

# ***MONTENEGRO Vineyard and Wine sector overview***

June 2023  
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## ***I. Historical facts***

### ***Historical and Modern Development of Viticulture in Montenegro***

Montenegro possesses a **longstanding tradition of viticulture and winemaking**, with origins traceable to the **pre-Roman era**. Archaeological evidence of early wine production has been discovered in the **necropolis of Budva**, a coastal city on the Adriatic, dating back to the **4th century BCE**. Additionally, the presence of **Illyrian-era tombstones adorned with grapevine motifs and Dionysian symbols** suggests that viticulture was not only economically important but also culturally and religiously significant in ancient Montenegrin societies.

Numerous archaeological findings, including amphorae, wine storage vessels, and decorative stone carvings from the **Illyrian period**, further underscore the widespread use and appreciation of wine in this early era. These artefacts indicate that wine was a prominent part of ritualistic practices and daily consumption.

### ***Institutionalization of Viticulture: The Reign of King Nikola I Petrović (1860–1918)***

A pivotal moment in the formal development of Montenegro's wine sector occurred during the reign of **King Nikola I Petrović**. Between **1860 and 1918**, efforts were made to **systematically organize grape cultivation and winemaking practices**. During this time, the first **regulatory frameworks** for grape-growing and wine production were introduced, laying the groundwork for modern viticulture in the country.

### ***Industrial Expansion and the Creation of Plantaže***

A major transformation in Montenegrin viticulture occurred in the **1960s**, with the consolidation of agricultural estates in **Podgorica, Danilovgrad, and Virpazar** into the agricultural cooperative **Agrokombinat "13. jul"**. This cooperative was later developed into a modern agribusiness known as **13. Jul – Plantaže**, which played a key role in advancing large-scale viticulture and enology in Montenegro.

One of the most significant projects undertaken by Plantaže was the development of the **Ćemovsko Polje** vineyard, implemented between **1977 and 1982**. This initiative involved:

- Planting of **1,500 hectares** of vineyards
- Establishment of a modern **wine cellar** with a storage capacity of **2 million liters**

### ***Present-Day Significance***

Today, **Ćemovsko Polje**, managed by Plantaže, represents the **largest single-plot vineyard in Europe**, encompassing a total area of **2,310 hectares**. The vineyard is a cornerstone of Montenegrin wine production and an important contributor to the regional wine economy. Its size and integrated operations exemplify successful state-supported viticultural planning that has evolved into a fully privatized and internationally competitive wine enterprise.

## **II. Vineyard regions**

According to data provided by the **International Organisation of Vine and Wine (OIV)**, approximately **4,000 hectares of vineyards** are currently planted in **Montenegro**. Official statistics from the **Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Montenegro** indicate that **69% of this vineyard area** is dedicated to the cultivation of **red grape varieties**, reflecting the country's strong tradition in red wine production.

The majority of vineyards are concentrated in the **Skadar Lake region**, which accounts for **approximately 97%** of the national vineyard area. Within this region lies **Ćemovsko Polje**, the most prominent viticultural site, recognized as the **largest continuous vineyard in Europe**.

