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## Cricova – The National and International Tourist Brand of The Republic of Moldova

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**Jak cytować [how to cite]:** Cujbă V., Sîrbu R. (2020): *Cricova – The National and International Tourist Brand of The Republic of Moldova*. Sport i Turystyka. Środkowoeuropejskie Czasopismo Naukowe, 3, 3, p. 105–115.

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### Cricova – narodowy i międzynarodowy turystyczny znak handlowy Republiki Mołdawii

#### Streszczenie

W tym artykule prezentowane są wyniki badań dotyczące tworzenia, organizowania, administrowania i promowania kompleksu win Cricova. Zostały zidentyfikowane elementy reprezentatywne zapewniające poziom atrakcyjności miejscowości z punktu widzenia turystycznego. Kompleks winiarski Cricova to system podziemnych galerii z czasów starożytnych, powstałych po wydobyciu kamienia wapiennego. Pomysł wykorzystania tych galerii jako magazynów wina został uzgodniony przez winiarzy Petru Ungureanu i Nicolae Soboleva, w odpowiedzi na rozwiązanie problemu braku specjalnie zaprojektowanych pomieszczeń do przechowywania, przetwarzania i dojrzewania win z lat 50. ubiegłego wieku. Obecnie kompleks zajmuje powierzchnię 53 hektarów, a podziemne galerie, przekształcone w ulice, mają łączną długość 120 kilometrów. Przez cały rok temperatura w podziemnych galeriach pozostaje stała, około + 12, + 14 °C, a wilgotność względna

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powietrza stanowi około 97–98%. O wyjątkowości podziemnego kompleksu świadczy unikalne dziedzictwo materialne i duchowe: sale degustacyjne, muzeum z eksponatami ze wszystkich czasów (prehistorycznych, starożytnych, średniowiecznych i współczesnych), narodowa kolekcja win z ponad 200 markami, wina z różnych regionów świata, organizowanie wydarzeń turystycznych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Cricova, podziemne galerie, piwnice, turystyka enologiczna, marka.

## Abstract

This article, presents the results of the research on the creation, organization, administration and promotion of the Cricova wine complex. In this, representative elements ensuring the attractiveness of the town from the tourist point of view have been identified. The Cricova wine complex is a system of underground galleries created after the extraction of conchiferous limestone since ancient times. The idea of using these galleries as wine warehouses was agreed upon by winemakers Petru Ungureanu and Nicolae Sobolev, in response to solving the problem of the lack of specially designed rooms for storing, processing and maturing wines from the 1950s. Currently, the complex covers the area of 53 hectares, and the underground galleries transformed into streets have a total length of 120 kilometers. Throughout the year, the temperature in the underground galleries remains constant, around + 12...+ 14 °C and the relative air humidity is around 97–98%. The uniqueness of the Underground Complex provides material and spiritual heritage of the tasting rooms, a museum with exhibits from all times (prehistoric, ancient, medieval and modern), a national wine collection with over 200 wine brands from different regions of the world, organizing tourist events.

**Keywords:** Cricova, underground galleries, cellars, oenological tourism, brand.

## Introduction

According to recent studies, “Cricova” is the most valuable and expensive brand in the Republic of Moldova [15]. The wine cellar in Cricova is a showpiece of the Republic of Moldova, a unique cultural and landscape complex, an illustration of the socio-economic and spiritual development of the country, and a winery that preserves the experience and tradition in the field of wine production. A leader in the quality and the implementation of the world new achievements in this field.

According to Bitsani E. and Kavoura A. [1], winemaking is a fast-growing industry for the states with their economy based on agriculture. At the same time, Nemethu S., Walas B. [5] points out that in wine-producing countries, the centuries-old oenological traditions have been the basis for the creation of attractive tourist attractions (wine routes, wine tastings, wine festivals, etc.). The studies conducted under the coordination of Peris – Ortiz M., Cruz Del Rio Rama M., Rueda-Armengot C. [7] have shown that wine tourism can be capitalized for sustainable economic development, which determines local economic growth and social development. For Nicolosi A., Cortese L., Nesci F.S. and Privitera D. [6] wine tourism ensure the right balance between the natural and the production environment and at the same time reduces the pressure from tourism.

