

Authentically Turkish Ankara

Find a trove of offerings in this working bazaar

BY TERRY BOYD
Stars and Stripes

We arrive in Ankara, eager to optimize our brief stay and hoping our hotel is close to the train station.

It is. The Angora House Hotel turned out to be just up the hill from Ankara's giant central train station, which also is a headquarters for the Turkish Republic Railway System, or TCDD.

We chose the Angora for two reasons. First and foremost, it's recommended in *The Little Hotel Book*, our travel bible for small hotels in Turkey. Second, it's in Old Ankara, the area inside and around Ankara's 1,000-year-old hilltop fortress, called Kaleici.

Both the hotel and Old Ankara turned out to be exactly what we were looking for — authentically Turkish, but with a bit of gloss.

Ankara's Kaleici, unlike the Kaleici in the Mediterranean resort city of Antalya, has not been restored to attract tourists. This former slum area has been resurrected into a real working bazaar, packed with every sort of merchant you can imagine. In the Turkish custom, similar stores collect in clusters.

Choosing a winding street at random, walking up steep hills and down, we arrive at a string of workshops where coppersmiths make *alems*, the decorative forms incorporating the crescent moon and star of Islam that top mosque domes and minarets.

Another route yields a series of shops all offering brass. Another leads to antique stores piled with samovars that have seeped in from nearby former Soviet republics. And everyone seems to be doing a lot of business.

The most fun I have is talking briefly with Salattin Aliev, a native of Azerbaijan who runs a spice shop in the old town. I watch as the animated old Azeri sells kilo after kilo of spices and nuts, keeping helpers busy fetching more sacks to replace the rapidly depleting inventory.

"Everyone knows that this is the best market for everything," he says excitedly. "How about some walnuts?"

Checking out a row of carpet shops, we meet Yetki Tuna and his wife, Fatma, who own two large carpet shops and an antique store. Yetki is a retired diplomat whose Ivy League English is a tipoff that he's a Harvard man. He and his elegant wife were so taken with Old Ankara that they renovated a couple of large Kaleici buildings, then moved their business, Galeri Z, from the expen-



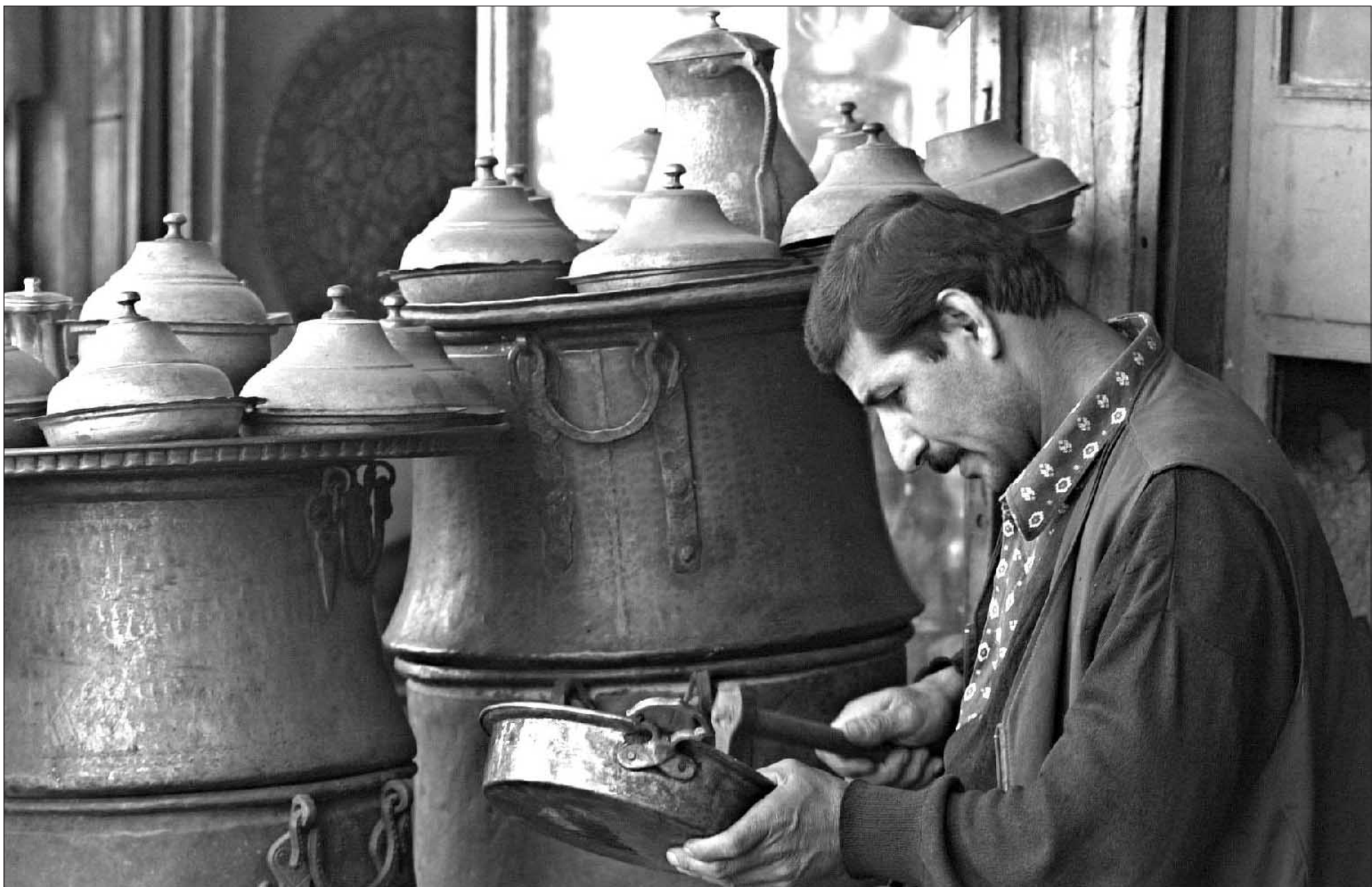
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A coppersmith checks the street looking for a friend. In his left hand is the form for beginning of an "alem," the bulbous shapes sitting outside his shop. Topped by a crescent moon, alems sit atop the domes of mosques. Many skills and crafts lost in other countries are still viable in Turkey, where trade guilds remain strong.



