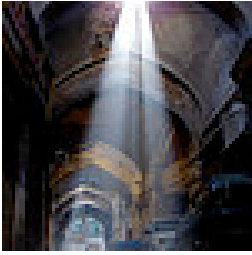


An Introduction to BAZAARS OF THE MIDDLE EAST



At the heart of every city in the Middle East, one can find a vibrant commercial hub that is the forerunner of today's shopping malls—the bazaar. Originally attached to a mosque complex, the bazaar continues to function as it has for hundreds of years providing a wide array of products and services arranged in a manner much different from what we are used to in the west.

Products are arranged in markets or *suy's* so that all the sellers of a particular item are conveniently located in one area. For instance, all the gold shops are in one area, as are all the spice sellers and carpet sellers, in an arrangement that has not changed for hundreds of years. Dealers of like commodities came together to manage their trade...they set prices and working hours, regulated weights and measures, and enforced ethical trading practices. They did not see themselves as competitors, but as members of a commercial community.

Bargaining is an essential part of the bazaar! In the Middle East it is expected and is an exercise in unhurried hospitality as tea is consumed while a discussion of politics, family, and, yes, even the weather takes place. The negotiating of a price is lengthy and involves manners as well as dramatic skills to get the best price.

Some of the most famous bazaars include:

The **Grand Bazaar in Istanbul** is a labyrinth of vaulted roofed winding streets and domed buildings that evolved over 250 years as a source of income for the Hagia Sofia Mosque. It covers an area of 75 acres and consists of over 3,000 shops, 61 streets, ten wells, four fountains, two mosques, and several cafes and restaurants. It employs 25,000 people and a large number of street vendors.



Istanbul's Spice Bazaar or Egyptian Bazaar (many spices were imported from Egypt in the past) is one of the oldest bazaars in the Middle East. It is the second largest covered shopping complex after the Grand Bazaar and is part of the Yeni Mosque which was completed in 1600. Rents from the shops within are paid to help with the upkeep of the mosque. This is an "L" shaped building consisting of 88 vaulted rooms, which are almost all divided into an upper and lower story.

The **Grand Bazaar in Tehran** is more than just a collection of shops. It is the heart of the Iranian capital where behind the individual merchants is a vast network of economic and commercial interests. It was here where the conservative *bazaaris* helped finance the Islamic revolution that ousted the pro-western Shah and spread the message of reform smuggled in by followers of Khomeini.

The **Khan el-Khalili** is Cairo's great market. This is one of the most historic bazaars in the world, founded in 1382. Located on major trade routes, it was responsible for developing a stranglehold on the spice trade moving from the east to the west that eventually led to the search for an alternate route and the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus.

Other examples abound...there is no limit to what can be found in the bazaars of the Middle East. The shopping is a treat for the senses. Enjoy!