

# Rasht translates culture into cuisine

Iranica Desk

Rasht, the capital city of Gilan Province, is not a city that can be understood merely by sight or sound; it must be tasted. A city that tells its story not only through historic buildings and local rituals, but through flavors, aromas, and the lived relationships of the table, Rasht today stands at a point where it can move beyond the title of “Creative City of Gastronomy” and emerge as an active player in Iran’s cultural diplomacy. Backed by a rich legacy of intangible culinary heritage, Rasht now has the capacity to offer the world a human, peace-oriented, and civilizational narrative of Iran — spoken through taste.

In contemporary cultural heritage studies, food is recognized as a form of “living intangible heritage”, a carrier of indigenous knowledge, ethical relationships with nature, social bonds, and collective historical memory. Gilani cuisine, with its remarkable diversity of ingredients, cooking methods, and deep connection to climate and ecology, stands as a striking example of this modern understanding, according to chtn.ir.

In Rasht, food is woven into everyday life. It is knowledge drawn from rice paddies, gardens, forests, and markets, passed down from generation to generation. This continuity between nature, people, and culture is precisely what gives Gilani cuisine its heritage value and distinguishes it from mere consumerism.

If Rasht is read as a cultural text, its historic bazaar forms one of its most important chapters. The Rasht Bazaar is a living network of social interaction, transmission of local knowledge, and reproduction of cultural identity. Here, food moves beyond abstraction; through direct contact with people, sound, color, and scent, it acquires meaning.

The bazaar functions as a medium that conveys its narrative without advertising — a medium that shows domestic and international visitors how food culture in Rasht is deeply intertwined with everyday life, and how it has adapted to modern times while remaining rooted in tradition.

Rasht’s designation as a Creative City of Gastronomy within UNESCO’s Creative Cities Network is, by nature, both a cultural and a policy responsibility. UNESCO expects creative cities to use food as a tool for sustainable development, cultural dialogue, and social cohesion.

With this title, Rasht has entered an international arena where cities are evaluated not by economic or military power, but by their cultural narratives. This is where cultural policy-making, urban management, and the Ministry of Cultural Heritage become crucial; without strategic planning, the title risks being reduced to a consumable brand.

In today’s world, food, music, art, and lifestyle have become key instruments of public diplomacy. Food, in particular, is



● zandproduct.com

a universal language — one that breaks down prejudices and opens space for dialogue.

Within this framework, Rasht can serve as one of Iran’s most important hubs of culinary diplomacy. The experience of tasting Gilani food creates an immediate, unmediated encounter with Iranian culture — often more effective than dozens of official statements. At a time when Iran faces serious challenges in international image-making, this capacity carries added significance.

One of Iran’s main global challenges is Iranophobia and one-dimensional portrayals of

Iranian society. In this context, culinary diplomacy can play a reparative role. Food carries messages of peace, hospitality, and humane coexistence — concepts deeply rooted in Iranian culture.

Through its culinary narrative, Rasht can present an image of Iran centered on life, nature, ethical consumption, and coexistence. Operating at a human level, this image is inherently more effective.

One often-overlooked dimension of Gilani food culture is the role of women. Gilani women play a central role not only in cooking, but in preserving rec-

ipes, transmitting indigenous knowledge, and managing the micro-economy of food. This has turned cuisine into a sphere of cultural and social empowerment.

In many homes and local businesses in Rasht, women are the primary custodians of culinary heritage — a heritage that has survived not through formal registration, but through continuous practice.

At a time when the world is grappling with environmental crises and excessive consumption, revisiting Gilani cuisine offers important lessons. The use of seasonal ingredients, respect

for nature, avoidance of waste, and dietary diversity reflect a form of indigenous ecological wisdom that is more necessary today than ever.

These characteristics make Gilani food a model for responsible tourism and sustainable development — aligned with broader cultural heritage policies aimed at resource conservation and strengthening local economies.

For Rasht to truly fulfill its role in cultural diplomacy, an event-based and ceremonial approach to food must give way to a strategic one. Festivals, events, and tourism programs will only be effective if they are defined within a comprehensive policy framework.

Drafting a “National Culinary Diplomacy Document for Iran,” centered on cities like Rasht, could be a significant step forward — one that recognizes food as part of Iran’s civilizational narrative and integrates it into cultural policy, tourism planning, and even international relations.

