MUSIC AND DANCE

The Bhutan program at the 2008 Smithsonian Folklife Festival will present all aspects of traditional and contemporary Bhutanese music and dance, thereby offering an opportunity to experience sights and sounds rarely seen or heard outside of the remote Himalayan Kingdom. Both secular and religious music and dance will be performed.

Highlights will include the dramatic masked dances that comprise a major part of traditional Bhutanese religious festivals—with opportunities offered for visitors to meet and interact with the dancers and to learn about the complex choreography and symbolism presented by the dances. Some of the traditional dances date from the 16th century, and will be performed for the very first time in America on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., during the 2008 Smithsonian Folklife Festival. The spectacular costumes and masks worn by the dancers will be complemented by rhythmic music all performed on traditional instruments.

The diversity of Bhutanese secular music also will be performed, providing opportunities to celebrate occasions of daily life in Bhutan such as rice-planting, plowing and harvesting, house-building, weaving, carpentry, and animal tending. Virtually always communal, visitors will be invited to join the Bhutanese dancers and thereby share their celebrations of daily life through these simple but challenging songs and graceful dance movements.

ARCHITECTURE

The diversity of Bhutan’s rich and unique architectural heritage and life today will be presented through examples of the design of Bhutanese chortens, stone walls, temples, monasteries, dzongs, and rural farmhouses. While impossible to reproduce the grandeur of the fortress-like dzongs or mystical settings of the many temples and monasteries found throughout Bhutan, examples of the unique elements of Bhutanese architecture will be recreated on the National Mall for visitors to experience first-hand.

The ritual elements represented by chortens and other architectural forms will be highlighted. Since most Bhutanese buildings are still constructed almost entirely by hand (including the milling of the timber used and the carving of all the architectural elements), Bhutanese craftsmen will demonstrate for visitors on the National Mall the wide-range of building techniques still practiced throughout the Kingdom but rarely seen outside.

One project scheduled for the Festival is the construction of a traditional Bhutanese Buddhist Lhakhang (temple) at the Festival site on the National Mall.

ARCHERY AND RECREATION

Archery is Bhutan’s national sport and usually comprises part of all festivities in the Kingdom. Traditional Bhutanese bows and arrows are made from bamboo. Small wooden targets are placed at either ends of standard Bhutanese regulation-size archery fields (approximately 140 meters in length).

Apart from the great skill of Bhutanese archers, archery contests are colorful communal events also characterized by dancing and singing cheerleaders (often intended to poke fun at the opposing team’s performance).

Other traditional Bhutanese games involving stone-throwing and darts will be demonstrated throughout the Smithsonian’s 2008 Bhutan program on the National Mall in Washington, D.C.
**RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES**

Bhutan is the last place on Earth where traditional Himalayan Buddhism is practiced widely and influences all aspects of daily life and society. Since Bhutan has never been colonized or occupied by any foreign invaders since the coming of Buddhism in the 7th century, Buddhist traditions in Bhutan have evolved unbroken for more than 1,000 years. There are approximately 6,000 monks living in hundreds of monastic communities that dot the Bhutanese landscape—ranging from the fortress-like dzongs to remote high-mountain monasteries and temples. Although monastic life in Bhutan is essentially male, there are some nuns who live in small communities also mainly in the remote countryside.

Monastic communities continue to follow religious academic traditions, which at one time was the only education available. After some years of academic training, some monks take up artistic traditions including dance, music, painting, and tailoring that continue to thrive in the monastic communities throughout the Kingdom.

In addition to keeping Buddhist traditions and teachings alive, Bhutan’s religious communities also serve their surrounding communities through ceremonies performed in public places as well as in family homes and associated acts of charity.

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**NARRATIVE STAGE/FOODWAYS**

Because of the many cross-cutting and interactive themes that will characterize the Bhutan program at the 2008 Smithsonian Folklife Festival, the Narrative Stage will provide a venue for lively discussion and hands-on demonstrations with participants and other persons knowledgeable about the life and history of Bhutan. In particular, the Narrative Stage will be a place for Festival participants and visitors to explore and discuss the Bhutanese concept of “Gross National Happiness” (an overarching theme of the Bhutan program), and its relevance to contemporary U.S. society and other places outside the Kingdom.

Since the Festival is intended to be as experiential as possible, cooking demonstrations and conversations about Bhutanese foodways will also take place. This is an important aspect of contemporary culture and gives insight into home and farm life.

**TEXTILES**

While also one of the arts of zorig chusum, Bhutanese textiles comprise one of the most dazzling artistic traditions practiced throughout the Kingdom but only rarely seen outside.

Each region of Bhutan has its own special textile styles, which vary according to type of loom, fibers used, colors and dyes derived from natural vegetable or mineral pigments, and complex weaving and stitching techniques and designs. Patterns have symbolic meanings, and even a small fabric may take many months to weave. All aspects of the textile making (from making and dyeing thread with natural pigments through the diversity of weaving techniques) will be presented by some of Bhutan’s finest textile weavers on the National Mall during the 2008 Smithsonian Folklife Festival.
TRADITIONAL MEDICINE

Bhutan has been known as the “Land of Medicinal Plants” since ancient times, and has a rich pharmacopoeia of medicinal treatments prepared with a wide range of plant, animal, and mineral substances found within the remote Himalayan region. Bhutanese medicine has been influenced by Ayurvedic medicine from India as well as from traditional Chinese medicine, and is very similar to the medicine once widely practiced in Tibet where many Bhutanese doctors once trained.

Today, the Bhutanese are exploring combinations of both traditional and Western approaches towards diagnosis and treatment with an eye towards identifying what works and improving understandings of why.

ZORIG CHUSUM
(Bhutan’s 13 Traditional Arts)

Skilled artists who practice all of Bhutan’s Thirteen Traditional Arts (or zorig chusum) will be presenting their skills on the National Mall during the 2008 Smithsonian Folklife Festival’s Bhutan program—a rare opportunity outside of Bhutan to see all of these traditional arts and to meet their finest practitioners presented all together in one place.

The identification of Bhutan’s zorig chusum dates from the 17th century, and includes woodworking, stone-carving, sculpture, painting, working in clay, casting and metalwork, wood-turning, metal-forging, jewelry making, bamboo basketry, paper-making, embroidery and weaving.

Because most objects are still created for their symbolic and functional value rather than for purely aesthetic reasons, the arts of zorig chusum also are closely tied to the traditional rhythms of life in Bhutan and the special relationship Bhutanese still cultivate with the land and other natural resources upon which they depend. Taken together, zorig chusum reflects the great Bhutanese wealth of traditional knowledge of artistic skills that have been passed from generation to generation for hundreds of years.