

1001 Inventions

Kids in Museums volunteer, Suzan Aral visited 1001 Inventions at Hagia Sophia in Istanbul with her family. The exhibition shows how Muslim civilisation has influenced the modern world today. She shares with us the impact this had on her and her family.

There had already been a record-breaking number of visitors to this British-designed exhibition by the time we rolled up at the end of its third week, with the same number of people seeing it in its eight weeks in Turkey as in its previous five months in the UK.

The exhibition tent filled the plaza in front of the Hagia Sophia and a long queue was already forming when we arrived just after opening time. First, we were ushered in to watch the excellent introductory film, starring Sir Ben Kingsley, which caught the imagination of both my sons (aged 5 and 9) immediately. Having been told about 'the Dark Ages not being so dark for some', we moved into the main exhibition eager to discover what the Golden Age of Islamic science and technology had given us.

The layout of the exhibition was simple and effective. Within a darkened space gleamed seven themed 'islands' of knowledge – home, school, hospital, market, town, world and universe – each with an array of illuminated information panels and interesting interactive bits and bobs. My sons' favourite section was a computer game where you race against the clock to guide a turbaned figure around a modern household, discovering objects that owe their existence to science and technology of the ancient Muslim world. I personally loved the animated 'framed portraits' of the historical characters that beckon at you across the crowded hall. I was also impressed that all texts, including the detailed exhibition book, were in English and Turkish.

The exhibition is definitely an inspiring experience for all, but is even more relevant to the many Turkish children who have now visited it.

1001 Inventions is now closed in London and Istanbul but will be heading to New York in December.

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