## Research materials and methods

The study carried out to identify the elements considered representative in the development and promotion of the tourist destination “Cricova”. Among the arguments in favour of the chosen research topic we can mention the aspects that characterize oenological tourism in the Republic of Moldova, in general, and their influence on the tourist destination “Cricova”, in particular: a) in the last years the number of wineries in the Republic of Moldova has doubled, and the number of visitors has increased by 20%; b) 80% of the foreigners who arrive in Moldova visit at least one winery; c) the Republic of Moldova is among the top 20 wine producers in the world [14]; d) Moldovan wines are promoted in the world under the unique brand “Wine of Moldova – Alive Legend” e) millennial traditions in the field of winemaking are celebrated annually during the National Wine Day; f) in 2018 Moldova was the host of the 3rd Global Conference on Wine Tourism

## Results and discussions

Thus, a first concern was the study of the chronological evolution of the Cricova Winery. The main stages that were the basis of the establishment of the company were identified and analyzed. Some aspects determined the perception of tourists concerning the attractiveness of the destination and influenced the demand for potential tourism.

Before the storage of wine began in the galleries of Cricova, primitive methods were used to extract conchiferous limestone. At the end of the nineteenth century the method of horizontal exploitation through galleries and rooms was introduced in Moldova, and by the end of 1953 Galanin stone-cutting machine began to be used [3, p. 75]. The idea of using underground galleries from Cricova as wine warehouses came from the winemakers Petru Ungureanu and Nicolae Sobolev, as a response to solving the lack of specially designed rooms for storing, processing and maturing wines. The year 1952 is considered the foundation year of the wine cellars in Cricova [4, p. 27].

The main events that have marked the history of the Cricova Winery since its establishment until now are [2, p. 98–99]:

- 1947 – first experiences in producing classic sparkling wines;
- 1954 – establishing the wine collection in which the collection of the marshal Hermann Göring was included;
- 1955 – launching Moldova’s first quality wines on the market;
- 1958 – the first international recognition of wines produced by “Cricova” at the competitions in Ljubjana and Budapest (Aligote and Feteasca won silver medals);
- 1958 – the first export of quality wines;

- 1977 – commissioning of the primary winemaking factory in the town of Cricova;
- 1980 – commissioning of the classic sparkling wine factory with a capacity of four million bottles;
- 1989 – commissioning of the sparkling wine factory by the Charmat method, the production of the first batch of “Original Spumant” of 226 thousand bottles;
- 1991–2000 – partial and complete modernization of the existing production capacities;
- 2005 – elaboration of the corporate identity “Cricova”, namely the graphic part of the logo and the slogan “Nomen est omen”.
- 2012 – launching of the corporate anthem.

The underground town, at present, covers an area of 53 hectares, and the underground galleries were transformed into streets that have a total length of 120 kilometers. The width of the galleries varies between 6 and 7.5 meters, and their height is 3–3.5 meters. The depth, at which the cellars are located, depending on the relief, varies from 35 meters at the entrance to 80 meters. During the whole year, the temperature in the underground galleries remains constant, around + 12... + 14 °C, while the relative humidity of the air remains at about 97–98%. Due to these natural conditions it is possible to keep and ripen the wines of superior quality, as well as the classic sparkling wine, with their authentic character formation [2, p. 23].

Though being located under the whole town of Cricova, the galleries represent a real underground town with streets, traffic lights and road signs. The streets are named according to the name of the wine that is kept in the adjacent niches: Cabernet, Dionis, Feteasca, Aligote, Sauvignon, etc.



**Figure 1.** The Underground Complex

Source: made by the author.

The uniqueness of the underground complex is ensured by five large, spacious and imposing rooms, in which the elements of classical architecture are interwoven with modern ornaments. The rooms are decorated with stained glass windows, tapestries, wooden sculptures made by folk craftsmen from the Republic of Moldova, and which represent true works of art (Figure 1).

I. The European Room – the stained-glass windows render the vines in all seasons. This room has necessary conditions for the organization of symposia, business meetings etc.

II. The Bottom of the Sea Room – the name of the room symbolizes the depths of the Sarmatian Sea, which existed on the present territory of the Republic of Moldova 12 million years ago, during the Miocene age, on the bottom of which the mollusk crusts were deposited (Figure 2).

III. The Room with the Fireplace – the predominant element in the decoration of this room is the fireplace, which generates a warm and relaxing atmosphere. The color range of the interior and decorations emphasize the hunting style.

IV. The Presidential Hall – a very spacious room with thematic images in the field of viticulture and winemaking of the Republic of Moldova. The works are designed in the technique of bas-relief, preserving the classical traditions of antiquity. Artworks, wooden furniture and monumental doors make up the decor of the room.

V. The Room Casa Mare – the place that bears the name of the most beautiful room of a traditional house in the rural area of Moldova (Figure 3). The room is decorated with oak furniture and national motifs. The rustic atmosphere predominates in this room due to the wooden ceiling with beams, which creates the impression of antiquity.



