

Culinary delights of Khorasan Razavi Province



Shishlik

Iranica Desk

The food industry is the third largest income-generating industry in the world, with an annual income of over \$200 billion in Iran before the spread of COVID-19. While Iran may not be among the top 10 countries in the world in terms of halal food ranking, it still has significant potential in this area. Based on the report by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) on food tourism, travelers spend over one-third of their travel budget on food and drinks. This highlights the significance of food tourism worldwide. Whether it's a leisure trip or a business venture, food and drinks are an integral part of travel. In fact, discovering and experiencing new cuisines has always been a motivating factor for travelers.

Food industry in Khorasan Razavi Province

Khorasan Razavi Province has a long-standing history in the food industry and is among the most experienced sectors in the country. This province is among the top three provinces in Iran in terms of the extent, volume, and diversity of its food production. The food industry in Khorasan Razavi Province is a vital source of income and a popular attraction that plays a significant role in attracting tourists, creating employment opportunities, and promoting the province's development.

Therefore, it is crucial to pay more attention to this sector and explore ways to increase its revenue. The provincial capital city of Mashhad and its surrounding areas are known for their traditional cuisine, which is considered one of the top 10 attractions of Khorasan Razavi Province. The dining halls around the holy shrine of Imam Reza (PBUH) and the historical and tourist areas of the city are highly regarded in the east of the country. The food industry is a significant contribu-

tor to the province's economy, with over 600 active industrial units, accounting for 13% of all industries of the province. Furthermore, it is the third-largest employment-generating sector in the province. Most of the companies involved in food production in Khorasan Razavi Province are privately owned. One of the province's most important features is easy access to a diverse range of raw materials, including agricultural, livestock, and horticultural products.

Food, a symbol of social culture

"Foods are symbols of society's culture and can be used to transfer a culture through their expansion and promotion. For example, *chelo kabab* is one of the historical and ancient foods and is well-known in this province alongside *shishlik* of Shandiz and *Sholeh Mashhadi*. He mentioned that the abundant

capacity in the culinary culture and cooking of Khorasan Razavi Province can play an effective role in developing tourism and increasing the length of stay of tourists in this region. He added that many of the traditional dishes of the province are widely recognized nationally and internationally.

A complementary form of tourism

The director general of Khorasan Razavi Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization said that food tourism has a high potential for attracting tourists, and it is crucial to take advantage of this capacity. Seyyed Javad Musavi added that the diversity of climates and ethnicities in Iran has resulted in a wide range of cuisines, with each region known for its distinctive traditional dishes and unique flavors. "Food tourism is a type of tourism that

complements other forms of travel. Iran is known for its delicious cuisine, which includes popular dishes such as *chelo kebab* (a dish that consists of grilled meat served with steamed saffron rice), *qormeh sabzi* (a traditional stew that is made with a variety of herbs, vegetables, and meat), *fesenjan* (a stew that is made with chicken or meat cooked in a rich, flavorful sauce made from ground walnuts and pomegranate molasses), *dizi sangi* (a traditional dish that is typically made with lamb, chickpeas, white beans, tomatoes, onions, and various spices), *lubia polo* (a dish that is made with rice, green

ground beef or lamb, and a blend of aromatic spices such as cinnamon and turmeric), *qeymeh* (a stew made with yellow split peas, diced beef or lamb, tomatoes, and a blend of spices such as turmeric, cinnamon, and saffron), *aash reshteh* (a soup made with a variety of herbs, legumes, and noodles, including spinach, parsley, cilantro, green onions, lentils, chickpeas, kidney beans, and *reshteh* which is a type of Persian noodles), and *shishlik* (a dish that consists of marinated and grilled lamb or beef that is skewered and cooked over an open flame). *Shishlik* of Shandiz and *Sholeh Mashhadi* are two dishes, the cooking techniques of which have been officially registered on Iran's Intangible Heritage List. The recognition highlights the cultural significance and value of these traditional Iranian foods.

Sholeh Mashhadi

Sholeh is one of the traditional foods of Mashhad, which has a lot of nutritional value due to the use of various legumes in its cooking. It dates back to the Qajar era. Since *sholeh* is considered a heavy meal, it can be enjoyed as a complete meal. This food, a type of *aash*, is one of the most common offerings that are cooked and distributed in Mashhad. *Aash* is a type of thick soup that is commonly consumed in Iranian cui-

sine. It usually contains a variety of vegetables, legumes, and sometimes meat, and is usually served with bread. The more meat used in *sholeh*, the more delicious it becomes. Also, due to the high amount of legumes, cooking this type of *sholeh* requires a long time. In its authentic form, *sholeh* is served by pouring *qeymeh* on it and accompanied by some *sangak* bread, cheese, and vegetables.

Shishlik

Deputy Head of the province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization for Tourism Affairs Yousef Bidkhori said that tourists and pilgrims travelling to Mashhad also pay special attention to Shandiz and are aware of its culinary attractions. Besides *shishlik*, in the town of Torqabeh, *dizi sangi*, *joojeh kebab* (chicken kebab), and *chelo gusht* (a dish that consists of steamed, fluffy white rice served with a flavorful meat stew) are popular main dishes among tourists. Additionally, ice cream, *samanu* (a sweet and creamy

Persian dessert that is made from sprouted wheat, flour, and sugar), and dried fruits are also in high demand among tourists. He noted that the culinary importance is to such an extent for tourists that Shandiz is known more by domestic and foreign tourists as the 'city of *shishlik*'. This food has a rich history of over 50 years and has gained popularity both within the country and internationally. It is highly sought after by tourists and its cooking skill has been officially registered on Iran's Intangible Heritage List in 2016.

Benefits of culinary tourism

The official stated that development of social and cultural awareness, improved communication between tourists and their destination, and creation of additional income for the locals are among the benefits of culinary tourism. Bidkhori mentioned that food tourism development offers a range of

benefits, including the enhancement of biodiversity and preservation of cultural heritage, job creation and entrepreneurship development, reduction of rural migration, preservation of customs and traditions of local communities, and increased presence of tourists in various parts of the country.



Sholeh Mashhadi

Dizi sangi

Joojeh kebab

Samanu