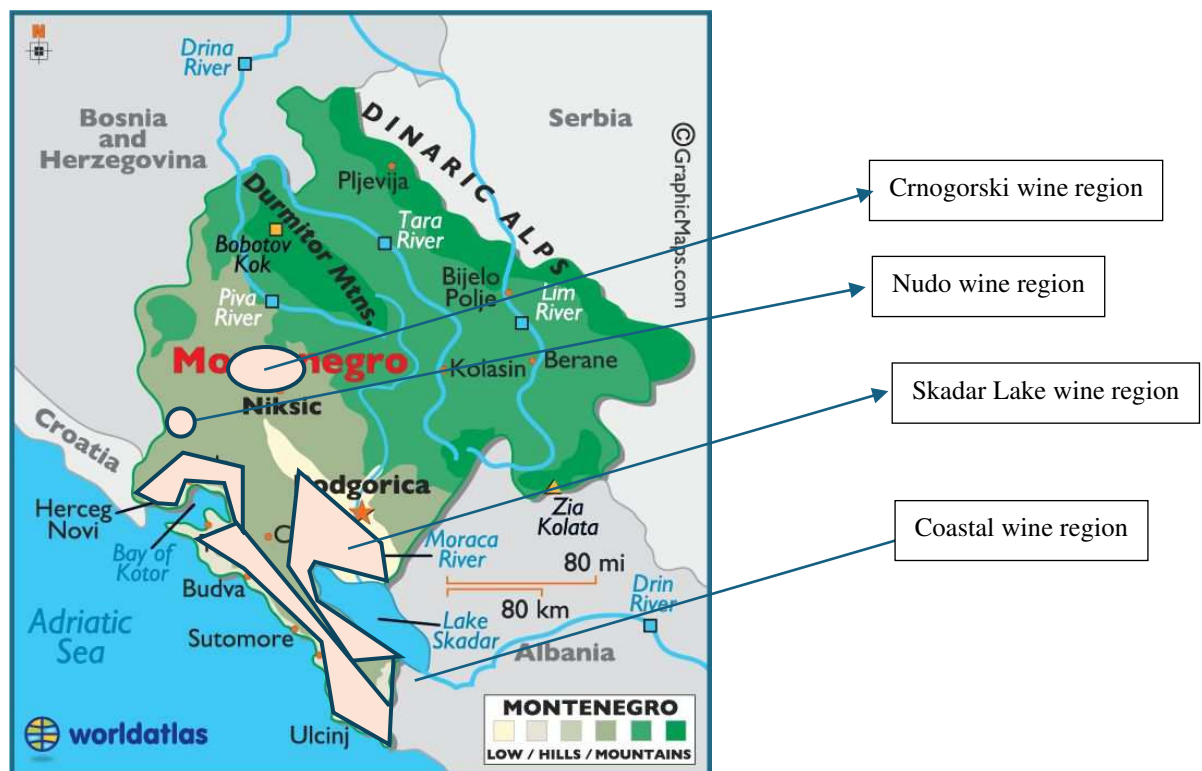
In addition to the Skadar Lake zone, vineyards are also located in the **coastal sub-regions** of **Crmnica, Nahije, Komani, and Bjelopavlići**, all of which contribute to Montenegro's diverse viticultural landscape.

Furthermore, the **Study on Viticultural Zoning and Wine-Growing Areas of Montenegro** identifies two additional, though smaller, vineyard zones:

- **Crnogorski Sjever (Montenegrin North) region**
- **Nudo area**

These supplementary regions, while limited in scale, offer potential for the development of niche grape varieties and may play a role in the diversification of Montenegrin wine production under region-specific microclimatic and edaphic conditions.

**Chart 1: Vineyard regions in Montenegro**



**Chart 2 : Vineyards of Plantaze – Cemovsko polje**



Source: [www.plantaze.com](http://www.plantaze.com)

### **III. Grapes**

#### ***Traditional and Introduced Grape Varieties in Montenegro***

Montenegro is home to a rich viticultural heritage, with several **autochthonous grape varieties** playing a dominant role in the country's wine identity. Among these, the **red grape varieties** *Vranac* and *Kratošija*, as well as the **white variety** *Krstač*, are of particular historical, cultural, and enological significance.

#### ***Vranac***

*Vranac* is the most widely cultivated and emblematic red grape variety in Montenegro. Scientific studies conducted by the national wine company **13. Jul – Plantaže** have confirmed that *Vranac* is an **ancient variety** indigenous to the **Crmnica region**. Genetic analyses suggest that it is a **natural progeny of Kratošija**, the oldest known Montenegrin grape, and a rare variety called *Duljenga*.

*Vranac* produces **deeply pigmented red wines**, characterized by robust tannic structure, high phenolic content, and strong aging potential. When vinified with **judicious oak maturation** and bottle aging, premium *Vranac* wines can develop complexity and concentration comparable to the **full-bodied reds of Southern France**. *Vranac* grown at **higher altitudes** also benefits from **enhanced acidity and aromatic freshness**, traits conferred by cooler microclimates prevalent in Montenegrin hill regions.