**Figure 2.** The Bottom of the Sea Room

Source: made by the author.



**Figure 3.** The Room Casa Mare

Source: made by the author.

Apart from that, the underground town hosts a museum in which unique exhibits have been gathered through the ages (prehistoric, ancient, medieval and modern), to describe in detail the history of winemaking. The material exhibited in the museum is part of the national heritage of the Republic of Moldova.

Cricova's cellars are home to a remarkable collection of wines (Oenoteca – National Wine Collection) which has its beginning in 1954. Currently, the national wine cellar has hundreds of thousands of bottles in the underground galleries of Cricova and also contains precious rarities. The most famous and oldest exhibit in the Cricova collection, kept under a glass lid, is a bottle of desert red wine “Ierusalim de Paști”, produced in 1902 in a small Jewish town. The gold collection also contains an old liqueur bottle “Yan Bekher” also produced in 1902 in the Czech Republic, as well as five bottles of “Chateau Mouton Rothschild” from the 1936 harvest [2, p. 126]. The wine exhibits include Hermann Gering's collection which was brought after the Second World War. In the Cricova wine cellar are stored about 200 wine brands from different regions of the world.

Cricova has created its own concept of oenological tourism development. Thus, in 1998 the Business and Tourism Centre “Cricova-Vin” was founded. The object of activity of this entity consists of organizing trips through the underground city, reservation and tourist assistance, marketing and delivery of wine products, promoting the image and maintaining the dialogue with potential buyers (<https://shop.cricova.md>).

The Business and Tourism Centre “Cricova-Vin” plans tourist packages with details related to transportation, guidance, food and tasting services. On week-

ends, after 4 pm, 5 € are charged per person at the standard price of the package. The excursions take place in Romanian, Russian, English, French, with the presentation of the oeno-gastronomic Tourist Complex “Kingdom of Wine” (Table 1).

**Table 1.** The contents of Tourist Packages

Nr.	The name of Tour Package	Duration	Price	Tasting, with menu	Package price with souvenir
1.	Business	1h 30'	25 €	3 types of wine	32 €
2.	Sparkling	1h 50'	32 €	5 types of sparkling wines	40 €
3.	Photo Session	1h 00'	110 €	—	—
4.	V.I.P	2h 30'	100 €	9 types of wine	110 €
9.	PREMIUM GOLD	2h 50'	165 €	11 types of wine	170 €

Source: <https://cricova.md/tururi/>

A tool of promotion increasingly used by Cricova is the organization of the tourist events that are included in the Agenda of the Cultural – Tourist Events “The Tree of Life”:

- Cricova Wine Run – the event is organized at the end of January and represents a unique run in Europe at a depth of 100 m through the underground galleries in Cricova (Figure 4). The race can be attended by aspiring sports enthusiasts and professionals [9].
- Underland Wine & Music Fest – is the only underground festival of this kind the world and it takes place in February (Figure 5). The tourist offer includes the following: boiled wine at the entrance, screenings of silent films in the Cricova Cinema, visit to the Museum of the underground town of Cricova, show with singers and performers from several countries, participation in workshops of musical and theatrical creations, access to all the thematic neighborhoods and to the scenes of the underground town, participation in the wine schools located in the underground galleries with wine tasting and sommeliers [10].
- Sparkling Night – the event is organized at the end of July and the program includes free tastings, tours through the Cricova cellars and sparkling wine production areas, visits to the Cricova museum, jazz music, lounge areas and promenades, and also Art-Salon [11].
- Cricova Must Fest – is one of the most popular music and wine festivals in the Republic of Moldova and is organized at the beginning of September [12,13]. The program includes professional tasting guided by sommeliers, masterclasses of traditional dishes like sarmale and pies, as well as pottery and weaving, exhibitions of national carpets and other objects, trips through galleries etc.





**Figure 4.** Cricova Wine Run

Source: <https://cricova.winerun.md/en/>



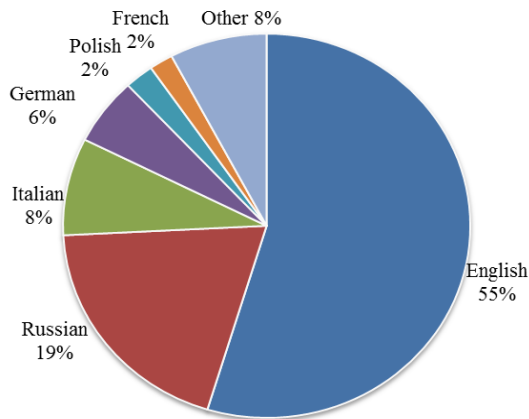
**Figure 5.** Underland Wine & Music Fest

