.
- **Asen's Fortress** – a medieval stronghold with stunning views
- **Starosel Thracian Cult Complex:** a large archaeological site with megalithic tombs and temples, believed to be one of the oldest Thracian religious hubs.

MAIN GRAPE

Mavrud is an ancient indigenous grape variety predominantly cultivated in the foothills of the Rhodope Mountains, particularly around Asenovgrad, Pazardzhik, and Plovdiv. Renowned for its deep ruby-purple hue, exhibiting exceptional complexity and elegance, characterized by a rich, velvety texture and a captivating bouquet, bursting with intense aromas of ripe wild berries, complemented by subtle spicy and herbal undertones. This distinctive combination of robust flavor and aromatic depth makes Mavrud one of Bulgaria's most esteemed and treasured red wines.

PAIRING YOUR WINE WITH THE LOCAL GASTRONOMY

Enjoy Rubin with traditional dishes like Kavarma and Sach, both featuring mixed meats. Mavrud, a versatile red wine, pairs beautifully with red meats such as beef steak, game, the traditional Rhodope patatnik and aged Bulgarian cheeses. Roast lamb, a classic Bulgarian dish, perfectly complements Mavrud's rich, complex flavors.

3

BLACK SEA REGION: *Eastern Wine Region*

The Black Sea Wine Region, located along Bulgaria's eastern coastline, is the country's largest wine area in terms of vineyard surface. Stretching from Dobrich and Varna in the north to Burgas in the south, this region benefits from the mild maritime climate of the Black Sea, ideal for growing white grape varieties.

PAIRING YOUR WINE WITH THE LOCAL GASTRONOMY

Grilled Black Sea fish pairs beautifully with the crisp elegance and minerality of Dimyat or the refined complexity of Varnenski Misket. The classical Black Sea recipe for baked creamy white brined cheese wrapped in vine leaves is complemented perfectly by the delicate floral notes of a Vrachanski Misket or the buttery richness of Chardonnay. Succulent mussels prepared with white wine and garlic harmonize ideally with freshness and citrus notes of Sauvignon Blanc or the vibrant aromatic complexity of Riesling. Traditional fish soup finds its ideal match in the fresh, elegance character of Dimyat or the balanced, floral profile of Vrachanski Misket

MAIN GRAPE

Here is the kingdom of white wines, with active work being done with local varieties of Dimyat, Varnenski Misket and Vrachanski Misket, but the leading ones remain Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Riesling, and Traminer. Due to climate change in recent years, other more 'southern' red varieties are also being used to create ever-better and elegant wines. This region aligns with current global wine trends - pure and honest wines with little or no oak, finesse, and a sense of belonging to their place of origin.



Mussels with herbs and lemon



The Ancient City of Nessebar, Church of St. Sophia.

MUST-VISIT IN THE REGION

- **Varna Archaeological Museum:** home to the world's oldest gold treasure (c. 4,600 BC).
- **Cape Kaliakra**
- **Nessebar:** *the Pearl of the Black Sea*, a historic town on the Bulgarian Black Sea coast, known for its rich cultural heritage, ancient architecture, and scenic seaside charm. It is one of the oldest towns in Europe and a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- **Sozopol:** is a charming seaside destination known for its ancient history, cobbled streets, wooden houses, beautiful beaches, fresh seafood, and vibrant cultural life.

4

STRUMA VALLEY: Southwestern Wine Region

The region follows the Struma River, stretching from Blagoevgrad to Petrich and Melnik. It is one of Bulgaria's most distinctive and rapidly developing wine regions. Known for its warm Mediterranean-like climate and indigenous grape varieties, it produces bold, expressive red wines with a unique regional character.

PAIRING YOUR WINE WITH THE LOCAL GASTRONOMY

Kapama, a traditional Bulgarian delicacy, combines slow-cooked sauerkraut, tender pork, succulent chicken, and fragrant rice in a harmonious blend - it pairs impeccably with Melnik 55 grape variety whose rich, spicy profile and velvety tannins beautifully complement the stew's complex layers. This wine goes also very well with bankski starets appetizer. For the slow-cooked lamb chomlek kebab, the bold, complex structure and deep, fruity notes of Shiroka Melnishka create an exquisite pairing, enhancing the dish's smoky, savory flavors with elegance and depth. For the harmonious and fresh aromatic profile of Sandanski Misket, it perfectly suits the classical specialty Razlog shupla.

MUST-VISIT IN THE REGION

- **Melnik:** Bulgaria's smallest town, famous for its sandstone pyramids, historic houses, and centuries-old wine cellars carved into cliffs.
- **Pirin National Park:** UNESCO World Heritage Site, ideal for hiking, nature walks, and wildlife spotting.
- **Sandanski:** A popular spa and wellness resort known for its mineral springs and mild Mediterranean climate.



Melnik

MAIN GRAPE

Shiroka Melnishka and Melnik 55 are local red variety which grows only in the regions of Melnik, Petrich and Sandanski. The wines from these varieties are characterized by a medium to full aromatic profile including a rich range of ripe cherry, black berries, herbs, plum jam while aging in oak barrels adds additional texture and notes of tobacco, leather and vanilla. Melnik 55 and Shiroka Melnishka grapes are one of the most prominent wine faces of the entire region.

5

THE VALLEY OF ROSES: Sub-Balkan Wine Region

The Valley of the Roses, also known as the Sub-Balkan Wine Region, is located in central Bulgaria, nestled between the Balkan Mountains to the north and the Sredna Gora Mountains to the south. It is famous not only for its fragrant rose oil production, but also for its diverse and productive vineyards.



Stuffed peppers



Bulgarian rose

PAIRING YOUR WINE WITH THE LOCAL GASTRONOMY

Red Misket is an elegant, aromatic white wine renowned for its vibrant floral and citrus notes, making it an ideal companion for the traditional delicious, sweet-savory banitsa, flatbread as well as Panagyurishte style poached eggs. Cabernet Sauvignon pairs beautifully with rich, slow-cooked dishes like hotchpotch, traditional roasted game, lamb or beef, and complements very well as well as with the creamy, tangy nuances of baked Bulgarian cheeses with honey. Merlot perfectly balances the savory, mildly spicy flavors of stuffed peppers.

MUST-VISIT IN THE REGION

- **Thracian Tomb of Kazanlak:** UNESCO World Heritage Site, a beautifully preserved ancient burial tomb from the 4th century BC, famous for its vivid frescoes and Thracian culture.
- **The Kazanlak Rose Festival:** first held in 1903, is the oldest rose-themed festival in Bulgaria, inspired by the Rosa Damascena.

MAIN GRAPE

Red Misket is an ancient Bulgarian grape variety predominantly grown in the Sub-Balkan region. It is the most cold-resistant Bulgarian variety. Wine produced from Red Misket grapes, has an intriguing golden pale hue and offers a bouquet of herbal notes, quince, honey and fine citrus. It can be tasted in wineries in the regions of Straldzha, Karnobat and Sungurlare.

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