#### ***Kratošija***

*Kratošija* is considered the **oldest grape variety in Montenegro**, with **historical records** dating back to the **15th century**, including mentions in the **Statute of Budva**. Viticultural studies have identified **17 distinct biotypes** of *Kratošija* within Montenegro, supporting its **centuries-old presence** and **high genetic diversity**. Moreover, the identification of **21 known descendant varieties** reinforces the hypothesis that **Montenegro is the center of origin** for *Kratošija*.

Recent **ampelographic and genetic research**, including work by academician **Dr. Ulićević**, has confirmed the identity of *Kratošija* as genetically identical to the globally known grape varieties **Zinfandel (USA)**, **Primitivo (Italy)**, and **Crljenak Kaštelanski (Croatia)**. The migration and evolution of *Kratošija* from the Balkans to other parts of the world underscore its historical importance and adaptability.



### **Krstač**

*Krstač* is a traditional **white grape variety** indigenous to Montenegro. It is primarily cultivated in specific micro-locations such as **Nikolj Crkva** and **Ćemovsko Polje**. Attempts to cultivate *Krstač* successfully outside Montenegro have largely failed, suggesting that it is highly **terroir-dependent**.

The variety is named after the characteristic shape of its **compact, medium-sized grape cluster**, which resembles a **cross** (“**krst**” in Montenegrin). Wines made from *Krstač* are typically **light, aromatic, and fresh**, making it a distinctive component of Montenegro’s white wine offerings.

### ***International and Regional Grape Varieties***

In addition to its indigenous varieties, Montenegro has introduced several **international cultivars** to diversify its viticultural portfolio:

- **White varieties:** *Chardonnay* (locally known as “Sardone”), *Sauvignon Blanc*, *Pinot Blanc*, and the regional Balkan variety *Smederevka*
- **Red varieties:** *Cabernet Sauvignon*, *Merlot*, *Marselan*, and *Petit Verdot*

These introductions support the modernization and global competitiveness of Montenegrin wine production while complementing the country’s indigenous grape heritage.

## **IV. Relief and climate**

Montenegro exhibits the typical features of a **southern European viticultural landscape**, characterized by a **predominantly mountainous terrain**, **semi-arid conditions**, and strong influence from the **Mediterranean climate system**. This climatic pattern extends from the **Bojana River valley**, through the lowland zones, reaching as far inland as **Podgorica**.

One of Montenegro’s most important wine-growing regions is located around **Lake Skadar**, situated on a low-lying **karst plateau** with elevations ranging between **45 and 70 meters above sea level**. The area is surrounded by **limestone hills**, contributing to its classification as a **karstic basin**. This unique topography results in **hot, dry summers** and **mild winters**, slightly cooler than those experienced in the adjacent coastal zone.

The **Ćemovsko Polje** sub-region, located within this broader Skadar Valley, exemplifies extreme Mediterranean climatic conditions. The region is marked by **prolonged sunshine durations**, with **up to 12 hours of solar radiation per day during the summer months**, and **minimal annual precipitation**. These environmental conditions present both opportunities and challenges for viticulture.

In addition to climatic stressors, **edaphic factors** in Ćemovsko Polje are particularly significant. The soils are classified as **skeletal, heavy-textured, and calcareous**, composed of **chalky limestone, sand, and gravel**, often interspersed with **highly polished alluvial pebbles**. This soil structure provides **excellent drainage** and contributes to **low vine vigor**, which, when properly managed, can enhance **fruit concentration and phenolic development** in grape berries.

Together, the **intense solar radiation, hydric stress, and mineral-rich karst soils** form a highly specific **terroir** that supports the cultivation of **resilient, high-quality grape varieties**, particularly those adapted to arid and calcareous environments.

## **V. Wine industry**

### ***Structure and Dynamics of the Wine Sector in Montenegro***

As of 2021, **88 wineries** were officially registered in Montenegro (Source: SWG-RRDG, 2021). However, the national wine industry remains **highly centralized**, with approximately **90% of total wine production** attributed to a single state-owned enterprise, **13. Jul – Plantaže**. This vertically integrated company manages **the largest contiguous vineyard in Europe**, encompassing **2,300 hectares in a single plot**, located approximately **30 km from the Adriatic Sea** and adjacent to **Lake Skadar**.

