

# The State

April 7, 2008

## A cultural celebration:

### International Festival brings sights, tastes of faraway places to Columbia

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It has been 10 years since Taknocka Sam moved to Columbia. She has never stopped missing the sights, smells and tastes from her childhood growing up in a U.S. military family living in Germany, Spain, France, Austria and Canada. On Sunday she was able to relive a piece of her past and add a couple of new stamps to her "passport" at the 13th Annual Columbia International Festival. "It's an opportunity to check out the different cultures," she said, while clutching souvenirs.

"I find it fascinating. I kind of miss it."

About 60 countries, including Armenia, Russia and India, were represented at the annual event at the state fairgrounds. Families learned about life in other countries through exhibits, food and merchandise.



"Everybody has got beautiful and unique things to share," said presenter Shirish Bhonsele. Every year he brings Indian currency, pictures of the Taj Mahal and musical instruments to show visitors. He said learning about other countries makes the community stronger. "The name of this country is United States. Everybody is part of this country."

Organizers expected about 20,000 visitors at the festival, which ended Sunday. Although a number of families walked from table to table, buying scarves from Greece, earrings from Senegal and learning about life in France, the food remains a big draw.



Aiken Spanish teacher Jill Jett and her husband, David, came to the festival for the first time Sunday.

Jett said she was hoping to pick up a souvenir for her classroom but she was planning a short detour toward a plate of arroz con pollo.

"It's interesting to me," she said about the chicken and rice dish a few steps away from her. "I'm leaning toward the Peruvian booth." Her husband hadn't yet set his mind to what type of food he wanted to try. "I'm not leaning toward anything," he said. "I like them all."



*TOP LEFT: Mohammed Fatani, right, talks to visitors at the Saudi Arabia booth during the 13th annual Columbia International Festival at the South Carolina Fairgrounds on Sunday.*

*TOP RIGHT: Members of the Csurdongolo Folk Dance Group perform traditional Hungarian dances during the 13th annual Columbia International Festival Sunday. The group is based out of the New York-New Jersey Hungarian American community, primarily in New Brunswick.*

*BOTTOM LEFT: Taylor Essell, 13, checks out the inside of a Bahay Kubo, a house in the Philippines made out of palm leaves and bamboo during the 13th annual Columbia International Festival on Sunday.*

*BOTTOM RIGHT: Art Bailie walks past a Chinese dragon Sunday at the 13th annual Columbia International Festival.*