A spice dealer points out his best goods to a skeptical couple. Commerce is the heart of Ankara's Kaleici, or inner castle, an authentic, unspoiled bazaar. Here, with few tourists to slow things down, thousands of tons of goods from saffron to copper change hands each day.

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A coppersmith finishes the bottom of a type of shallow casserole pan that probably will become a decorative item. In the old town of Ankara, Turkey, craftsmen tend to cluster by trade in different sections of the market. So you can visit 10 coppershops in 10 minutes if you wish.

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sive Kavaklıdere district.

They are hard at work on a third building when we visit in October, confident that Kaleici is becoming a destination for Turkish visitors and foreigners alike.

The only upsetting part of our brief stay was that the hotel was so luxurious that we didn't want

to leave. Muammer Ustu, a young entrepreneur, says that he and his partner, Ahmet Burtur, spent more than \$100,000 — a huge sum in Turkey — to totally renovate a 200-year-old building into the Angora House, then furnish it with antiques.

And it shows. We unplug two 1920s vintage lamps in our second-floor room and take them

downstairs to the office so that our kids can't smash them. Our room is huge, with rich green brocaded bedcovers that matched the window treatments. It's so big that the king-size bed is lost in it. The bathroom is all marble and fancy fixtures. Built-in dressers complete the perfection.

When we go down to the dining area for breakfast the next morning, my wife, Cheryl, and I keep marveling at how well done everything is in every corner of the four-story hotel. And the is \$75 per night rather than the \$120-plus we would have paid at the characterless Hilton or the Sheraton 5-star a few miles away.

But far from sharing the Tunas' optimism about the future of the Kaleici, Ustu makes no secret that the Angora House



Ankara's old city is an exciting place to take photos. An interesting face or ancient tableau lies around each corner. Though Ankara is now Turkey's capital, it's been a major trading center for more than 2,000 years, and you see faces from East and West. This man's ancestors may have come to Turkey from China with conquerer Genghis Khan.

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is struggling. Nearly every reservation — most by Americans — were canceled after Sept. 11, a litany we have heard countless times in the last four months.

Moreover, "the tourism officials come and tell us that they're going make this Kaleici as popular as Antalya's, but then we never see them again," Ustu says.

Visitors tend to have mixed opinions on Ankara, Turkey's capital. The area near the embassies is packed with expensive stores and chromed and track-lit

restaurants catering to the businessmen and foreign dignitaries who stay at the Hilton or Sheraton. Some find it too parochial, and others compare Ankara's large parks and public spaces favorably to Boston, of all places.

But after only a few hours, I was in complete accord with our friends Sevan and Mujde Nisan-yan, authors of *The Little Hotel Book*, who wrote that the Kaleici "is being discovered for what it is — the only part of Ankara that is worth looking into."