

WINE TOURISM IN ALICANTE: WINE ROUTE IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF PINOSO

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Tourist activity in the Alicante province has traditionally been associated with the 'sun and beach' product. However, the recent changes in tourists' behaviour and motivation have made it necessary to develop new tourism products where the tourist can play a more active role. Due to these changes in tourist demand, policies oriented to diversification through the creation of new tourism products and the differentiation of the already existing ones have been developed since the early 1990s. Thus, for example, the *Plan de Espacios Turísticos de la Comunidad Valenciana (PETCV)* [Plan for Tourist Spaces in the Valencian Autonomous Region] seeks the development of new products such as rural tourism or natural tourism, amongst other objectives.

A clear example of the bet on tourism diversification can be found in the different municipalities of the Alicante province that are giving a boost to enological tourism or winetourism. An Alicante Wine Route which goes through the main wine-growing towns in the province and aims at making the quality of its wines well-known, attracting visitors and tourists, and contributing to regional economic development, has been designed during the last few years.

Wine tourism or enotourism has been experiencing a considerable development in recent years. It may be regarded as a type of themed tourism and, as such, it uses thematic routes in order to develop new products. The so-called 'Wine Routes,' or enological routes, appear as a set of experiences where the tourist can visit a winery, enjoy the view of a vineyard, taste the typical gastronomy of the area, visit a museum, go to a wine-growing information centre, gaze at landscapes, buy wine or stay at places related to this theme.

The Alicante Wine Route is mainly located in different municipalities belonging to the *comarcas* [small regions inside a province] of Medio Vinalopó and Alto Vinalopó. These small regions are situated in the north of the province and border with the province of Valencia to the north and the provinces of Albacete and Murcia to the west. The territory covered by the aforesaid tourism route appears as an area which has a strong tourism potential, with an interesting supply of popular culture, rural activities, handicrafts, gastronomy and landscapes of great environmental value.

Regarding wines from this area, they enjoy a recognised prestige thanks to the effort and wisdom exuded by the growers and producers of these wines. These are high-quality wines which result from the monitoring exerted from the Alicante Designation of Origin (the second oldest designation of origin in Spain, after La Rioja). The Vinalopó river basin has a wine tradition characterised by the extension and quality of its stocks –above all of Monastrell, which is the most personal autochthonous variety. However, the most prominent wine in this area is actually Fondillón which, apart from being the one that provides this Designation of Origin with more personality, is the most traditional and exclusive of the area. 53 wineries currently form part of the Designation of Origin Regulatory Council, 37 of which are located in some of the towns included in this tourism route (that is, nearly 70% of the total).

The Alicante Wine Route project was born in 2006 as a result of a prospective study about the municipality of Pinoso. This was conceived as a way to promote local wines together with gastronomy and the cultural offer in Pinoso. One of the first steps taken by the local Town Council was to join *ACEVIN (Asociación Española de Ciudades del Vino)* [Spanish Wine Cities' Association] through the partner figure. At present, the tourism route themed around the wine culture goes through the inland regions of Medio Vinalopó and Alto Vinalopó in the province of Alicante, and through the coastal region of Marina Alta. It is expected to cover the whole province of Alicante in the future.

Wine-growing forms part of the culture and tradition of people from Pinoso, as well as of its landscape. Nowadays, and following several years and innovations in the sector, a significant number of wineries exist in this town and in some of its municipal districts which are gradually adapting to what the market demands from them at each moment. To this must be added the high quality of the wines that they produce, as attested by the numerous national as well as international awards that some of the wineries located in this part of the Alicante province receive every year.

The development of tourism in this inland municipality is very recent, since Pinoso did not start thinking of tourism as a dynamising and complementary economic activity for its economic structure until 2006, when the local Department of Tourism carried out a diagnosis about tourism development in this town for the purpose of obtaining a number of guidelines on which future decisions could be based. This study provided various lines of work, of which the Town Council thought it appropriate to choose the one referring to Enotourism and Gastronomy, based on the traditional productive system. According to the Town Council, the choice of this tourism development model was due to the fact that it owns «some relevant characteristics strongly linked to the social and economic management of Pinoso.»

Through the bet on this type of themed tourism, the Pinoso Local Tourism Department seeks to create a tourism product by means of which it can promote local wines, together with its gastronomy and its complementary offer. One of the main objectives is to make enological tourism become a part of the Costa Blanca tourism supply. The aim is to take advantage of the opportunities offered by this type of tourism, which finds itself in an emergent situation, through the creation of a differentiating, competitive and high-quality product.

The following opportunities and strengths were revealed by a SWOT analysis on enological tourism in Pinoso: the growing interest in the wine world and culture among the population, the growth of economic activity in this segment, the local and regional governments' willingness to promote wine tourism as the star product of this area, the presence of wines recognised in national and international contests in the area, the bet on the preservation of the agricultural landscape, especially of the vineyard, the recognition and good positioning of this municipality in relation to the gastronomy offered by it, the leadership role assumed by Pinoso during the process of creation of the 'Alicante Wine Route,' the inclusion of Pinoso within the Alicante Designation of Origin, etc.

Threats and weaknesses were detected as well, for instance, the proximity of the Jumilla Wine Route, the strong competition exerted by highly consolidated national enotourism destinations, such as La Rioja, the fact that wines from this area were largely unknown to the international market, the fact that these wines did not have a very positive image (due to lack of knowledge) because they were associated with strong, rough wines, the shortage of professionals and guides specialised in enological tourism, the scarce involvement of wine-producers from Pinoso as opposed to other municipalities belonging to the actual Alicante Wine Route, the insufficient complementary offer in the town, the lack of a real supply specialised in wine tourism, the low number of accommodation places in the municipality and in the surrounding region before the implementation of the Alicante Wine Route, the limited involvement of the local population in the Alicante Wine Route project, the bad transport connections with the town of Pinoso, etc.

A series of actions were put forward seeking to solve the difficulties detected. These actions are focused on promotion, on training and on the cooperation that should exist between private and public institutions in order to make known the 'Alicante Wine Route', its wines and its tourism product. It is equally necessary to achieve collaboration between the different private entities coexisting in the tourism market of this town, especially between the firms dedicated to gastronomy and wine. This will allow the creation of an integrated tourism product characterised by its quality which can distinguish the wine tourism of Pinoso, as well as its tourism supply, from what is offered by the other municipalities.

