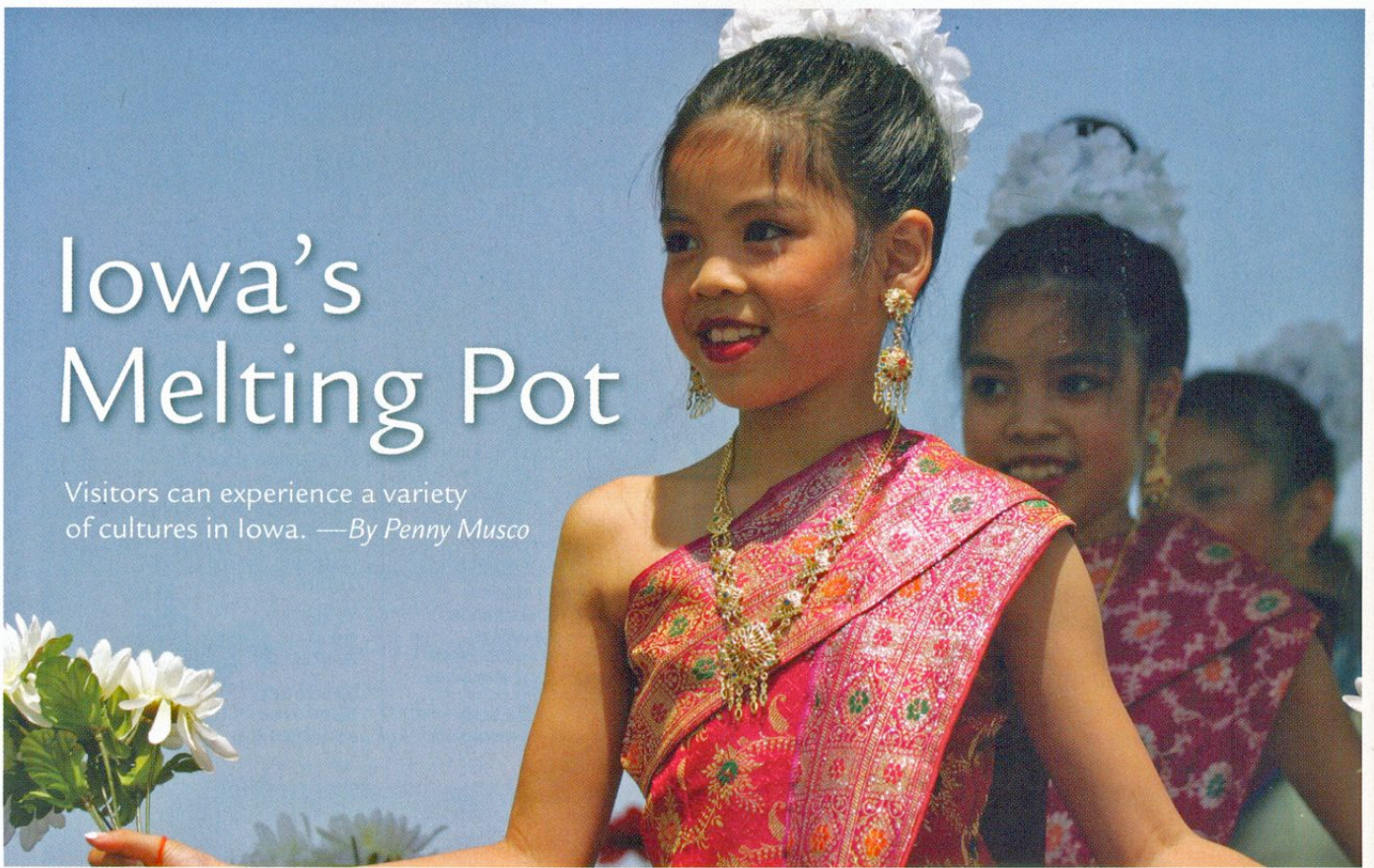


Iowa's Melting Pot

Visitors can experience a variety of cultures in Iowa. —By Penny Musco



CelebrAsian: Asian Heritage Festival, one of Iowa's many cultural traditions.

As far back as the 1800s, many ethnic groups sought a better life in Iowa. In the late 1970s, then-Gov. Robert Ray continued the legacy of Iowa hospitality by accepting nearly 4,000 Southeast Asian refugees. Today, many cultures add their flavor to the Hawkeye State.

STORY CITY

Originally called Fairview, this town owes its beginnings, and its Scandinavian heritage, to Nordic immigrants who sought religious freedom as well as affordable land. Scandinavian Days (June 6–8) honors the traditions of those early settlers, such as Danish paper-craft and potato cake making.

MARSHALLTOWN

The influx of Latinos—primarily from Villachuato, Mexico, drawn by the demand for labor at the giant pork processing plant—has transformed, even revived, this community. The Hispanic Heritage Festival (June 7) features crafts, music, films and a soccer tournament.

CEDAR RAPIDS

In 1994, a group of members from Mt. Zion Baptist Church envisioned a nearby place where black history could be preserved and taught—and the African American Historical Museum and Cultural Center of Iowa was born. The center celebrates Juneteenth (June 20–21), a commemoration of the end of slavery, with a festival that includes a history program, music, a puppet theater performance and a soul food dinner.

DES MOINES

Lao and Vietnamese are the two most widely spoken Asian languages in Iowa, due to an influx of immigrants from these countries 30 years ago. The capital is home to the state's largest percentage of Asians, as well as the Iowa Asian Alliance, representing Asians from more than 15 different ethnic communities in business, economics and culture. CelebrAsian: Asian Heritage Festival (May 17) showcases the customs and food of many of those countries.

TAMA

The Meskwaki tribe, also known as the Sac and Fox of the Mississippi, reside on a 7,395-acre settlement, different from a reservation because they own the land. The tribe runs a casino/hotel on Highway 30 and puts on an annual powwow during the second weekend of August, with ceremonial dances, native regalia, crafts and exhibits. ●