

Qabeli polo; a delicious legacy of Silk Road

Iranica Desk

Khorasan was a province in northeastern Iran until September 2004, when it was divided into three new provinces: North Khorasan, South Khorasan, and Khorasan Razavi. The region, with its diverse geological structure, varied climate, and unique geographical position, has long served as a significant hub for commerce and military activities. Notably, the Silk Road, which connects the East to the West, runs through this region. The geographical diversity of Khorasan includes a hot, desert climate in the south and a temperate climate in the north, creating vast valleys and plains that can reach widths of up to 200 kilometers. The fertile areas between the mountain ranges of Koppeh Dagh and Hezar Masjed lend themselves well to agriculture.

Northern part of the region generally features a temperate and cold mountainous climate, making it the most densely populated and economically developed part of the province. The natural potential of these regions has also enabled livestock farming and red meat production.



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Influence of agriculture

The abundance of agricultural and livestock products has led to a rich diversity of food among various ethnic groups. *Qabeli polo*, also known as *Kabuli Pulao*, is one of the most renowned dishes that reflect the agricultural and livestock prosperity of the area. This meal holds a special place at family gatherings and significant ceremonies, embodying the essence

of local heritage. Polo is a style of cooked rice, known in English as pilaf. It typically involves cooking rice with various ingredients, including vegetables, meat, or spices, to create flavorful and aromatic dishes that are often served as a staple in various cuisines. The dish, popular in North Khorasan Province and Tabriz, also has many fans among Afghan and Research indicates that



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this dish is a remnant of the Silk Road, as merchants and traders consumed it during their travels to gain the physical strength and energy needed along the route.

Cooking instructions
To prepare Qabeli, follow these steps:
Preparation: Pour a small amount of oil into a suitable pot and sauté chopped onions until golden.

Adding meat: Next, incorporate the red meat and cook it until browned.
Optional cumin: Sprinkle cumin on the meat for enhanced flavor if desired.
Cooking the meat: Once the meat is browned, add boiling water and let it simmer until tender. Season with salt to taste afterward.
Adding legumes: After the meat is cooked, introduce pre-

cooked beans and lentils.
Cooking the rice: Finally, add the rice to the mixture and let it steam until fully cooked. This dish can also be prepared with chicken. Qabeli polo not only represents the cultural richness of the region but also serves as a reminder of the historical significance of the Silk Road and the thriving trade that once passed through it.

Unveiling secrets of Niasar Fire Temple

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Niasar Fire Temple is a notable *chahartaq* structure topped with a dome, located on the hillsides of Karkas Mountain, overlooking the Kashan plain, Isfahan Province, at an elevation of 1,741 meters above sea level. This historical site is situated in the megalithic lands on the eastern side of Kashan.

Historical background

According to historical accounts, after defeating the nobles of Kashan, Ardashir Babakan (or Ardashir I) returned to Isfahan while carrying their heads. He camped at a spring, which is now known as Niasar, and later established a city there, naming it Niasar. At one point, it was also referred to as Niastar.

Architectural features

The Niasar Fire Temple features a cube-shaped structure made of limestone and plaster mortar, with each side measuring approximately eleven meters. Its *chahartaq* plan is intentionally aligned just eleven degrees off true north, a characteristic common in many Sassanid fire temples, reflecting the significance of north in Zoroastrianism.

Although the dome of the Niasar Fire Temple is now in ruins, it is believed to have originally resembled an eggshell. A reconstruction in 1955 took place, but the new dome reflects Islamic architectural styles rather than the ancient Iranian design. Archaeologists suggest that the *chahartaq* may have featured stucco decorations. Today, visitors can see the plinth stones of the outer façade and the plaster covering of the interior. The pointed arches of the structure are formed by layered stone arrangements, likely sourced from nearby Niasar Cave.

In addition to the fire temple, remnants of three other structures can be found on the eastern side of the site. Artifacts discovered at the fire temple include pottery fragments, such as urns and pots adorned with cream, red, and intricate designs, as well as glazed pottery in turquoise, green, blue, and white.

Attractions in Niasar

Niasar is not only known for its historical significance but also for its natural beauty and cultural richness. Here are some of its attractions:

- **Niasar Waterfall:** Just a short distance from the village, this picturesque waterfall is a popular spot for visitors seeking natural beauty. The surrounding area offers walking trails and picnic spots.
- **Niasar Cave:** A fascinating geological site, the cave consists of stunning formations and serves as a habitat for various animal species. It is a popular destination for adventurers and cave explorers.
- **Traditional village atmosphere:** Niasar village is recognized for its quaint architecture and vibrant local culture. Visitors can walk through its narrow lanes, experience local hospitality, and sample traditional Persian cuisine.
- **Historical sites:** Besides the fire temple, the area is rich with other ancient structures and remains, allowing for exploration of Iran's rich history.
- **Local handicrafts:** Niasar is known for traditional crafts such as pottery and weaving. Visitors can purchase handmade

items from local artisans or even participate in workshops.

- **Natural scenery:** Surrounded by the Karkas Mountains, Niasar offers breathtaking landscapes, making it an excellent destination for hikers and nature lovers.

Visiting Niasar

Niasar Fire Temple is recognized as a National Heritage Site of Iran. The region, despite its cooler climate compared to Kashan, is an ideal summer tourist destination, with spring and autumn — particularly March and May — being the best times to visit. Visitors are encouraged to engage with the local community and enjoy the tranquility that Niasar offers, making it a perfect getaway for history enthusiasts and nature lovers alike.

