

A Journey of Discovery

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Each year in late June and early July, the Smithsonian Folklife Festival brings together hundreds of tradition bearers from around the world to share their cultures on the National Mall of the United States. To make this happen, the planning for each Festival begins years prior—when the Smithsonian and our collaborators form partnerships, undertake field research projects with featured communities, and work with individuals and groups to arrange presentations. During these months and years of hard work, we all make new discoveries through countless conversations about longtime traditions that remain a vibrant part of a community's life. For those of us who organize and participate in the Festival, the preparatory period is a very exciting time.

In planning this year's Festival, our curators traveled throughout Mexico with our partners from that country's National Council for Culture and the Arts (Conaculta) and the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH); around the Asian Pacific American communities of the Washington, D.C., area with collaborators from the University of Maryland, George Mason University, and the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Program; and within the museums, research centers, and workshops of the Smithsonian itself, guided by colleagues who are intimately familiar with many of the Institution's hidden hallways and secluded collections seldom seen by members of the public. Through the Festival, visitors can meet, talk with, and learn from many of the most interesting people our curators and researchers have found in the course of their travels.

The Festival also extends into the future by sparking fresh interest in the traditions presented, and by bringing together compatriots who often end up inspiring each other. We hope the Festival experience will set us all on a path toward discovering new ways of seeing our own communities and better understanding those of others.

This book serves as a key part of that journey of discovery. It provides rich articles that give readers a window into the work leading up to these ten days on the Mall, and it supplies an opportunity to continue learning and to make new connections even after the Festival concludes. You will find in these pages Rodolfo Palma Rojo's portrait of Mexico as a crossroads of communities, Phil Tajitsu Nash's exploration of Asian Pacific American identity, Betty Belanus's expedition through the Smithsonian's museums, and Diana N'Diaye's impressions from a recent visit with artists in Haiti.

For those of you attending the Festival on the Mall, this book should deepen your experience and help you continue your relationship with the communities and culture bearers you have just met. For those of you whose introduction to the Festival comes not on the Mall but in these pages, I hope these articles will act as a portal through which you may engage with the people and traditions featured in these pages, and perhaps even lead you to visit the Festival in person. And for all readers, I hope this book inspires you to think about the world in new and creative ways.

A Naxi Dongba priest in Yunnan Province, China, explains Margaret Lawrence's horoscope as Zhao Gang interprets. This fieldwork was done in preparation for the Mekong River program at the 2007 Smithsonian Folklife Festival.

Photo by Frank Proschan, Smithsonian Institution

