



Journey in the Heart of the Vineyards in the Sunniest Land of Romania, Dealu Mare

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Abstract: *The Dealul Mare wine-growing area is one of the most valuable wine-growing areas in Romania. On a surface area of approximately 15,000 hectares, there are numerous wineries and vineyards. This is due to the geographical location offering favorable conditions for the development of vines (positioning at 45 degrees northern latitude). The conditions are similar to the regions of Bordeaux (France) or Tuscany (Italy), famous for their wines. The area enjoys many sunny days compared to the rest of the country. This adds to the taste and aromas of the grapes.*

The Dealu Mare vineyard is known for its red wines. The best known is Feteasca Neagra, also called the "ambassador of Romanian wines". Cabernet Sauvignon or Pinot Noir, as well as white wines: Feteasca Alba, Muscat Ottonel, or Chardonnay, take pride of place.

1. INTRODUCTION AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF VITICULTURE IN ROMANIA

Wine is a historical beverage. The history of vine cultivation and wine consumption in Romania dates back to before the cultivation of wheat, according to archaeological evidence. The Geto-Dacians, the inhabitants of ancient Dacia, valued this drink - wine in particular, and the grapevine was considered the most important of their wealth. Dacians drink wine poured into ox horns, jugs, or even gourds.

History A.D. Xenopol, taking the information from Homer, in his work - History of the Romans from Dacia Traiana - that "men and women drink wine after the Scythian fashion, unmixed with water, using, instead of glasses or cups, large stag horns or of oxen, which passed from hand to hand". The historian Diodorus of Sicily (1st century BC) tells about the feast given by Dromicheites, the leader of a powerful union of Geto-Dacian tribes, in honor of his prisoner, the Macedonian general Lysimachus, defeated in 292 BC, at which the guests were served wine in gold and silver goblets, while the hosts drank from wooden vessels and cattle horns, to demonstrate the simplicity and sobriety of the locals.

The first written mention of vineyard cultivation in Dacia comes from the Greek geographer Strabo (66 BC), considered the father of geography. It referred to the measure adopted by King Burebista (82-44 BC), concerning the deforestation of vineyards. The decision taken by Burebista, by following the advice of the high priest Deceneu, aimed not so much at making the population stop consuming wine in excess, but above all at making the temptation that the vineyards of Dacia had on the foreign populations from the east that came, attracted by vineyards. The Dacians knew the technology of freezing wine, thus being able to consume wine throughout the year. It is undeniable that the culture of wine consumption in various ceremonies and rituals was inherited from the Dacians.

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The notion of bread and wine represents “total food”, in a variant of the medieval legend about - Baba Dochia -, who asks God for food, by which bread and wine are implied - defining elements of human food since ancient times.

After the conquest of Dacia by the Romans, under their influence, grapevine cultivation developed through the advanced viticultural techniques brought by them. The Romanians come with new varieties of vineyards, and techniques for care its and growth. On the territory of Dacia, Romans found coins on which images of bunches of grapes were inscribed, a sign of the respect offered to this occupation. There follows a period in which viticulture knows a very complex development. Viticulture remained thriving even after the Aurelian retreat of AD 207 and even during Ottoman rule.

The botanist A. Griesbach, studying botanical and climatic elements, claims that “the homeland of the vine must be sought in the wooded lands, rich in vines of Pontus and Thrace, up to beyond the Danube”. Starting from the 2nd millennium BC (the Bronze Age was discovered from archaeological evidence), the cultivation of vines and the production of wines became the basic occupations of the ancestors of the Dacians, from the current Romanian space.

After 1972, the communist regime decided to cut down large areas of vineyards cultivated with varieties of foreign origin, the cultivated area was 300,000 ha. Starting with the year 1990, the cultivated area began to decrease drastically, so that in 2004 it was 193,000 hectares.

Romanian viticulture is currently going through great transformations. The production of wines is a business that leads winegrowers to ensure the technical means necessary to produce wine at the highest possible quality level. Viticulture and winemaking are adapting to new conditions, new cultivation and plantation maintenance technologies so that each producer can obtain the best and most appreciated wines.