Plantaže produces an estimated **15 million bottles annually**, of which **60% is exported**, with **China** currently representing the primary export destination. The company operates its own **vine nursery**, cultivating over **99 grape varieties**, though production is strongly dominated by **autochthonous red grape Vranac**, which accounts for approximately **70% of the company's total output**, followed by **Kratošija**. Several **international varieties** are also planted, including *Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, and Pinot Blanc*.

### ***Key Wine Cellars Operated by Plantaže***

Plantaže's operations are structured around **three primary wine cellars**, each serving distinct functions in the production chain:

- **Lješkopolje Cellar:** The oldest of the company's facilities, recently renovated to serve as a center for **experimental vinification** and the **aging of limited-edition wines**. This cellar hosts approximately **100 micro-vinifications per year**, supporting research and innovation in wine production.
- **Ćemovsko Polje Cellar:** The core facility for **large-scale vinification**, equipped with **modern production technologies** aligned with contemporary winemaking standards. It handles the majority of the company's volume-based production.



- **Šipčanik Cellar:** Housed in a **converted underground military airbase**, Šipčanik represents one of the most architecturally and functionally significant wine aging facilities in the Balkans. The cellar is located **over 30 meters underground**, forming a **spiral tunnel** 356 meters in length, with an average **width of 13.5 meters, height of 7 meters**, and a total area exceeding **7,000 square meters**. The ambient conditions are optimal for aging, with a **stable temperature between 17–19°C** and **80% relative humidity**. At any given time, Šipčanik holds up to **2 million liters of wine in maturation**.

### ***Emergence of Boutique Wineries and Sector Diversification***

While Plantaže remains the dominant player, a growing number of **family-owned boutique or “garage” wineries** have emerged, particularly along the **Adriatic coastal zone**. These small-scale producers primarily target the **HORECA sector** (hotels, restaurants, cafes), aiming to serve the **seasonal tourism market** with **easy-drinking wines**, including **white, rosé, and light red styles**. This business model allows for **quick turnover and positive cash flow**, which is critical for sustaining early-stage growth and reinvestment.

### ***Promotion and Sector Recognition***

To elevate the profile of Montenegrin wines on a regional and international level, the **National Wine Academy of Montenegro**, in collaboration with the **National Association of Sommeliers**, has launched the **MonteVino trade show**. Held annually in early March (e.g., March 10–11, 2023, at the Hilton Hotel, Podgorica), MonteVino has become one of the **premier wine events in the Western Balkans**. It gathers:

- Montenegrin wine producers
- Regional participants from Serbia, North Macedonia, Croatia, Slovenia, Albania, and Italy
- Wine buyers, hospitality professionals, sommeliers, journalists, and enthusiasts

The event serves as a platform for **networking, product exposure, and brand building**, helping to position Montenegro as an **emerging wine-producing country** with both historical depth and contemporary relevance.

## **VI. Montenegro Vine and Wine sector SWOT Analysis**

Chart 3: SWOT analysis of Montenegro vine and wine sector

### **STRENGTH**

- ✓ Favourable climatic and geological condition for high quality wine production
- ✓ Autochthonous varieties, such as, but not only, Vranac and Kratosija, are helping to create the country wine identity
- ✓ Strong tourism development
- ✓ Plantaze, the leading company in the country, is paving the path for premium quality wines
- ✓ Family wineries are being created
- ✓ Montevino exhibition is gaining greater international recognition, benefitting to the entire industry

### **WEAKNESSES**

- ✓ Monopolistic wine industry
- ✓ Domestic market is small and depends a lot on tourism
- ✓ Except tourism sector, domestic market is mostly demanding low valued wines
- ✓ Vineyard cadastre is not up-dated
- ✓ Wine legislation is not in line with EU regulations

### **OPPORTUNITIES**

- ✓ Family wineries are increasing and bringing new dynamism
- ✓ Development of tourism is pushing wine quality upward

### **THREATS**

- ✓ High cost of production due to necessity of importing dry
- ✓ High dependence on 2 grape varieties
- ✓ Lack of regulation and control body to govern the increasing number of producers