



**Good Practice Story Title:** Unveiling Urla's Wine Heritage: The Birth of the Urla Vineyard Route

**Destination:** Urla Vineyard Route, İzmir

**Country:** Türkiye

**Submitting Organization:** İzmir Metropolitan Municipality

**Category:**

- Destination Management
- Nature & Scenery
- Environment & Climate
- Culture & Tradition
- Thriving Communities
- Business & Marketing

**Destination description:**

Urla, a coastal town with a 7500-year history, uniquely blends its natural beauty, cultural heritage, and sustainable practices. Renowned for its locally sustainable ecosystem, Urla offers visitors routes like the Olive and Vineyard Routes, showcasing ancient olive farming and vineyards. The region, historically recognized for winemaking, boasts three Michelin Stars and a Green Star, drawing attention with its Vineyard Route.

In Urla, it was known that 90 million liters of wine were produced annually up until 100 years ago. However, winemaking gradually began to decline over time due to various changes. Fifteen years ago, wine amphorae discovered during excavations for the establishment of a farm started to revive Urla's wine history. With this discovery, Urla's wine tradition was remembered, and multiple vineyard houses began to open. With those vineyards, they established The Urla Vineyard Route Association, which aimed to coordinate the opening of vineyard houses, brand Urla wines, and revive the past wine-making culture. Formed by local producers, The Urla Vineyard Route Association drives sustainable development by revitalizing ecological zones and viticulture through collaborative efforts. Digitized pathways enhance accessibility, aligning with the Izmir Peninsula Development Strategy. This model aims to revive centuries-old wine culture while addressing sustainability challenges through conservation, traditional methods, and economic prosperity.

Urla is one of the first places that come to mind when it comes to viticulture in Turkey. Urla's vineyards yield a variety of grapes, including French varieties like Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, alongside Turkish grapes like



Boğazkere and Bornova Misketi. Among its wineries, Urlice Vineyard and Winery, Urla Winery, and USCA stand out for their achievements and international recognition.

MMG Winery's "Şatomet" brand and Mozaik Winery's "Mahrem" brand have garnered acclaim in international competitions, while Çakır Winery's "Somnium" series revives uprooted vineyards. Perdix Winery produces wines from five grape varieties, blending historical Urla textures with modern architecture. İkidenezarası Winery aims to reconnect Yağcılar Village with its history, strategically located between two seas.

Urla epitomizes sustainable viticulture, preserving its cultural and natural heritage while promoting local development and tourism. With its rich history, diverse grape varieties, and award-winning wineries, Urla continues to thrive as a destination for wine enthusiasts and sustainable tourism seekers.

### **Summary of Good Practice Story:**

The Urla Vineyard Route was founded in 2013 by seven local organizations in response to the increasing number of wineries in the Urla region. Its primary objectives include fostering collaboration among these wineries to operate cohesively, reviving the historical significance of viticulture and winemaking that has roots dating back thousands of years in Urla, and promoting local development while ensuring its sustainability. The establishment of this route signifies a collective effort to showcase the unique wine culture of Urla and to position the region prominently on the global wine map.

### **Issues faced:**

One of the challenges faced by the Urla Vineyard Route initiative is the need to shift the prevalent perception of tourism in the region. In a country where 'sun-sea-beach tourism' is ingrained, introducing and promoting alternative tourist activities such as wine tourism requires overcoming stereotypes and changing visitor expectations. This shift in perception necessitates effective marketing and promotion strategies to educate potential tourists about the unique offerings of the Urla region and the benefits of engaging in wine-related experiences.

Additionally, extending the tourism season beyond the traditional summer months presents a challenge in itself, as it requires infrastructure development, event planning, new hotels offering experiential tourism, new fine dining restaurants, and collaborative efforts to attract visitors during off-peak seasons. Balancing the preservation of cultural heritage and natural resources with tourism development, while ensuring the involvement and benefits of the local community, presents a complex challenge in the sustainability efforts of the Urla Vineyard Route.



## **Solution:**

To address sustainability challenges, the Urla Vineyard Route implemented various solutions. It promoted alternative tourism to diversify from beach tourism, supported by the Türkiye Tourism Promotion and Development Agency (TGA), İzmir Metropolitan Municipality, İzmir Development Agency, and the European Union. Marketing efforts included pamphlets, brochures, a website, and a mobile app to attract wine tourists. Collaborative efforts among businesses ensured mutual support despite competition, fostering regional unity. Digitalization enhanced accessibility and communication. These measures aimed to ensure sustainable tourism, preserve cultural heritage, and equitably distribute economic benefits for the long-term development of the Urla region.