According to the National Institute of Statistics, in 2019 Romania had around 180,000 ha of fruit vineyards, occupying the 5th place in Europe (after Spain, France, Italy, and Portugal). Approximately 5 million hectoliters are produced annually.

Table 1 presents the statistical data provided by the National Institute of Statistics for the period between 2012–2023 for the amount of wine obtained in Romania without taking into account the geographical area where the grapes were harvested for wine production.

Table 1. Amount of wine obtained in Prahova and Buzau counties (in hectolitres per year)

2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
5462954	5113232	3749862	3627609	3266669	4264144	5088202	3808430	3959703	4451149	3787502

Source: National Institute of Statistics (n.d.)

From the analysis it can be seen that the largest amount of wine obtained during the studied period was 5462954 Hl in 2012, also the smallest amount of wine was obtained in the year 2016, 3266669 Hl. The amount of wine obtained in 2012 is since this year was one of the warmest years, a fact that positively influenced the amount of grapes for wine obtained. The year 2016 was a year considered very warm and without precipitation in the spring months, according to the National Institute of Meteorology, which led to the modification of the quantities of grapes for wine and implicitly to obtaining a low quantity of wine. There is also a tendency to decrease the amount of wine in 2022 as well.

2. THE WINE ROAD: A JOURNEY THROUGH THE VINEYARDS OF PRAHOVA AND BUZAU COUNTIES

The Wine Road is a spectacular tourist route that includes wineries and vineyards in Buzau and Prahova counties. The area has been known for over 400 years for the exceptional quality of the wines produced here. The secret of this area is its ideal geographical positioning, which allows it to enjoy the direct rays of the sun for 14 days longer than any other wine-growing area in Romania. Constant investments in viticulture and wine tourism attract 300,000 tourists, Romanians and foreigners, annually (Anisi et al., 2015; Hedley, 2015).

Prahova County has a temperate-continental climate, with big differences between the mountain and plain units. The maximum thermal amplitude is 77.4°C, resulting from the accumulation of extreme thermal values. The climate is characterized by hot (sometimes dry) summers and cold winters. The area of the sub-carpathian hills and depressions has intermediate climatic characteristics compared to the two neighboring areas.



Figure 1. The Wine Road in Prahova country

Source: Own research

The wine route - Wine Road is a project initiated in 2004 covering the counties of Prahova and Buzau. The route covers 15,000 ha planted with vines, with a length of 65 kilometres. The route goes through the localities of Filipești de Pădure, Băicoi, Boldești, Bucov, Pleașa, Valea Călugărească, Iordăcheanu, Urlați, Căptura, Fântânele, Tohani and Gura Vadului. Wineries from Urlați, Valea Călugărească and Tohani were recently included in this circuit. The Dealul Mare wine area is famous for the native variety of Fetească Neagră and other red varieties, the modern approaches of the winemakers on this route offer an incredible variety of tastes and aromas (Oșlobeanu et al., 1991; Virgin Wines, n.d.).

One of the oldest and most reputable wineries is the Tohani Winery. The Tohani winery was established in the 1930s on the royal estates. The Tohani commercial company was founded on January 1, 1959, on an area of 856 hectares. Currently, the company manages approximately 1300 hectares of vines cultivated by 15 grape varieties. From Fetească Neagră and Sangiovese, to Tămăioasa Românească and Fetească Regală, the Winery offers a variety of wines for every enthusiast. The only wine cellar in the area is conserved within the winery, keeping over 100,000 bottles of collection wines.

The Budureasca vineyards represent another famous area of the Dealu Mare wine region. The area occupied by Domeniile Budureasca is approximately 275 hectares. Of this surface, 250 hectares were replanted with new vines, and 25 hectares were preserved with old vines. In 2013, the new winery was inaugurated, with an area of over 2,500 square meters. The winery preserves the architecture of the area. The building has three buried sides, keeping a constant temperature for the wines throughout the year. In addition to tastings, tourists can take a tour of the vineyard, a tour of the winery, with access to the tank room and the barrel room.

