

# Catch 'em before they're gone: Legendary Istanbul and 1001 Inventions

September 20, 2010

tags: [City Guide](#), [cool stuff to do in Istanbul](#), [Museums](#), [Sultanahmet](#), [exhibits](#), [limited time offer](#), [history](#), [Islam](#), [science](#), [exploring](#)

by Rebecca

Many awesome exhibits come through Istanbul. Unfortunately, there are so many that often you (or at least I) only hear about really good ones after they've moved on to the next town. Luckily, we're here to remedy, just barely – two quite well done exhibits are ending in the next two weeks, so consider this your last-minute warning to head out and see them before they, too, disappear.

Ending this Sunday (Sept. 26), after a successful and extended run, is the Sabanci Museum's [Legendary Istanbul](#): 8,000 years of a capital. The Sabanci Museum can be a little bit of a hassle to get to, especially if you get stuck in Bebek weekend traffic, but it's well worth the hike: The exhibit presents a view of historical Istanbul that often gets lost among the strictly-Ottoman or strictly-Byzantine narratives. The sheer amount of artifacts the museum was able to pull together into a series of exhibit halls advancing the story of the city is nothing short of impressive. One of my favorite parts was a large dome which shifted between images of various famous domes in the city, from the Hagia Sofia to the Ortakoy Mosque and many, many others. I think the Ottoman battle tent was another highlight, for sheer grandeur, although I was most impressed by the artifacts on display from the Yenikapi excavations – I've often seen relics of civilizations that old in museums, but they're generally from archaeological digs that are amidst farmers' fields, not down the street from me.

One of my chief criticisms of Turkish museums is a lack of interpretation, a fault [Legendary Istanbul](#) definitely does not suffer from. The Turkish-English texts are informative and packed with interesting historical anecdotes that to me emphasized the common people that lived in Istanbul over the years, rather than simply the rulers. I found it very well done, although it left me wanting more interpretation, more content, and more of its comprehensive take on Istanbul history. If you've not made it out to Emirgan (take a bus from Besiktas, if it goes to Istinye it'll go by Emirgan), definitely make room in

your schedule for the [Legendary Istanbul](#) exhibit. If you're looking to make a half-day out of it, pair it with a stop by Emirgan Park, one of the better and larger parks in Istanbul, conveniently almost right next to the museum.

Just days behind [Legendary Istanbul](#) is [1001 Inventions](#), which is in a large tent in front of the Hagia Sofia and open in Istanbul through Oct. 5. [1001 Inventions](#) comes to Istanbul via London – It opened at the Science Museum of London and was sponsored by the Foundation for Science, Technology, and Civilisation, a British group. Its perspective, thus, is not so Turk-centered.

I wouldn't call [1001 Inventions](#) a museum, as it really has very few artifacts on display. It is, however, a wonderful interactive and tech-savvy exhibit that wouldn't be out of place at any of the US-based Science Museums I've visited. It starts out with an introductory video featuring Ben Kingsley as al-Jazari and a handful of other shining lights of the Middle Ages in the Muslim world. The exhibition does get a little excited about ascribing future inventions to people who made important discoveries that were instrumental to the later success. I'm not sure I buy the exhibit's positioning of Abbas ibn Firnas as the father of modern flight, for example, but I did enjoy the reproduction of his glider. And, as a travel nerd, I appreciated the attention paid to Ibn Battuta and to Muslim maps (I love a good old map).

[1001 Inventions](#), like [Legendary Istanbul](#), has very well done interpretation in both English and Turkish. All the videos, originally in English, have been dubbed into Turkish but there are English subtitles.

In addition to just being a fascinating, well-assembled, visually interesting exhibit, 1001 Inventions makes you walk away wanting to explore so many things it gave just a glimpse of. For me, it was [astrolabes](#) and the [Ulugh Beg observatory](#). You have a little bit more time to make it over to 1001 Inventions and learn about the Islamic world's contributions to science and discoveries; luckily the tourist season's dying down so Sultanahmet isn't quite as teeming as it has been recently.

Both these exhibitions add uniquely to one's understanding of Istanbul, as well as to the Ottoman, Byzantine, and Roman empires and the ancient Islamic world. If you enjoy exploring history and appreciate well-designed exhibits, hie over to Sultanahmet and Emirgan in the next week and change before they leave town and you're left hearing about how awesome they were all Fall while mentally kicking yourself for not going to see them.

from → [City Life, Events](#)  
← [‘What Turkey thinks’, or what people think Turkey thinks](#)  
[Hugh Pope Speaks. Important People \(and others\) Listen.](#) →  
No comments yet

### Leave a Reply

Name: (required):

Email: (required):

Website:

Comment: