



Good Practice Story Title: Discovering Colares: A Journey through the Vineyards and Natural Beauty

Destination: Sintra

Country: Portugal

Submitting Organization: Municipality of Sintra

Category:

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

Destination description:

Sintra, an enchanted treasure in the green hills of the Serra de Sintra, is a Portuguese municipality, located in the district of Lisbon, that breathes history, culture and natural beauty, taking your breath away.

This place is also an image of a vibrant community, where customs and traditions are preserved with care, as they are what brings life to the city's streets, attracting visitors from all over the world to embrace the discovery of this place. However, it is worth highlighting that Sintra is much more than just a tourist destination - it is a unique place, given the presence of its majestic palaces to the winding streets of the historic center.

Beyond the walls of the historic center, there is a region that perfectly complements the beauty of this place: Colares, a region located at the foot of the Serra de Sintra and very close to the sea, offers visitors a unique experience that combines historic vineyards, beaches with stunning views and a serene and welcoming atmosphere.



The Colares vineyards have unique peculiarities, as the vines are planted in the sand and are cultivated sustainably in harmony with the natural environment. Thus, the Colares wine region complements the natural and historical beauty of Sintra, known for its palaces, farms and gardens. The harmonious coexistence of vineyards and historical monuments strengthens Sintra's tourist appeal, offering visitors a different experience that includes wine tourism, history and nature.

Summary of Good Practice Story:

Colares wine has a long and rich history dating back to times before the arrival of the Romans in the Iberian Peninsula. Located in the Sintra region, close to Lisbon, wine production in Colares gained notoriety especially during the 19th century. It was during this time that phylloxera, a devastating pest that affected vineyards across Europe, had less of an impact on Colares due to the unique characteristics of its soil. The vines are planted in sandy soils, combined with an underlying layer of clay, which prevents pests from attacking the vines, allowing local vines, especially the Ramisco variety, to survive.

Its uniqueness lies in the resistance of the vines to the phylloxera attack and in the traditional cultivation techniques. Official recognition came in 1908, when Colares was designated as one of the first demarcated regions in Portugal. This set a standard of quality and protection for wines produced in the area.

The Colares vineyard is a crucial element for the municipality of Sintra, both from an economic and cultural point of view. The production of high quality wines, with emphasis on Vinho Ramisco, a long-lived and incorporated red, and Malvasia de Colares, an aromatic white, both varieties having a unique character, given the particularity of the soils in which they are grown. The producers, on the other hand, have always worked with love and care to preserve the vineyards, following traditional methods that have been passed down from generation to generation.

Furthermore, Colares' traditional viticulture preserves ancestral agricultural practices, keeping an important part of the region's cultural heritage alive. The harvest is done manually, due to the terrain and the traditional cultivation method. The grapes are carefully selected to guarantee the quality of the wine. Winemaking follows traditional methods, where grapes are crushed and fermented in tanks. Wine aging takes place in large wooden barrels, often oak, for several years. This gives Colares wine its complexity and unique characteristics.





As time progressed and the world around them changed, concerns began to arise in the community of Colares, as there were fears that the rich culture of the vineyards and the unique way in which they were cultivated were in danger. It was then that authorities, together with producers, came together on a mission: to preserve not only the vineyards, but also the tradition and legacy they represented.

This sustainable approach ensures that wine production in Colares remains true to its historical and environmental roots, whilst continuing to delight and captivate wine lovers around the world.

Issues faced:

Given the unique wine culture found in the beautiful region of Colares, there is a great concern about preserving the culture and traditional forms of cultivation, as, despite its historical and economic importance, the Colares vineyard faces a series of challenges that threaten its continuity, such as:

- ➔ **Vineyard Protection:** Urban expansion is a significant challenge, and the protection of growing areas is vital to the preservation of Colares wine production.
- ➔ **Climate Change:** Climate change represents another significant challenge for the Colares vineyard. Changes in weather patterns, including warmer temperatures, variations in rainfall and extreme weather events, directly affect the growth cycle of vines and the quality of grapes. The Colares vineyards, adapted to a specific microclimate, are particularly sensitive to these changes. The need to implement climate adaptation techniques, such as efficient water management and protection against excessive heat, is crucial to ensuring the survival of vineyards.
- ➔ **Shortage of Specialized Labor:** Viticulture in Colares requires specialized knowledge and qualified labor, especially due to the traditional techniques used in growing and harvesting grapes. However, the shortage of skilled workers is a growing concern. Many young people in the region seek opportunities in other sectors, resulting in a lack of continuity in traditional practices. Training new generations of winegrowers and attracting specialized labor are essential to maintaining the quality and tradition of Colares wines.





- ➔ **Conservation and Innovation:** The preservation of the Colares vineyard demands continuous efforts to conserve traditional practices and innovation to face modern challenges. Conservation involves the protection of wine-growing lands against urbanization, the sustainable use of natural resources and the promotion of biodiversity. On the other hand, innovation is necessary to improve the efficiency and sustainability of production. This includes the adoption of new agricultural technologies, growing methods that are more resistant to climate change and winemaking practices that respect the environment.
- ➔ **Government and Community Support:** Overcoming these problems also depends on strong government and community support. Public policies that protect agricultural land, encourage sustainable production and promote wine tourism are essential. Furthermore, the local community must be involved in preserving the vineyard, recognizing its cultural and economic value. Cooperation initiatives between producers, winegrowers' associations and tourist entities can strengthen the resilience of the Colares vineyard.

In this sense, the Colares vineyard faces complex challenges that require an integrated approach to conservation, innovation and community support. Urbanization, climate change and labor shortages are obstacles that threaten the continuity of traditional winemaking practices. However, with coordinated efforts and a strong commitment to preservation and innovation, it is possible to ensure that the Colares vineyard continues to be a symbol of tradition, quality and sustainability in the Sintra region.

Solution:

Despite its rich history, Colares wine has faced significant challenges over the years, especially due to increasing urbanization and real estate pressure in the region. These factors threatened the continuity of traditional viticultural practices and the preservation of Colares' unique vineyards. However, in recent decades, innovative and integrated solutions have been developed to face these challenges and ensure the sustainability and continuity of this wine-growing heritage.

The solution designed aims to preserve this tradition so marked in the Colares and Sintra region, involving several dynamics such as:



- ➔ **Preservation of the Traditional Method:** Maintaining traditional cultivation and winemaking practices helps preserve the cultural heritage and techniques that make Colares wine unique.
- ➔ **Conservation of indigenous varieties:** such as Ramisco and Malvasia de Colares. These grape varieties are adapted to the local environment and contribute to the region's biodiversity.
- ➔ **Develop Sustainable Agricultural Practices:** Many producers are adopting sustainable agricultural practices, such as integrated pest management, efficient water use and organic methods, to ensure the long-term health of vineyards and the environment.
- ➔ **Modern Equipment:** Investment in winemaking technology, such as advanced temperature control systems, controlled fermentation and modern aging techniques, to improve the quality and consistency of wines.
- ➔ **Research and Development:** Partnerships with universities and research centers to develop new winemaking and vineyard management techniques that respect traditions, but also incorporate scientific innovations.
- ➔ **Adoption of organic and biodynamic agricultural practices:** to reduce environmental impact and promote biodiversity.
- ➔ **Resource Management:** Implementation of efficient water management and soil conservation systems to face the challenges of climate change.
- ➔ **Development of Wine Tourism:** Investment in wine tourism infrastructure to attract visitors and increase the notoriety of Colares wine. This includes guided tours of the vineyards and wineries, tastings and cultural events.
- ➔ **Partnerships with Local Tourism:** Collaboration with hotels, restaurants and tour operators to create tourism packages that include visits to wineries and enogastronomic experiences.
- ➔ **Cooperatives and Associations:** Strengthen winegrower cooperatives and local associations to promote collaboration and exchange of knowledge.
- ➔ **Development of a tourist product associated with the Colares vineyard:** objective of boosting actions such as wine tasting, visits to the centuries-old winery, among others.





Methods, Steps, and Tools applied:

Wine production in the Colares region is a true treasure, with its unique characteristics and centuries-old traditions that continue to be followed to this day. At the heart of this production is the Ramisco grape variety, a grape variety exclusive to Colares that is considered unique in the world. Some methods and techniques used by producers to guarantee the quality and authenticity of this centuries-old product:

- ➔ The grapes are harvested by hand and delivered to the winery, where they are carefully processed using the same mechanisms and utensils that have been used over the years. It is important to highlight that the winery itself is a historic site, with more than a hundred years of history;
- ➔ Production is limited and aimed at a specific target audience, which guarantees the exclusivity and quality of the final product. To promote and share this tradition with the public, producers in partnership with the 4 municipalities that make up the route carry out tastings in cultural and heritage sites in the region, with a limited number of participants to guarantee an intimate and authentic experience (maximum around 40 people);
- ➔ The Municipality, in collaboration with producers, carries out an activity called “Cup with History” which involves four tastings throughout the year, where participants have the unique opportunity to taste wines from all 13 producers in the region. These tastings are a celebration of the tradition and heritage of Colares, providing a sensorial experience that highlights the quality and uniqueness of these exceptional wines.
- ➔ Develop and promote wine tourism itineraries that include visits to vineyards, tastings and cultural events.
- ➔ Organize festivals and cultural events that celebrate the history and culture of Colares viticulture.
- ➔ Encourage the participation of the local community in activities related to the vineyard, strengthening the cultural bond
- ➔ Strengthen winegrower associations to promote cooperation and exchange of knowledge between producer

The preservation of Colares vineyards is an ongoing effort that involves legal protection, conservation of traditional practices, adaptation to climate change, technological innovation, cultural appreciation and cooperation between different actors. With an integrated approach and the commitment of the local community, it is possible to ensure that the Colares vineyards continue to produce high quality wines and preserve a unique cultural legacy.



