

THE WINES OF ISRAEL

Although tiny compared to most modern wine-producing nations, Israel's wine production has attracted attention from all corners of the wine world in recent years. This is not only due to the development of new cooler-climate terroirs such as the Golan Heights, but also to the quality-conscious approach of the nation's wine producers.

Israel's wine history is perhaps one of the richest on earth, dating back thousands of years. There are numerous biblical references to local vineyards, grapes being transformed into juice that provided an intoxicating effect, and the vine itself was deemed to be a blessing on the children of Israel.

Various 'international' wine grape varieties have proved successful in Israel's better vineyard sites, among them Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Syrah, Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon, Chardonnay and even Gewurztraminer. Several members of the extensive Muscat family, which retains its historic links with this part of the world, are also to be found here. Alexandria, home of Muscat of Alexandria, lies 315 miles (500km) west of the Israeli capital Jerusalem.

Although the majority of Israel's terroirs are too hot and dry to reliably produce wine of high quality, there are patches of viticultural promise in the Judean Hills and Carmel Valley. Israel's finest wine region is arguably Galilee, particularly at the cool elevations of the Golan Heights.

Israel's approach to winemaking is stylistically quite New World, while neighboring Lebanon has retained an Old World feel due to its French colonial history. This is borne out by Israel's proactive approach to wine marketing and tourism. There are grand designs for a national wine center, intended to promote and develop Israel's wine industry throughout the world. The proposed site will cover roughly 150 acres (60ha) near Binyamina, at the heart of the Shomron wine region. Rather appropriately, Binyamina (which was founded in 1922) was officially named by Baron Edmond Benjamin James de Rothschild, former owner of the eponymous Medoc wine estate. If one chooses to observe the auspices of this coincidence, the future of Israeli wine tourism looks very bright indeed.



The typical geographic classifications that assist wine drinkers in recognizing a region and the wines it produces—think Bordeaux, Champagne, Chianti etc.—take a back seat to the designation of kosher, which most Israel’s wines carry. To many, Israeli wine and kosher wine are one and the same. And the understanding of what kosher means is fuzzy at best.

Kosher Israeli wine is an integral part of the country’s culture—as historic legacy, as standard consumption and as an offering in many religious observances. Unfortunately, it is the common ceremonial use that provides the primary source of identity for Israeli wines to the American consumer. The fact is, not all Israeli wines are kosher. The majority are, but there are numerous no kosher selections, produced primarily by smaller boutique wineries. However, most of these no kosher selections have limited availability or are not currently imported into the United States. In the U.S. some still think that Israeli wine is sweet and low quality, but this perception is changing fast. The export to the U.S. is growing,

and much of the growth is in the no kosher market.

The industry has evolved over the past 30 years, as winemakers have learned the complexities of their terroir, climate tendencies, resiliency of their vines and the best way to tie these elements together.

Israel is divided into five major wine-producing regions: Galilee, Shomron (also known as Samaria), Shimshon (or Samson), Jerusalem Mountains (or Judean Hills) and Negev. Although it's a relatively small country (about 5% of the size of California), its north-to-south configuration offers a variety of altitudes and topographic changes, resulting in numerous microclimates and subzones.

One key component to improving overall wine quality is discovering which varieties will produce the best grapes in each area. Traditionally, the emphasis has been on classic noble varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Chardonnay, but research and experimentation for suitable alternatives is ongoing.

What Makes a Wine Kosher? Contrary to common perception, there are few differences between a kosher and no kosher wine. The techniques used during production are almost identical; there are just some guidelines to be observed in order to achieve kosher status.

The biggest difference is that a kosher wine can only be handled by Sabbath observant Jews at all points of the winemaking process. However, it's not necessary for a head winemaker at a kosher winery to be Jewish. Many are not.

