Persian Tea Culture

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Persian tea culture, in summary:** Persian tea culture: samovar, small clear estekan glasses, strong black tea sipped through a sugar cube (kand); chaykhaneh tea houses still active.

In Iran, chai is not a drink so much as the medium of hospitality itself. For comparison across traditions, see how customs differ.

Last reviewed by the teas.co.uk team in May 2026.

Persian (Iranian) tea culture at a glance

Element	The note
Central vessel	Samovar (Russian-origin); brewing happens above, drinking glass below
Drinking vessel	Small clear glass (estekan), often gold-rimmed
Tea	Strong black tea (Iranian-grown Gilan or Indian Assam-style)
Sweetener	Sugar cube held between teeth; tea sipped through it (kand)
Pairs with	Dates, dried fruit, nuts, saffron biscuits, rock sugar (nabat)
When	All-day; especially after meals and as social welcome
Refusing	Reads as refusing welcome; accept the glass
Where	Homes, traditional tea houses (chaykhaneh), bazaars

The samovar, and how the tea is brewed

The samovar (the word means roughly "self-boiler") is the centre of Persian tea-making, and it determines the cup that arrives. A traditional samovar is a large metal urn, once charcoal-heated and now usually electric, holding hot water in the body with a small, concentrated brew kept warm in a teapot on the lid. To serve, the brewer pours a little of the strong brew into the glass, then dilutes it with hot water from the urn's tap to the strength each drinker wants. That solves several problems at once: the brew stays consistently strong, the temperature holds across hours, every glass is individually adjustable, and one vessel can serve unlimited visitors all day. The samovar reached Iran from Russia in the 19th century along the Caspian and Caucasian trade routes and settled straight into household and tea-house life, see the samovar tradition.

The sugar cube (kand), and hospitality

The most distinctive Persian technique is the kand: a small rectangular sugar cube held between the front teeth, through which the hot tea is sipped, so the sugar dissolves slowly into each sip rather than sweetening the whole glass. It is functional rather than show, the first sip sweeter as the cube is fresh, the last milder as it dissolves, which is part of the drink's rhythm. Older drinkers favour nabat, a crystallised saffron-yellow rock sugar on a stick, dipped briefly between sips. The cultural frame matters more than the mechanics: offering chai is automatic and near-constant, refusing the glass reads as refusing welcome, and the host pouring tea is one of the small structured acts of hospitality that runs through Persian life.

Iranian tea, the chaykhaneh, and the neighbours

Iran has a real domestic tea industry concentrated in the northern Gilan province on the Caspian coast, where rainfall, mild temperatures and hill slopes suit the plant; commercial growing began in the early 20th century after Prince Kashef Al Saltaneh brought seeds and techniques back from India, and the resulting Iranian black tea is a strong, slightly malty Assam style cup that suits the samovar beautifully, though imported Indian and Sri Lankan black is widely drunk too. The chaykhaneh, the traditional tea house, is the Persian equivalent of the British pub or Italian cafe, an all-day institution where people gather around samovars to drink tea, play backgammon, talk and conduct informal business, and it remains active. In regional terms Persian tea sits closest to Turkish and Azerbaijani samovar-and-glass culture rather than Arab Gulf coffee or South Asian milky chai, see Turkish tea culture.

What pairs with it, and a home version

Persian tea is a food-pairing tradition. Soft Mazafati dates are the everyday accompaniment, eaten between sips to balance the strong tea; nabat rock sugar is the more formal sweetener; and dried fruit and nuts, raisins, apricots, pistachios and almonds, appear at most tea moments, with saffron and chickpea-flour biscuits (nan-e nokhodchi) and rose-water pastries for formal occasions. For a home version the kit is short: a small electric samovar, or simply a strong brewing teapot kept over a hot kettle, a few small clear estekan glasses, a strong loose leaf black (Iranian Gilan if you can find it, otherwise a hearty Assam), sugar cubes, and a bowl of dates and nuts. Brew strong in the small pot, keep the water hot below, pour a concentrated splash into each glass and top up to taste. The cup is good alone, but the meaning emerges with company and time, see tea customs around the world.

What to buy

Source a strong Persian-style black from the black tea range, with a sturdy Assam the easiest substitute for Gilan, or browse the full tea shop; free UK delivery over £35.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Samovar or teapot, the glass you actually drain is the one that counts. Try other Persian touches once that first glass is sorted.

Tea-culture reading

- Tea customs around the world
- Turkish tea culture
- Mauritanian tea ritual
- Senegalese attaya

More from the tea wiki

- Green tea
- Black tea
- Oolong tea
- White tea
- Herbal tea
- Caffeine in tea
- How to make tea properly
- Loose leaf vs teabag

Earn rewards on teas.co.uk

Earn loyalty points on every order. Free to join.

+100 pts

Create your free account

Welcome bonus + earn on every order.



100 pts = 1 tree

Plant a tree in Scotland

Pledge points to our reforestation partner.



teas.co.uk · Tunbridge Wells, Kent · hello@teas.co.uk · 3-click cancel at teas.co.uk/cancel/