The next winery on the Wine Road is Domeniile Urlati. The winery is located at the same latitude as the famous wine-growing areas of Tuscany and Bordeaux. The quality of the wines is superior in this region, the famous varieties are Fetească Albă, Sauvignon Blanc, Fetească Neagra and Cabernet Sauvignon. The area of 110 hectares of the company's heritage, divided between Urlați and Ceptura, has the advantage of total exposure to the south. Exposure to the south ensures maximum insolation throughout the growing season. In 2007, the company Domeniile Dealu Mare Urlați restored the brilliance of the area and promoted the famous Pelin de Urlați for wine enthusiasts.

In Urlați we discover the Bazilescu Winery. With a tradition of over a century in wine production, the winery has built its impeccable reputation since the beginning. The winery and mansion reopened in 2008, and through the remarkable wines obtained, they have established themselves on the Wine Road map (and on the oenological map in general). Basilescu Winery currently owns 60 hectares of vineyards. It has mixed plantations of Fetească Neagra, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Burgund Mare, Pinot Noir, Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay and Fetească. The oldest wines in the cellar are from 2013. Here are the top wines Golem, Angels from Little Paris, Eclipse and Autentique.

The first wine centre in Romania that offered tourists the opportunity to visit a functional winery is Conacul Urlăteanu. It was built on top of a hill in 1922, in the town of Urlați. It was taken over at the end of the 90s by Halewood Wineries. The restoration of the mansion and the cellar ended in 1999. The purpose of the restoration was to provide a location for events that tell about the wealth and history of the place. In the cellars there is the room for maturing the wines in oak barrels, being the place where wine tastings take place. Sommeliers tell about how their grapes end up being one of the most appreciated Romanian wines.

Rotenberg wineries are recognized for their exceptional wines and care for the environment. The wines are obtained by the traditional method, manually, without mechanized equipment. The winery was completely restored in 2007, having two overlapping cellars. This allows a gravity flow technology, where the wine does not go through pumps. From the area of 18 hectares cultivated with vines, predominantly Merlot between the communes of Ceptura and Fântânele, exceptional artisanal wines are produced annually, 100% handmade.

In the commune of Ceptura is the SERVE Winery, founded in 1990 by Count Guy de Poix. The first Romanian dry red wine and the first Romanian Cuvée were vinified in this winery. Arriving tourists have the opportunity to visit the vineyard and the winery and can participate in tasting sessions of the noble wines produced here. The specialists of this winery on the Wine Road will take you through most of the top ranges, Vinul Cavalerului, Terra Romana and Cuvée. The oldest wine that can be found in the winery was produced in 1999.

The wine-growing route is part of the CII wine-growing area, according to Order 645/2005 on the approval of the Romanian wine-growing regions that are part of the wine-growing areas of

the European Union. The wines produced in this area have specific characteristics only for this area. The grapes come from the geographical area 100%. The implementation of oenological practices and treatments according to the legislation in force. The wine produced in this area has a real alcohol content of at least 11% vol, depending on the quality of the grapes in the ripening phenophase given by the sugar content (Oşlobeanu et al., 1991; Wadsworth, 1999).

Tables 2 and 3 show the productions obtained in Buzau and Prahova counties, according to the statistical data provided online by the National Institute of Statistics. The analyzed period is between 2016 – 2023.