## **Methods, Steps, and Tools applied:**

The establishment of the Urla Vineyard Route in 2013 marked a pivotal moment as new wineries continued to flourish in Urla. This growth prompted the establishment of an association, bringing together vineyard owners and wine businesses. With unanimous support from all stakeholders, the concept of the Urla Vineyard Route gained momentum, garnering backing from the European Union, İzmir Development Agency, and İzmir Metropolitan Municipality. This support facilitated promotional activities such as brochure printing, map creation, website development, and the launch of a mobile application. In addition to national efforts to promote wine tourism, international exposure was sought through participation in global fairs, aiming to position Urla as a gastro-tourism destination.

The sales and promotion of wines crafted from Urla's unique grape varieties have been a key focus within the Urla Vineyard Route. For instance, "Urla Şarapçılık," a member of the route, has diligently revived historical grape varieties used by the Greek population during the Ottoman Empire era. Their acquisition of a century-old vineyard and patent for the "Urla Karası" grape variety exemplify their dedication to enriching the region's heritage and viticultural diversity. The sharing of Urla Karası grapes with other vineyards is also planned. Thus, the aim is to spread this endemic variety to the Aegean region in the future and ensure its sustainability.

Despite its merits, the Urla Vineyard Route faces challenges. The surge in tourist demand has led to increased construction and investment, diminishing available land for viticulture and posing obstacles to agro-tourism. Urbanization drives up land prices, making it costlier to establish new wineries and displacing agricultural land for construction purposes. Furthermore, rising prices adversely affect the local population's livelihoods. In response, the route strives to protect communities, preserve viticulture, and ensure sustainability through various initiatives.

While competition exists among businesses, the overarching goal of the Urla Vineyard Route is regional development. Practices such as providing consultancy, laboratory access, and equipment support to emerging businesses align with this objective. Additionally, businesses within the route collaborate to ensure mutual benefits. Notably, inclusion in the route is contingent upon meeting stringent quality standards, fostering a commitment to excellence in both production and service.



The establishments along the Urla Vineyard Route operate in an integrated manner, encompassing those engaged in the production process and those that are not, thereby ensuring mutual benefit for all. For instance, businesses not yet involved in winemaking, such as Urla Vineyard House, can obtain the necessary support from other establishments to participate in the production process, while those involved in production can take requisite steps to partake in the service aspect of the process. However, not every establishment established in the region is included in the Urla Vineyard Route. To uphold the overall quality of the Urla region and the Urla Vineyard Route, certain quality standards are required for establishments wishing to be part of this route. For example, one criterion that establishments on the route must meet is that at least 70% of the wine produced must originate from grapes harvested from vineyards in this region. Establishments aspiring to join the Urla Vineyard Route are admitted by members through a unanimous vote based on compliance with specific quality standards at production and service points. This holistic approach underscores the route's dedication to enhancing the Urla region's prosperity and preserving its unique viticultural heritage.

In conclusion, the implementation process of the Urla Vineyard Route solution involved a collaborative effort among various stakeholders, including vineyard houses, wine businesses, and public organizations such as the European Union, İzmir Development Agency, and İzmir Metropolitan Municipality, as well as the local community. This concerted effort was instrumental in achieving significant progress in addressing sustainability issues within the Urla region. Critical elements that contributed to this progress included unanimous support from all involved parties, strategic promotional activities such as brochure printing, map creation, and website development, as well as the launch of a mobile application. Additionally, the focus on promoting wines made from unique Urla grape varieties, efforts to protect local communities, and stringent quality standards for inclusion in the route underscored the commitment to sustainability and regional development. Through these initiatives, the Urla Vineyard Route has emerged as a model for promoting sustainable tourism, preserving cultural heritage, and fostering economic growth in the region.

### **Achievements and Results:**

Renowned for its vineyards, Urla has become a magnet for wine tourists seeking to immerse themselves in its rich wine culture. These enthusiasts typically spend 3-4 days exploring vineyards, restaurants, and attractions. Businesses such as 'Od Urla', which received a Michelin Star, have effectively drawn the attention of wine tourists and shifted the focus away from day visitors. Initially driven by domestic tourism, Urla has experienced a noticeable increase in foreign visitors.

The Urla Vineyard Route, supported by robust destination promotion, has extended the tourism season by 3-4 months. Starting with seven establishments, the association has expanded to include emerging businesses in response to growing demand. The rise of wine tourism in Urla reflects a clear preference among enthusiasts for the region, underscoring the success of Urla's agro-tourism initiatives.