All ingredients must be certified kosher. Most wine ingredients are already kosher, but certain items, like unauthorized yeasts and animal-based fining additives such as gelatin or isinglass are prohibited. Kosher tools and storage facilities must be observed, meaning that no designated kosher equipment may be used for the production of no kosher wine.

Main Wineries: Yarden, Recanati, Petit Castel, Golan. Gamla, Galil, Carmel, Lone Oak.

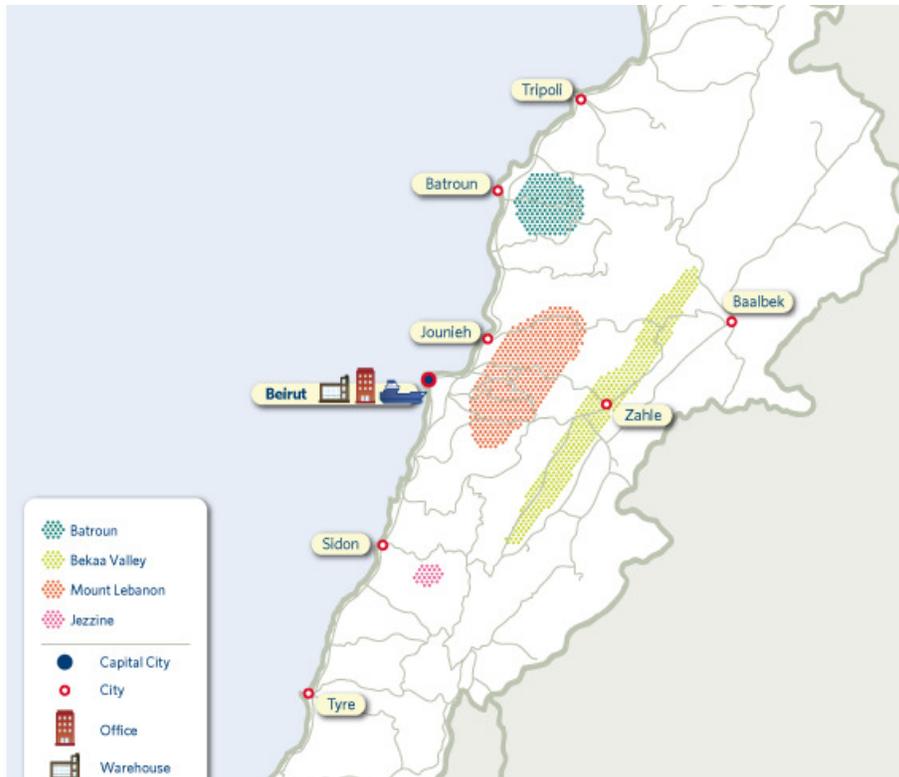
THE WINES OF LEBANON

Lebanon has an ancient wine culture that has experienced a renaissance in the past few decades. In 2011, roughly six million bottles of Lebanese wine were produced from 5000 acres (2000ha) of vineyards concentrated mostly in the Bekaa Valley. The majority of Lebanese wine is exported to the UK, France and the USA, where the receptive consumer bases have encouraged healthy growth in Lebanon's modern wine industry. In 1998 there were fewer than ten wineries in Lebanon – now there are more than 30. The majority of the wine they produce is red, made from the classic wine grapes of southern France.

Lebanese wine history dates back more than five millennia. It begins with the Phoenicians, an ancient civilization whose strong culture of travel and trade was of considerable importance to the development of early Mediterranean civilization. Wine was an important export for this ancient culture, and was taken to Egypt in large volumes and traded for gold.

History. For well over 1000 years, Phoenician traders traded gold, dyes, metalwork, glass, ceramics and wine. Along with these wares came the raw materials and technologies used to make them. It was this enthusiastic talent for trade and technology that we should thank for much of Europe's winemaking history, including the propagation of various members of the *Vitis vinifera* vine family.

