

Tourists by far comprise the core of Thailand's wine consumers (approximately 80% of the total) followed by local expatriates at 15%. Only about 5% of the market is comprised of Thais. Wine drinking is still at its infancy in Thailand, but is rapidly growing in popularity as drinking wine connotes a very favourable social reputation.

Wines sold in Thailand are nearly all bottled imports. It's not unusual for local importers to carry a very large selection. For example, at Caldbeck MacGregor (Thailand) Ltd. there are over 200 different wines available. But Thais buying wine at supermarkets are not very particular about the brand. Four and five star hotels and European-style restaurants try to encourage wine consumption. Although some Thai, Chinese and other ethnic restaurants may also include wine in their menu, most of their customers are content to drink whisky or beer.

Promoting wine consumption is a year-round activity for top marketers, who hold "wine of the week" and "wine of the month" specials tied to hotel food promotions. Recently, wine tasting nights have been organized, especially at five star hotels as a promotional vehicle. Wine seminars are also regularly held in Bangkok and other popular tourist destinations, including Phuket, Pattaya and Chiang Mai.

In the early 1980s, less than 10,000 nine-litre cases of wine were imported annually. Since then, wine imports have steadily grown to about 160,000 cases a year, including sparkling wine and champagne, valued at approximately 400 million baht (CS21M).

Wine imports by country of origin can be roughly divided as follows:

COUNTRIES	PERCENT
FRANCE	50
AUSTRALIA	18
U.S.A. CALIF.	10
PORTUGAL	9
ITALY	8
GERMANY	4
OTHERS	1

Not surprisingly, wine is often promoted as a drink with "a touch of class". This is especially true in the case of Thai woman, as wine is considered a much more socially acceptable drink as compared to hard liquor. Thus one sees more sophisticated Thai women at cocktail parties elegantly sipping their glass of wine.

Due to Thailand's hot and humid climate, storing wine for extended periods of time is not encouraged. Humidity problems combined with the cost of air-conditioning have discouraged wine storage.

With local consumption at only 5%, the market for wine has tremendous potential. Thailand has very limited local wine production that is not anticipated to develop much further - the lion's share of the demand will be supplied by the imports. As with other