

## 1,001 Inventions could visit UAE

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Visitors enjoy the 1001 Inventions exhibition in Istanbul this summer. The exhibition's next stop is New York, and it is expected in the UAE next year. Ibrahim Usta / AP Photo

With his body covered in feathers and a wing-like apparatus strapped to his arms, Abbas Ibn Firnas took to the sky.

To the surprise of the gathered crowd, on a hilltop in 9th-century Cordoba, he managed to glide for several metres before crash landing. He had not yet realised the importance of a tail.

Ibn Firnas's story, along with those of other Muslim scholars, is now being retold in an exhibition that is making its way around the world and will soon land in the UAE.

Starting in January this year, the 1,001 Inventions show - the name is a reference to the popular 1,001 Nights stories - began its trip at the Science Museum in London, where more than 400,000 visited.

"It was by far the most popular exhibition the museum has seen," said Prof Salim al Hassani, chairman and founder of the project.

The show covers 1,000 years, from the 7th century onwards. "It was during this time, between the fall of Rome and the rise of the European Renaissance, that Muslim civilisation led the world in science and technology," said Prof al Hassani, who is British, but of Iraqi origin.

After closing in London at the end of June, the exhibition went to Istanbul, where it ran from mid-August until October 5. There, it received almost 400,000 visitors.

Its next scheduled stop is the New York Hall of Science, from December 5.

"We hope to bring the exhibition to the UAE and are currently in discussions with senior figures in the UAE about the most appropriate time and location," said Prof al Hassani.



"This is just the beginning. Our aim is to ensure that both Muslims and non-Muslims are given an accurate and honest appreciation of the great scientific and cultural achievements of Muslim civilisation."

The exhibition is spread over seven zones, each representing a different sphere of life including school, home, universe, world, town, hospital and market and the different scholars who contributed

to these areas.

It includes a short film, *The Library of Secrets*, which stars the Oscar-winning actor Sir Ben Kingsley. The film won eight awards at New York International Television and Film Awards and four at London's International Visual Communications Association awards, including best educational film.

Despite its success in London, George Saliba, professor of Arabic and Islamic Science at Columbia University in New York, fears his home town may not be so receptive. New York has been the centre of controversy over plans for a community centre with a Muslim prayer space, two blocks from the site of the September 11 attacks.

"If the exhibition did not do anything except start a conversation about the nature of Islamic science and technology and their place in history, it would have achieved much more than anyone anticipated," he said.

"When this exhibit comes to New York, I think it will tread on completely different grounds from those covered in London."

Mr Saliba said he hopes to be "surprised" by the exhibit's success in New York.

More optimistic was Dr Mohamed Abdullatif, associate professor in Islamic Studies at UAE University.

"The Muslim community in New York is very large and well connected," he said. "It will also be a big success here, if it is advertised well in Arabic media, not only because the exhibition is coming from the West, but also as it covers a subject which is not covered in the curriculum in the Arab world."

Coincidentally, changes have been made in the Islamic Studies course at UAE University since the beginning of this academic year to cover Muslim heritage and discoveries made by Muslim scholars.

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### First university

With an inherited fortune, Fatima al Fihri wanted to help the less fortunate and so built one of the largest mosques in Africa, which in 841 became one of the first universities - the University of Al-Qarawiyyin in Morocco.

### First camera

Ibn al Haitham, born in Iraq in 965, was the first scientist to discover that light travels in straight lines and vision occurs when light rays enter our eyes. His discovery of "bait al muzlim" [the dark room], or camera obscura, laid the foundation for the modern cinema. [Next page](#)

### Surgical instruments

Abu al Qasim al Zahrawi was the 10th-century father of surgery. His encyclopedia *Kitab Al Tasrif* was used as a reference for hundreds of years in Europe. It includes 200 instruments he invented, including scalpels, forceps and surgical needles.