The ancient port of Byblos, was famous in classical antiquity as a wine center, in terms of both production and trading. This remained the case until the 16th century, when the Ottoman armies swept southward around the eastern Mediterranean. Wine production and consumption were prohibited under their Sharia law, so the once-thriving wine industry around Byblos, Tyre and Sidon fell silent for almost 350 years. As dhimmis (non-Muslims living in a Muslim state), Christians living in Lebanon at that time were permitted certain freedoms, one of which was the right to make wine for ceremonial purposes. It was on this basis that in 1857 a group of Jesuit priests founded a winery in Ksara, a small town in the fertile Bekaa Valley, Lebanon's finest wine terroir. Chateau Ksara warrants its own chapter in the annals of Lebanese wine history, alongside Chateau Musar and Chateau Kefraya. The Christian community that founded the original winery effectively founded the modern Lebanese wine industry. Even today one in every three bottles of Lebanese wine is produced at Ksara, which also makes Arak, the anise-flavored spirit that remains Lebanon's most popular alcoholic beverage.



Wines. The original vineyards at Ksara were planted with Cinsaut, which was subsequently joined by other French vine varieties. Most of these remain in Lebanon's vinicultural makeup today: red Carignan, Grenache, Syrah, Mourvedre, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, and white Ugni Blanc, Clairette and Chardonnay. The original plants were brought from France via the French colonies in Algeria, and with them came contemporary French winemaking wisdom. This, coupled with the country's period under French rule in the early 20th century, explains why Lebanon's wine industry is so closely modeled on its counterpart in France. It is also the reason why Lebanese wineries are Chateaux and why the national wine authority, the UVL, is the Union Vinicole du Liban. The first comprehensive Lebanese wine laws were drafted in May 2000. Although not as detailed or comprehensive as the French AOC laws they're based on, they outline each of the significant elements required for a national-level wine-regulation system. The laws include definitions of wine-related terminology such as that used for sweetness and sparkling wine pressures.

Modern Lebanese viniculture has moved away from the ancient Phoenician port cities and inland to the fertile Bekaa Valley. There are also a handful of vineyards near Jezzine, a few miles beyond the southern end of the Bekaa, just inland of Sidon.

THE WINES OF TURKEY (Source: Wine Searcher)

Turkey, on the Anatolian Peninsula between the Mediterranean and Black seas,

grows more grapes than almost any country on earth. Only a very small proportion of these grapes are made into wine, however; as a Muslim-predominant nation, Turkey's per capita alcohol consumption is very low.

The most commonly used wine grapes in Turkey are those which double as table grapes, the only use to which they could be put during seven centuries of Ottoman rule. Ampelographic research has suggested that Turkey is home to between 500 and 1000 distinct grape varieties of the vinifera species.

Turkey's trans-continental location between the deserts of Arabia (its eastern neighbors are Syria, Iraq and Iran) and the seas of Eastern Europe (Mediterranean, Black and Caspian) mean there is significant climatic variation within its borders. While the coastal regions in the west have a temperate Mediterranean climate, with hot, dry summers and milder, wetter winters, those in the north (by the Black Sea) have significantly higher humidity in summer and colder winters. In Turkey's interior, particularly the south-eastern corners and the heart of Anatolia between Ankara and Konya, the climate is more continental. This means greater diurnal temperature variation in the hot summers and harsh winters; much of eastern Anatolia is covered with snow for at least four months of the year. This variability offers a wealth of diverse terroirs to Turkish vignerons, and much of the country remains viticulturally uncharted.



(Map Source: VinoRai)

Turkish winemaking employs a mixture of traditional, local grapes and modern, imported varieties (whose ancestors may well have originated here). The

increasingly global red-wine portfolio of Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Syrah is present, as is its white-wine equivalent, consisting of Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and Semillon. The rustic southern French duo of Cinsaut and Grenache is also used in various Turkish wine regions, as is the Grenache-Petit Bouschet crossing of Alicante Bouschet. Cinsaut is often blended with the local grape Papazkarasi (which translates ominously as 'black priest').