Today, Rasht is more than a tourist destination; it is a cultural possibility. A possibility for narrating Iran through a human, tangible, and peace-oriented path. If properly understood and managed, Rasht can become a model for other Iranian cities — demonstrating how a global future can be shaped from the heart of tradition.

In a world where dialogue has become increasingly difficult, perhaps flavors can still build bridges. Rasht is one of the strongest of those bridges.

## Artisan devotes life to preserving traditional Kar-Bafi in Ardakan



● chtn.ir

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An artisan of Kar-Bafi (traditional hand weaving) and manager of a handicrafts workshop in Ardakan, Yazd Province, said her main professional activity is focused on preserving Ardakan’s traditional Kar-Bafi — a centuries-old form of hand weaving that uses cotton yarns on wooden looms to produce everyday textiles.

Fatemeh Shaker Ardakani, a prominent example of the continuity and revival of Ardakan’s Kar-Bafi, explained that this craft has been practiced in her family for three consecutive generations. “For me, Kar-Bafi is not just a job; it is part of my identity, my life, and my daily routine,” she said.

Shaker Ardakani grew up alongside the weaving loom and learned the

craft from her mother, who is now 86 years old. Today, her daughter serves as the workshop’s training supervisor and production manager, continuing the family tradition. Their long-held belief, she noted, is that Kar-Bafi represents a way of life rather than merely a source of income.

Emphasizing the importance of hands-on experience, she said that while formal training plays an important role, real learning takes place through living and working beside the loom. According to her, the workshop’s ongoing training courses provide teenagers and young adults with valuable opportunities to experience the creative process firsthand.

“This art is shaped through patience, mistakes, and repetition,” she added, stressing that theoretical instruction

alone cannot replace practical experience and long-term engagement with the craft.

The workshop’s products preserve the authenticity of traditional Kar-Bafi while offering variety in color, size, and design to meet contemporary tastes. These products include towels, hand cloths, cotton fabrics, traditional clothing, and practical everyday items. Many customers become regular buyers due to the high quality and authenticity of the products, and the workshop itself has become a destination for visitors interested in observing and learning about the weaving process.

All materials used are high-quality natural yarns sourced from reputable domestic markets.

Shaker Ardakani, who is also a handicrafts instructor, believes Kar-Bafi is a path to preserving cultural identity, achieving mental calm, and creating lasting cultural values. She advises young people interested in the craft to enter the field with patience and passion, emphasizing that success depends on continuous learning and hands-on practice at the loom.

She also emphasized the need for sustained and practical support for artisans, including the provision of suitable workspaces, insurance coverage, and the creation of stable sales markets. She expressed her appreciation for the support of the Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicraft Department and local authorities in Ardakan.

Her activities — combining heritage preservation, training the next generation, and producing authentic and functional products — have turned the workshop into one of the leading centers for the revival of traditional Kar-Bafi in Ardakan.

## Restoration project revives Darvish Qanat in Shahrud



● mehrnews.com

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The head of the Agricultural Jihad Department of Shahrud, Semnan Province, announced the completion of restoration and rehabilitation operations on the historic Darvish Qanat in Torud village.

Speaking on the sidelines of a field visit to the project, Hamid Aqabiki said that restoring and rehabilitating such qanats plays a fundamental role in ensuring the sustainability of regional water resources, according to ISNA.

Referring to the special status of qanats in Iran’s culture and history, he noted that these ancient structures are not only vital sources of water in arid and desert regions, but also an integral part of Iran’s national identity and indigenous knowledge.

Aqabiki added that the project is part of the town’s comprehensive and structured plans to revive all traditional water resources, with the primary objective of providing sustainable water supplies to support local agricultural development.

He explained that dredging, repair, and structural reinforcement works on the Darvish Qanat were carried out with a

high level of technical precision in order to optimize water flow and prevent the loss of valuable resources.

He emphasized that the completion of the restoration project can directly increase the productivity of nearby farms and orchards, helping to create the conditions necessary for sustainable economic growth in the Torud village.

He also pointed out that the special focus on water supply in Torud is part of Shahrud’s broader strategy to support farmers in addressing climate-related challenges.

He stressed that preserving and rehabilitating qanats is a historical responsibility that must be passed on to future generations to ensure this valuable heritage remains alive. According to him, such projects can serve as successful models for other similar regions and can significantly contribute to reducing water scarcity challenges in the agricultural sector.

Aqabiki expressed optimism about the long-term outcomes of the operation, stating that with the full rehabilitation of the Darvish Qanat, an increase in agricultural production and an improvement in the livelihoods of local farmers are expected.