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## Lost and Found

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## Afghan Treasures Dazzle D.C.

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By Gina Hagler

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It's not often your kids can see long-lost treasures for themselves, but now through September 7, they can do just that at the National Gallery of Art's Afghanistan: Hidden Treasures from the National Museum, Kabul exhibition.

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Everything they'll see on display was thought to be lost during decades of unrest in Afghanistan. In 2004, after the treasures were discovered in the vaults of the Presidential Palace, it was learned that men had risked their lives – and endured torture – to keep the secrets of the treasures safe. Part of the wonder of this exhibition is that these men went to great lengths to bring truth to the words, “A nation stays alive when its culture stays alive.”

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But also significant is the meaning of this discovery to other cultures. Because Afghanistan was at the heart of the medieval Silk Road trade route that linked cultures from Asia to the Mediterranean, the work on display shows the influences of many cultures and gives us a sense of them as well. It also restores a part of their history thought lost.

### What You'll Discover

The items in the exhibition are exquisite. From the fragments of golden goblets found at Tepe Fullol to the bronze statuette of Hercules found at Ai Khanum, the rooms each have several items that will catch your child's attention.

My favorite objects in the first rooms were the stone vessel lids from Ai Khanum. The color in these third and second century B.C. objects is vivid even today. The gargoyle made of limestone is a cross between whimsical and fierce. There are also two sundials on display. One is concave and set for the local time, while the other has different positions for the seasons and is calibrated for a different latitude. It was the first time I heard about sundials being calibrated, which was just one of many things I learned at the exhibit.

In the Begram room, the treasures include figures carved from ivory, painted glass beakers, painted fish and – my favorite – a circular metal medallion that acted as a lid on a container of water. There is a metal sculpture of swimming fish on the top of the lid, and part of the sculpture includes movable fins and tails. When the water in the container moved, so did the weights dangling from the bottom of the lid, causing the fins and tails of the fish to move when placed over a basin of water.

The final rooms contain items from the burial tombs of Tillya Tepe. The tombs are thought to be those of wealthy travelers, and the jewelry that adorned the dead is on display. The display includes gold plaques in the shapes of flowers, triangles, knots, masks, scarabs, hearts, scrolls and bracelets adorned with antelopes. There are weapons made of gold, as well as a crown that comes apart so it can be packed flat for travel.

## Beyond the Exhibit

It's worth taking the time to view several excellent sites designed in conjunction with the exhibit (The URLs are listed below.). The National Geographic site provides an interactive map with commentary by archaeologist and National Geographic Fellow Fredrik Hiebert. It tells the story of the initial discovery, gives the treasures a context and provides a sense of the history of the pieces. Hiebert was at the palace when these treasures were rediscovered, and his account of that event is gripping. The National Gallery of Art has an Art Timeline of Treasures site describing each piece in even more detail. It provided a good way to spot the pieces we'd look for once we arrived.

The Discovery Guide for kids gives them specific objects to look for in each room of the exhibit. Be sure to download it and bring it along, because it's not available at the gallery. ([www.nga.gov/exhibitions/2008/afghanistan/afghan-guide.pdf](http://www.nga.gov/exhibitions/2008/afghanistan/afghan-guide.pdf)).

The time we spent at the exhibition was very well spent. All my kids, ages 7 to 17, enjoyed the 12-minute movie, which gave an overview of the treasures discovered. With that information, each of my children sought out several objects that held their attention. The younger ones enjoyed looking for all the animals throughout the exhibition, while my oldest was happy to see examples of the things he's studying at school.

Don't miss this opportunity to give your treasure hunters a chance to explore!

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*Gina Hagler is a writer and mother of three in Rockville.*

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### Useful Information:

The National Gallery of Art is located on the National Mall between 3rd and 7th streets at Constitution Avenue, NW.

**Hours:** Monday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Sunday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1.

**Metro:** Judiciary Square on the Red Line, Archives on the Yellow/Green Lines and Smithsonian on the Blue/Orange Lines. Metro bus and DC Circulator bus stops are located nearby.

**Audio Guide:** Yes

### Sites to view:

National Gallery of Art Afghanistan main exhibition page:  
[www.nga.gov/exhibitions/2008/afghanistan](http://www.nga.gov/exhibitions/2008/afghanistan)

Afghanistan Exhibition Info page:  
[www.nga.gov/exhibitions/afghanistaninfo.shtm](http://www.nga.gov/exhibitions/afghanistaninfo.shtm)

National Gallery of Art Timeline of Treasures:  
[www.nga.gov/exhibitions/2008/afghanistan/timeline.shtm](http://www.nga.gov/exhibitions/2008/afghanistan/timeline.shtm)

National Geographic Interactive Map with commentary by archaeologist and National Geographic Fellow Fredrik Hiebert:  
[www.nationalgeographic.com/mission/afghanistan-treasures](http://www.nationalgeographic.com/mission/afghanistan-treasures)

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It's not just tangible treasures that have been rediscovered. The songs of the children of Afghanistan have also been restored, returned to them and shared with children of the United States. Dr. Louise Pascale first became acquainted with the songs and melodies during a stint in the Peace Corps in the

1960s. In 2001, she realized the book of songs and poems she had might very well be the only existing copy. She decided to return the book and music to the people of Afghanistan – music had been outlawed until that time. Shamim Jawad, wife of His Excellency Said T. Jawad, Afghanistan Ambassador to the United States, learned of Pascale’s plan and helped to make it possible through Shamim Jawad’s Ayenda Foundation.

The book and CD are available in the gift shop at the National Gallery or online from The Folk Arts Center of New England at [www.facone.org/musicshop/afghan\\_book.htm](http://www.facone.org/musicshop/afghan_book.htm).

My younger kids were delighted to read the translation and realize that the kids in Afghanistan also sing an alphabet song, as well as songs about their country and one reminiscent of “Old MacDonald.”

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