



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Columbia to Host 17<sup>th</sup> Annual International Festival

*Recognized as a **Top 20 Event** by the Southeast Tourism Society in 1999 & 2001*

**Columbia, SC** Come see, taste and experience the world at the 17<sup>th</sup> Annual **Columbia International Festival**. The festival features an International Food Court and Bazaar, 60 national/cultural exhibits, an International Fashion Show, a pageantry Parade of Nations and on-stage cultural entertainment from over 25 countries. Columbia International Festival has become one of the largest indoor cultural/international events in Southeastern U.S. The festival showcases the cultural, racial and national diversity that exists within South Carolina. **No other event brings out the true cosmopolitan aspects of South Carolina like the Columbia International Festival.**

This year's festival features ***Viva el Español! The Spanish-speaking Countries*** around the world. Many of these 20 countries will be highlighted in the national exhibits, cuisine and cultural performances. Nearly another 50 countries will contribute to the festival's international – global – flavor.

“The purpose of the festival is to give people in South Carolina and neighboring states the opportunity to enjoy music, culture, food and performing arts from many different countries,” says Dr. Raj Aluri, festival director. “It is also designed to encourage international understanding and appreciation of various cultures, nationalities, races, language groups and international corporations represented in the region. The festival brings many international communities together to build better community/race relations between themselves and the region as a whole,” said Aluri. Since its debut in 1996, the festival has averaged about 10,000 people in annual attendance.

The Columbia International Festival – a family-friendly event – includes a special day designed exclusively for our state's school children. **Global Education Day** will be held

on Friday, March 30, 2012 at the SC State Fairgrounds. Pre-registered school children in grades one through twelve can choose one of three tours and experience cultural dancing, music and national exhibits from more than 60 countries. This year we expect nearly 3,000 students and educators from across the state will take advantage of this unique opportunity to ***experience the world under one roof.***

The festival flag ceremony, called the **Parade of Nations**, will begin at 2:00 P.M. on Saturday, March 31. Parade participants wear traditional attire and proudly carry their own flag in procession.

Approximately 60 countries will be represented in **National Exhibits**. Guests may have their names written in various Asian scripts, get close-up looks at Central American costumes, or talk to Europeans about places to visit on their next vacation. Souvenirs and gifts from around the world can be purchased at the **International Bazaar**, including beautiful clothing, flags and festival T-shirts. Festival sponsors and various organizations that serve the international community present additional exhibits.

The **Cultural Entertainment** will be on stage throughout the festival. Guests in previous years have reported this was the highlight of their visit. The program is highly diverse, showcasing everything from classical music and traditional instruments to artistic performances of traditional/folk dances. The festival's **International Food Court** will surround the stage and the seating area. From baklava to egg rolls, and from curry to sausage, foods from 20 nations will be there to satisfy anyone's appetite. "You will not find a better variety of mouth-watering meals anywhere in Columbia!" says Dr. Aluri.

The United States is very diverse. **One in eight or nearly 50 million people living in our country are foreign-born. More than 750,000 foreign-born people representing over 200 countries call South Carolina their home.** The 2010 census shows that the Hispanic community has already become the largest minority in the USA. The strong presence and growth of international companies in South Carolina is a testimonial to the state's reputation as a world-class center for commerce. The Columbia International Festival is important to the state's economy because international trade and investments play a major part in the state's economic strength. The festival also provides a family-friendly atmosphere in which to celebrate South Carolina's ties with the rest of the world.

Festival hours are 10:00 A.M. to 7:00 P.M., Saturday, March 31, and 12:00 noon to 6:00 P.M., Sunday, April 1. Admission is \$5 per adult and \$1 per child ages 6-12. Children 5 and under are admitted free. Sunday's admission is free to the previous day's guests. According to Dr. Aluri, **"this is a wonderful way to travel around the world without ever leaving South Carolina."** For more information, call (803)799-3452 or visit our website at [www.cifonline.org](http://www.cifonline.org).

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