Source: <https://www.fest.md/>

Thus, the Cricova complex enters the top 10 most visited tourist destinations in the Republic of Moldova. The number of tourists visiting the winery is growing. In 2019, alone, the winery was visited by about 100,000 tourists, of which 75% were foreigners. However, in the absence of statistical data on the structure of tourist flows organized at the Cricova Winery, the information available on the Tripadvisor platform was used, namely regarding the comments made by tourists in different languages of international and regional circulation, as well as the appreciation of the quality of the services provided within the tourist destination.



Based on the analysis of the comments made by tourists in different languages, the areas of their geographical origin were deduced. Thus, the highest share belongs to tourists who speak English 55% and Russian 19% (Figure 6). Unlike Russian-speaking tourists where the geographical area may be limited to several states (The Russian Federation, Ukraine, Belarus, etc.), those who commented in English come from various countries of the world (USA, UK, the Netherlands, Austria, Israel, Turkey), including those from Romania who are fluent in English.



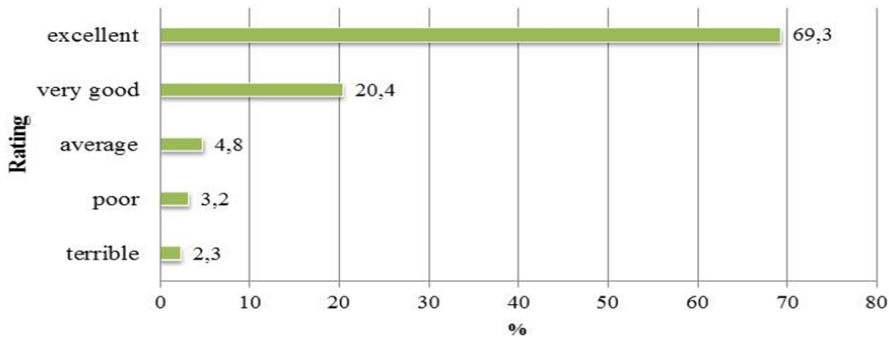
**Figure 6.** Distribution of comments on the Cricova Winery according to the foreign tourists' language of communication (Tripadvisor platform)

Source: own research.

At a great distance they are followed by the tourists who commented in Italian 9%, German 6%, Polish 2% and French 2%. The presence of these tourists in the structure of the tourist flow is mainly due to the increasingly efficient promotion of wine products under the Cricova brand on the international market in recent years.

Another segment of tourists who commented in their native language, altogether hold 8% of the total number of comments. They come from the countries of Northern Europe (Sweden, Norway, Finland), which represents a new market for the Republic of Moldova, with limited traditions in wine consumption, or from the Mediterranean European countries (Spain, Portugal or Greece), which are very demanding of quality services provided in the winery.

At the same time, out of the total number of tourists,  $\approx 90\%$  were very satisfied with the experience lived in the underground town of Cricova and only 10% appreciated the destination from unsatisfactory to average (Figure 7).



**Figure 7.** Quality of tourist services within the Cricova Winery according to foreign tourists' opinions

Source: own research.

## Conclusion

The Cricova Winery has demonstrated that effective organization, capitalization and promotion can turn a simple resource into a true tourist destination. The development of the tourist destination Cricova was possible with the development, over time, of its own material and spiritual heritage and the fundamental reconstruction of the complex allowed the diversification of the tourist offer by adding new elements (wine cellar, museum, tasting rooms, cinema), and hosting different events tourist attractions which have gained the attention and interest of tourists. However, the wine collection represents the undeniable value of the galleries in Cricova and serves as a quality standard for other wineries in the Republic of Moldova. As the slogan "Nomen est Omen" says, Cricova is a brand which represents it.

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### **Deklaracja braku konfliktu interesów**

Autorzy deklarują brak potencjalnych konfliktów interesów w odniesieniu do badań, autorstwa i/lub publikacji artykułu *Cricova – The National and International Tourist Brand of The Republic of Moldova*.

### **Finansowanie**

Autorzy nie otrzymali żadnego wsparcia finansowego w zakresie badań, autorstwa i/lub publikacji artykułu *Cricova – The National and International Tourist Brand of The Republic of Moldova*.

### **Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interests with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of the article *Cricova – The National and International Tourist Brand of The Republic of Moldova*.

### **Funding**

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of the article *Cricova – The National and International Tourist Brand of The Republic of Moldova*.

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