Table 2. Areas occupied by vineyards in Prahova and Buzau counties

Vineyards	Ownership forms	Counties	Years							
			2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
			Hectares							
			Ha	Ha	Ha	Ha	Ha	Ha	Ha	Ha
Total vineyards	Total	Buzau	14466	14223	13880	13781	13101	14012	13841	14545
-	-	Prahova	7324	7405	7254	7218	7169	6834	6813	6873
-	Private sector	Buzau	14303	14065	13722	13623	12954	13785	13614	14306
-	-	Prahova	7324	7293	7121	7179	7130	6725	6768	6833
-	of which: Individual farms	Buzau	13233	12646	12600	12600	11601	12734	12719	12709
-	-	Prahova	5551	5556	5391	5392	5391	4871	4913	4906
Grafted vineyards on the fruit	Total	Buzau	9172	8829	8570	8488	7578	8575	8515	9142
-	-	Prahova	6261	6342	6269	6226	6176	5855	5841	5898
-	Private sector	Buzau	9014	8671	8412	8330	7431	8348	8288	8904
-	-	Prahova	6261	6230	6136	6187	6137	5746	5796	5858
-	of which: Individual farms	Buzau	7983	7395	7318	7319	6319	7455	7445	7444
-	-	Prahova	4488	4493	4406	4407	4406	3892	3941	3935
Hybrid vineyards per fruit	Total	Buzau	5294	5394	5311	5292	5523	5437	5326	5403
-	-	Prahova	1063	1063	985	992	993	979	972	975
-	Private sector	Buzau	5289	5394	5311	5292	5523	5437	5326	5403
-	-	Prahova	1063	1063	985	992	993	979	972	975
-	of which: Individual farms	Buzau	5250	5251	5282	5281	5282	5279	5274	5265

Source: National Institute of Statistics (n.d.)

From Table 2, for the county of Buzau, the year 2022 has the smallest area cultivated with vines, 13101 ha. The private sector owned an important area of 12954 ha, individual farms owned 11601 ha, Prahova County had the smallest area cultivated with vines in 2022, 6813 ha, and the private sector occupies 4913 ha.

Fruit vine plantations, in Buzau county in 2016 had 9172 ha, the largest area. In 2017, Prahova has 6269 ha. In the case of individual farms, Buzau County in 2016 with an area of 7983 ha, and

Prahova in 2017 - 4493 ha. Hybrid vineyards per fruit, the largest area is in Buzau in 2022 - 5403 ha, in Prahova in 2018 - 985 ha.

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Table 3 shows the production of grapes from the two counties of Prahova and Buzau, for consumption and for obtaining wine. The quantities obtained from the private sector are analysed in which Buzau county, due to the favourable climatic conditions, obtained 2018 a record quantity of 93125 tons. The private sector obtained the largest amount in 2021, 96356 tons. From individual farms, the largest amount was in 2013, 77574 tons. Prahova County obtained a quantity of 45,717 tons in 2018, of which 45,555 tons are from the private sector. Individual farms obtained the highest production in 2013, 34,563 tons, and in 2016, the lowest production, 17,286 tons.

Table 3. Production of grapes from the two counties of Prahova and Buzau

Vineyards categories	Ownership forms	Counties	Years										
			2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
			Tons										
Wine grapes	Total	Buzau	83047	65829	70694	64462	81613	93125	81815	81410	98626	76069	75551
-	-	Prahova	43661	30771	34716	27838	44488	45717	33369	40335	44708	32861	33508
-	Private sector	Buzau	81511	64434	69249	63486	80507	91861	80551	80386	96356	73595	73658
-	-	Prahova	43090	30593	34385	27838	44411	45555	33346	40260	44574	32788	33386
-	of which: Individual farms	Buzau	77574	57633	63291	58347	69395	83447	75465	71834	89847	68410	63440
-	-	Prahova	34563	23088	21757	17289	30244	30864	26959	26860	27897	21688	17510

Source: National Institute of Statistics (n.d.)

3. CONCLUSION

In the world, wine tourism is a priority in travelers' vacation options. France, Italy, Spain, and the USA, countries with wine traditions excel in this tourism. In Romania, there is an increase in interest in this type of tourism. However, growth opportunities depend on accommodation, dining, and leisure options at wineries and in the surrounding area.

The wines produced in these wineries frequently win world medals and are the result of investments of millions of euros by specialists who want to regain the image of Romanian wine in the world through quality. The bet of the investors in the vineyard was won, by returning to the pure varieties and consecrated assortments of wines from the Dealu Mare – Big Hill area.

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