Achievements and Results:

Colares wines have achieved notable success, reflecting the joint effort to preserve winemaking traditions and adapt to modern demands. This success can be attributed to several factors that, together, guaranteed the survival and appreciation of the Colares vineyards. The combination of unique natural features, legal protection and effective marketing and tourism strategies has been fundamental to this positive result.

Some of the factors that led to success:

- ➔ **Sandy Soil:** The sandy soil of Colares has been a crucial factor in the survival of native vines, especially during the phylloxera epidemic in the 19th century. This type of soil makes it difficult for the pest to spread, preserving the vines.
- ➔ **Unique Soil Characteristics:** In addition to being sandy, Colares soil combines an underlying layer of clay, providing an ideal environment for vines to grow. This combination of soils gives unique characteristics to the wines produced, resulting in distinct flavors and aromas that are highly valued.
- ➔ **Maritime Influence:** The proximity to the Atlantic Ocean contributes to a particular microclimate. Sea breezes moderate temperatures, creating ideal conditions for the slow ripening of the grapes and maintaining balanced acidity. This unique microclimate is crucial for the production of high quality wines in Colares.
- ➔ **Controlled Designation of Origin (DOC):** The attribution of Controlled Designation of Origin (DOC) to Colares protects the designation and ensures rigorous quality standards. This certification not only helps to differentiate Colares wines on the market, but also guarantees consumers the authenticity and excellence of the products.
- ➔ **Promotion of Wine Tourism:** The promotion of wine tourism has been vital to increase the visibility of Colares wines. The region has invested in tourism promotion, offering guided tours of the vineyards, tastings and cultural events. Furthermore, presence at international fairs and events increases the demand for Colares wines, increasing its global recognition.





The success of Colares wines is the result of a coordinated effort that combines the preservation of traditions with innovation and adaptation to modern conditions. The unique soil, the influence of the maritime climate, legal protection through the DOC and effective marketing and tourism strategies have been fundamental in ensuring that Colares wines continue to be recognized and appreciated worldwide. These factors not only preserve a rich cultural heritage, but also ensure a prosperous future for Colares viticulture.

Thus, the history of the Colares vineyard continues to be written, with each visit, each tasting and each experience contributing to the rich tapestry of this unique region of Portugal. It is a story of achievements and results, of tradition and innovation, which continues to enchant and inspire all those who have the privilege of knowing it.

Lessons Learned and Advice:

The preservation of the Colares vineyards is a testimony to the authenticity and cultural richness of the Sintra region. This demarcated area not only produces unique, high-quality wines, but also keeps a significant part of Portugal's cultural heritage alive. The continuity of the Colares vineyards depends on a careful balance between tradition and innovation, legal protection and adaptation to new climatic and economic realities.

The tradition of this peculiar place has always focused on valuing both history and local culture, and more specifically, on preserving traditional wine production methods, as they were passed down from father to son, and always like that.

Colares wine also represents an important economic value for the region, which was one of the sectors that most employed the local population until the mid-20th century and which, although having suffered a decrease with urban growth in the 80s and 90s, is now recovering with new registered producers and a growing interest in this practice, reinforcing business and job opportunities in the region.

Just as Sintra knew how to preserve the demarcated region of Colares for its authenticity, it is crucial that everyone involved, from winegrowers to legislators and the local community, work together to ensure that this heritage continues to flourish. Preservation of the Colares vineyards is not just a matter of maintaining an agricultural practice; it's about preserving the soul and history of a region that has produced some of Portugal's most distinctive wines for centuries.



Recognitions and Additional References

- Recognition in 1908 as DOC (Denomination of Controlled Origin): The attribution of DOC to Colares protects the denomination and ensures quality standards. This also helps to differentiate the product in the market.
- <https://visitsintra.travel/en/eat-drink/wine-cellars/colares-wine-route>
- <https://visitsintra.travel/en/eat-drink/wine-cellars>
- <https://visitsintra.travel/en/eat-drink/colares-wine>



