NEWS

Summary

The history of Muslim inventors is on display at interactive Corniche exhibition.

Inventions of old spark new minds

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The interactive exhibition allows schoolchildren to test out some of the ancient inventions that have revolutionised not only the region, but the world.

FATIMA AL MARZOUQI / THE NATIONAL

ABU DHABI //Eesha Raazia can sum up her visit to Abu Dhabi's 1001 Inventions exhibition in one word: awesome.

The collection on Abu Dhabi Corniche has already toured the UK and the US, promoting the important role the ancient Muslim world played in the history of science. Now the award-winning exhibition is on show in the capital until December 24.

"It's very knowledgeable and very creative," Eesha, 11, declares after touring the exhibit as part of a school outing with her class from Sherwood Academy. And it is definitely more fun than normal school.

The class learnt about Fatima Al Fihri, a 9th-century educator who founded the oldest university in the world. They also flapped their arms and attempted to fly like the famous inventor Abbas Ibn Firnas.

Eesha's favourite part was learning about the legendary elephant clock, created by the 12th-century Muslim scholar Al Jazari.

The water clock - carved in the form of an elephant with an Egyptian phoenix, elephant driver and Chinese serpents on its back - chimes every 30 minutes when a bowl of water in the elephant's belly fills and pulls a string. This releases a ball from the serpent's mouth and causes the elephant driver's hand to drop and strike a drum and the phoenix to chirp.

"I want to invent a time machine, but I think it would be impossible," Eesha muses, before rushing off to explore more.

Al Jazari, the creator of more than 50 different devices, is one of several influential inventors whose work is being commemorated by the exhibition.

Jimmy Mesho, an 18-year-old student at New York University Abu Dhabi, dons a costume every day to play the role of the Iraqi-born 11th-century scientist Ibn Al Haytham.

As one of many costumed volunteers manning the exhibition, Mr Mesho teaches visitors about Al Haytham's most famous invention: the camera obscura.

The scientist accidentally found that when light passes through a small hole, it can be projected as an upside-down image on the surface opposite to the hole.

"Ibn Al Haytham was the father of optics and scientific experiments," Mr Mesho told a group of enraptured schoolchildren, before moving on to show them what Al Haytham had invented.

"That's crazy," whispered one, as the others tried to touch the projected images.

Reny Thomas, a teacher at Sherwood Academy, said introducing children to an exhibition like this teaches them how to learn in a positive way. "Here, they are allowed to move freely. They are tension-free, and they are very happy."

Equipped with notepads, the children will take a note of topics they want to explore more, said the teacher, ensuring their learning does not stop once their tour is over.

"I loved the part about learning to fly and the part that made the ship move," says 10-year-old Amira Hassan.

"It was really interesting that some people [inventors] came from my city," says Zainab Iman, an Iraqi pupil.

In the past two days, approximately 15,000 people are believed to have visited 1001 Inventions and the science festival at the Abu Dhabi National Exhibition Centre, says a spokesman for the exhibition. Yesterday, organisers welcomed about 100 visitors every 15 minutes.

"They are loving it," says the spokesman. "There is another one which is currently touring the US, but this is a bilingual version, and it is bigger."

The Abu Dhabi version also houses several new electronic games and hands-on exhibits.

The students found the experience very interesting, agrees John Julian, another teacher from Sherwood Academy. He says, in the six years since he started teaching in the UAE, 1001 Inventions is like nothing the schoolchildren have had a chance to take part in.

"They get to have a very hands-on experience, especially with the characters that are speaking to them," he says.

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* Visit 1001 Inventions at West Plaza, Gate 12 of the Abu Dhabi Corniche from 5pm to 10pm on weekdays and 2pm to 10pm on weekends.