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Iran’s Hidden Wine Trade Survives

Home fermentation and secret sales keep a centuries-old drinking culture alive despite strict bans and periodic police raids

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Iran has long been one of the world’s most restrictive countries when it comes to alcohol, but wine has never disappeared from daily life entirely. In private homes, in hidden workshops and through informal networks, Iranians continue to make and drink wine despite the risk of punishment under Islamic law. The practice survives as both a cultural habit and a quiet form of resistance.

Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the sale and public consumption of alcohol have been banned in Iran for Muslims. The law is enforced unevenly, but the penalties can be severe. That has pushed wine production underground, away from licensed cellars and into apartments, basements and rural houses where families press grapes and ferment juice in secret. The result is a clandestine market that remains active across the country, especially in cities where demand is strongest.

The tradition has deep roots. Before the revolution, Iran had a legal wine industry and a long history of viticulture that stretched back centuries. Grapes are still grown widely in the country, and many households know how to turn them into wine using methods passed down from older generations. Some of that knowledge survived the political shift of 1979, even as public drinking vanished from view.

Today, the hidden trade is shaped by scarcity and caution. Bottles are often sold through personal contacts rather than shops. Prices can be high because production is small, ingredients are limited and distribution carries risk. Homemade wine is common, but quality varies widely. Some producers work carefully with clean equipment and controlled fermentation. Others use improvised methods that can lead to unstable or unsafe products.

The black market also reflects broader social changes. Younger Iranians in particular have found ways to keep drinking culture alive in private gatherings, despite official restrictions. For many urban residents, homemade wine is part of a wider underground scene that includes beer, spirits and imported alcohol brought in illegally from neighboring countries. In this setting, wine is not only a beverage but also a marker of social freedom in a tightly controlled environment.

Religious authorities continue to condemn alcohol use, and police raids on illegal production sites still occur. Yet enforcement has not eliminated demand. Instead, it has driven the trade further out of sight. Producers rely on trust, secrecy and word of mouth. Buyers often accept the risks because legal alternatives do not exist for most people.

The persistence of clandestine wine in Iran also points to a contradiction at the center of the country’s relationship with alcohol: a nation with an ancient wine culture now forced to hide it. Grapes remain abundant, home fermentation continues and bottles still circulate quietly among friends and relatives, even as the state tries to keep them out of public view.