

Culinary heritage of Gilan Province



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The rich variety of local foods in Gilan Province, stemming from the culture, customs, and traditions of the region, has made it a compelling reason for travelers and tourists to visit the area. Thanks to its diverse culinary offerings, the provincial capital city of Rasht is renowned as one of the most delightful regions in Iran and the world.

This reputation was solidified a decade ago when UNESCO registered Rasht as the Creative City of Food.

Marjan Nemati Saba, the head of the Public Relations Department of the province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization, emphasized in a note: "Food is one of the basic and essential needs of humans. Human life depends on food and nutrition, after water and air."

While food is indeed a fundamental human requirement, the variety of flavors and tastes in different foods has elevated it to a

culinary art form, chtn.ir wrote. Statistics indicate that approximately one-third of travelers' expenses are allocated to food, underscoring the significance of introducing Iranian and Gilani cuisine to the world as a means to attract tourists to the country.

Given that one of the crucial aspects of travel is food, and with food tourism growing day by day, it's worth noting that Iranians have over 2,500 types of food, 110 types of drinks, and various bread and pastries. The history of Iranian food can be considered alongside Roman and Chinese cuisine.

Considering Iran's history as the cradle of culture and civilization, it's evident that the history of food has a long and rich heritage.

Food culture is an integral part of the cultural heritage of every region and indigenous people; throughout the history of myths, melodies, songs, inscriptions, manuscripts, clothing, customs, and religion, food serves as a testament to the culture of each land.



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Undoubtedly, there is a distinction between societies that thoughtfully and artistically prepare and present food, and those who view

food solely as a means to satisfy a physical need.

It is important to note that despite the many differences, Iranian food

exhibits relative unity. Specific foods and ingredients that were once confined to particular regions are now commonplace on tables across Iran.

The contrast in lifestyle, culture, customs, and cuisine between the two sides of the Alborz Mountain is striking. This disparity extends to the dietary habits and culinary culture of the region, setting it apart from other Iranian ethnic groups.

Gilan Province boasts the most diverse cuisine in the country, with over 350 identified local dishes, many of which are recognized as part of the nation's intangible cultural heritage, and some are on the brink of official registration.

The combination of a wide variety of food ingredients and the art of cooking in Gilan Province has resulted in the creation of one of the most extensive local food menus in the country.

Given the facilitated national registration of Gilan's foods and their increasing global recognition, there is now a prime opportunity

for culinary tourism in the province to take center stage. This not only has the potential to attract tourists but also to expand the reach of Gilani cuisine to a global scale.

The largest national food event in Rasht, known as "Gileh Khorak," was organized with the participation of city management and the Cultural Heritage Office of Gilan. The event received support from hoteliers, hospitality units, and people involved in tourism, and garnered attention from over 30 international journalists. Through the collaborative efforts of the public relations department of the Cultural Heritage Office of Gilan Province and the Rasht Municipality, this delicious event was showcased.

This initiative is a significant endeavor to promote the unique culinary culture of Gilan Province. By organizing events that focus on indigenous and regional culture, there is potential to elevate the culinary culture of Gilan to a global platform.

Patronage and literary return movement in Isfahan

Crucial to the formation and coherence of the early 'literary return' movement is the patronage many of the early poets received from one of Isfahan's mayors during the Zand period – Mirza 'Abd al-Wahhab Musavi Isfahani.

That the Isfahani Circle of poets had a patron, let alone the mayor of Isfahan, sheds a different light on the formation of the 'literary return' movement, especially since Mirza 'Abd al-Wahhab's involvement occurred after the passing of the movement's putative founder Seyyed Ali Mushtaq. It is unclear when Mirza 'Abd al-Wahhab was first appointed to rule Isfahan. It is possible that he served as mayor in 1759, but, if so, it was only for a short time.

Known with more certainty is that he did serve as mayor of Isfahan from 1767 to 1770, the year of his death. Mirza 'Abd al-Wahhab hailed from a family that settled in Isfahan and provided medical services to the Safavid kings for several generations. As mayor of Isfa-

han, he was well-respected for the nature of his rule and management of affairs. Being from a respected Isfahani family with a pedigree of government service certainly would have been beneficial, especially in the context of years of uncertainty and tumult. His pedigree and knowledge of Isfahan no doubt helped maintain the relative calm and stability associated with the period of Karim Khan Zand's rule.

Mirza 'Abd al-Wahhab 'rose to the office of mayor in the government of Isfahan, out of distinction, purity, generosity, intelligence, good taste and unrivaled genius'. In the preceding period, from 1732 to 1759, more than twenty people had served as mayor of Isfahan, but few were natives of the city.

For almost the entire twenty-year period from 1759 to 1779, corresponding to Karim Khan Zand's suzerainty over Isfahan, the city was ruled by two individuals, both members of respected and reputable Isfahani families: Mirza 'Abd

al-Wahhab and Aqa Muhammad Marbini. These two mayors' tenures stand in contrast to the tenures of those active under Nader Shah, who sought to limit the power of the mayor of Isfahan by both appointing non-Isfahani natives and frequently dismissing them.

According to the historian Abd al-Razzaq Beg Dunbuli, the general populace during the Zand period was 'overwhelmed in joy and happiness', and 'calamitous misfortune was distant from the face of time'.

The relative calm and stability in Isfahan no doubt helped create the conditions for increased literary activities and productivity. An added benefit for those writers and poets in Isfahan was having a ruler receptive to poetic activities, who maintained an interest in the arts and served as a patron of writing and poetry. Mirza 'Abd al-Wahhab, in addition to being mayor, was also a student of the renowned calligrapher and poet 'Abd al-Majid Darvish, who was affiliated with the Isfa-

hani Circle of poets.

Under Mirza 'Abd al-Wahhab Isfahan continued to expand the image of its recent glories. Dunbuli referred to Isfahan under Mirza 'Abd al-Wahhab's rule as a place experiencing the gathering of 'poets, geniuses, first-rate minds of every type and masters of verse [who] every day upon the branches of poetry ... were constructing lyrics and choice lines'. During his tenure as mayor, Mirza 'Abd al-Wahhab remained well-connected to the Isfahani Circle of poets:

Rarely is Mirza 'Abd al-Wahhab's role as patron of poetry after Mushtaq's death referenced in relation to the rise of the 'literary return' movement. As Dunbuli's statement makes clear, under Mirza 'Abd al-Wahhab's patronage the Isfahani Circle of poets appears to have expanded by adding several poets not earlier associated with Mushtaq's literary society. The community of poets first started by Mushtaq was accruing members and gaining steam.

