Life in many cities of Muslim civilisation was a pleasurable experience. In 10th-century Cordoba in Spain, and Baghdad in Iraq, public baths, bookshops and libraries lined paved streets that were lit at night. Rubbish was collected on a regular basis and some sewage systems were underground.

Did you know?
Public baths or hammams in Muslim civilisation had sumptuous tiled walls, fountains and decorative pools. Men and women would bathe at different times of day, and visiting the hammam would be a social experience full of opportunities to exchange news and catch up with friends.

Architectural ideas
The architecture of Muslim civilisation demonstrated a huge variety of new ideas, many of which were re-used and adapted all over the world. Important and impressive buildings such as the Alhambra in Granada, the Great Mosque of Cordoba, and many buildings of utilitarian nature such as the impressive dams at al Qayrawan.

Most arches were semicircular at first, like those of Rome and Byzantium. But architects soon adopted the pointed arch — the search for rich and varied building designs. It appears in the palaces of Matraja, built in Jordan by the Umayyads in 744, and became increasingly common. Parabolic arches were used in the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus and the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem.

Some historians believe the multi-arched designs of Muslim civilisation influenced Gothic architecture, particularly in the way the windows are arranged to create a rhythmic decoration of lancets above the main opening.

Sina
A staggering 477 buildings were designed and built by Sinan during his long career under three Sultans in Turkey during the 15th century.

His Selimiye Mosque in Edirne has the tallest, most earthquake-defying, minarets in the whole of Turkey. His Suleymaniye Mosque had a filter room to clean the smoke from the numerous oil lamps inside before it was expelled into the atmosphere. The collected soot was then used in ink.

Domes
Master-architect Sinan developed techniques to construct taller and wider domed roofs than those built before his time such as Hagia Sophia in Istanbul and St Paul’s in Rome.

Today, onion-shaped domes are well known in Russian Orthodox churches and were particularly popular throughout the Mughal Empire in India. In 1710, Sir Christopher Wren drew consciously on Muslim influences when he designed St Paul’s Cathedral in London, with its combination of domes and towers.

Summerhouses
The word kiosk comes from the Turkish keshki, which was adopted into English and means an open-sided domed hall. These structures originally had four side-rooms to a kiosk, later evolving into summerhouses used by sultans.

Most famous kiosks were built in the 18th century at the Topkapi Palace in Istanbul. They offered a place to sit whilst enjoying the view of the gardens and the surrounding city. Forming winter gardens, they were also used for refreshments. Later, kiosks evolved into the conservatories we know today — glazed and furnished for comfort.