Businesses along the Urla Vineyard Route operate sustainably, aligning their practices with the region's natural resources. They prioritize investments in renewable energy sources like solar power to enhance energy efficiency





and reduce their carbon footprint. These efforts aim not only to bolster environmental sustainability but also to improve economic efficiency.

Preservation of vineyards and the surrounding ecosystem is paramount. Businesses employ natural farming methods to minimize their impact on local flora and fauna, contributing to biodiversity conservation and habitat restoration projects. They also implement sustainable practices in water resource management and waste disposal.

Moreover, these businesses collaborate with universities and research institutions to foster innovation and scientific research. Joint projects and studies enhance their technical capabilities and provide valuable data for maintaining the long-term health of the regional ecosystem. They are distinguished not only by economic success but also by their commitment to environmental and social responsibility, integrating sustainability into their business strategies to benefit local communities and ensure the long-term sustainability of regional tourism.

The Urla Vineyard Route aims to promote Urla and its vineyards nationally and internationally, extending the tourism season and diverging from the prevalent mass tourism model. It seeks to preserve a boutique, high-quality winemaking approach, avoiding industrialization. The practice of showcasing wines made from locally grown grapes in their own wineries will continue. Future projects will engage younger generations in viticulture to ensure the sustainability of winemaking.

Urla's recognition has significantly contributed to regional economic and social development. The establishment of new restaurants, hotels, and tourism establishments has revitalized economic activities and created job opportunities, boosting the customer bases of existing businesses and improving local residents' income levels.

Socially and culturally, Urla has become a dynamic hub hosting various events and cultural activities such as art exhibitions and music festivals, appealing to both locals and visitors. The Urla Vineyard Route has enhanced the visibility of different villages, offering opportunities to explore their cultural heritage and natural beauty while boosting local economies.

In villages experiencing reverse migration from urban areas, tourism revenues have revitalized communities and raised living standards. These villages, rich in historical and natural resources, have become popular tourist destinations featured in various tour programs.

Urla's tourism potential not only stimulates economic growth but also enriches its social and cultural fabric, improving residents' quality of life. With future projects and sustainable tourism practices, Urla will further strengthen these positive impacts.

Several important steps are being taken to develop the Urla Vineyard Route, and various exciting future projects are being planned. For example, there are plans to establish an interactive museum that explores the Urla Vineyard Route and the rich viticultural history of Urla in depth. This museum will provide visitors with the opportunity to interactively experience the region's rich cultural heritage and wine production processes. Additionally, the project aims to enhance tourism value, contribute to the local economy of Urla, and increase the







region's visibility nationally and internationally. These efforts aim to strengthen Urla's sustainable tourism potential by preserving its viticultural traditions and passing them on to future generations.

As a result of Urla's emergence as a prominent destination in Turkey, wine tourism has become a significant alternative sector. Supporting wine destinations like the Urla Vineyard Route will diversify tourism, promote regional development, preserve wine culture, ensure sustainability, and benefit the local economy. The Urla Vineyard Route Association plans to work towards opening more businesses within the Urla Vineyard Route and further developing wine tourism.

### **Lessons Learned and Advice:**

The establishment of the Urla Vineyard Route has brought about both positive and negative experiences in Urla's tourism sector. On the bright side, there has been a noticeable surge in wine tourism, effectively extending the tourism season by 3-4 months. Moreover, Urla's boutique winemaking approach has garnered favor among wine enthusiasts, bolstering the success of agro-tourism endeavors. However, challenges like urbanization and land competition present significant hurdles. The escalating land prices and the shift from agriculture to construction jeopardize the region's agricultural sustainability. Recommendations for destinations grappling with similar issues include advocating sustainable development practices, fostering collaboration among stakeholders, diversifying tourism offerings, and involving local communities in decision-making processes. By tackling these challenges head-on and capitalizing on opportunities, destinations can ensure the sustainability and resilience of their tourism sectors.

### **Recognitions and Additional References**

Between 2018 and 2023, wines produced by vineyards located along the Urla Vineyard Route have earned awards from numerous national and international organizations.

Some of these organizations are listed below:

- Turkish Wine Challenge (TWC)
- Challenging Master Classes (CMC)
- International Wine Challenge (IWC)
- Decanter World Wine Awards (DWAA)
- Wine Award International
- Turkey Sommelier Association

These awards demonstrate the quality and international recognition of the wines produced by businesses along the Urla Vineyard Route. You can find detailed information about the awards on the vineyards' websites.



<https://urlabagyolu.com/en/urla-bag-yolu-urla-sarapcilik-dernegi-english-2/>

<https://vineyards.goturkiye.com/urla-vineyard-route>

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