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Insider's Guide to Cherry Blossom Season

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Travel Advisor

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For a few fleeting weeks every spring, cherry blossoms burst on the scene of a few cities around the globe, creating a magical scene. From Tokyo's bustling Meguro River to Kyoto's quiet

temple gardens, Japan's sakura are iconic, and in South Korea, Seoul's streets and hilltop parks are covered in the pale pink vision.

In the Americas, Washington, DC's Tidal Basin is filled with the blooming trees, reflecting the waters. And even in Vancouver, the cherry trees provide a captivating contrast to the dramatic mountains and harbor.

In all these spots, the annual cherry blossom season is just as dazzling as it is short, so make sure to read on for tips on how to uncover the best viewing spots, plus the best places to stay and eat to make the most out of your trip.

Need to know



Cherry blossom season is a hugely popular time to visit these destinations, so make sure to plan ahead. Lodging, guided tours and cultural activities fill up quickly. Traffic can also be heavy, so avoid driving where possible, and opt for public transport, biking or walking.

Another tip for having a great experience is to be respectful of the landscape— don't shake branches or climb the cherry trees. Additional helpful behavior involves not blocking walkways while taking photos, cleaning up after picnicking and being mindful of cultural differences when in Japan or Seoul.

Currency:

- **Japan:** The official currency is the Japanese yen (JPY). While there's no tipping culture, many restaurants and shops are cash only outside of major cities.
- **Seoul:** The official currency is the South Korean won (KRW). Credit cards are widely accepted, but small vendors and street food stalls may require cash. There's also no tipping culture, and it's generally considered rude.
- **Washington DC:** The official currency is the US dollar (USD). Credit cards are accepted most places, but always have cash on hand for smaller vendors just in case. Expect to tip between 15% and 20%.
- **Vancouver:** The currency is the Canadian dollar (CAD). Have cash on hand for smaller vendors, but credit cards are widely accepted. Tipping 15%–20% at restaurants and bars is typical.

Languages: English will be spoken in Washington, DC and Vancouver, but Japanese will be the main language in Japan, and Korean in Seoul. While many people will do their best, English is not widely spoken outside of tourist areas and hotels. Your best friend will be Google Translate.

Airports:

- **Japan:** There are two major international airports in Tokyo, Narita (NRT) and Haneda (HND), with Kyoto's best connected gateway being Kansai International Airport (KIX).
- **Seoul:** Incheon International Airport (ICN) offers the most direct flights from major U.S. cities, but Gimpo International Airport (GMP) handles a lot of domestic and nearby international flights.
- **Washington DC:** The area is home to two major gateways, Washington Dulles (IAD) and Ronald Reagan (DCA), with direct flights from major domestic and international cities. Nearby Baltimore (BWI) also has a well connected airport.
- **Vancouver:** The Vancouver International Airport (YVR) offers direct flights from most major US cities and international destinations.

Transportation:

- **Japan:** Japan has massive, well-connected train and public transportation systems. High-speed trains (Shinkansen) connect major cities and make sure to pick up a delicious Eki-ben meal box before the trip. Private guided tours and car rentals for countryside exploration are other great transport options.
- **Seoul:** The extensive public transit system helps connect Seoul's airports, major sites and most neighborhoods. Central districts are also best and easily explored on foot.
- **Washington, DC:** The city has a great public transport system across the city and surrounding area. Once inside the city, it's very walkable. There's also easy access to ride-sharing options like Uber and Lyft, and private transportation can also be reserved.
- **Vancouver:** An efficient SkyTrain system connects the city's major areas and attractions. Neighborhoods in the city are easily walkable as well.

Best time to visit: For peak cherry blossom viewing, expect to visit in late March through mid April. While the best dates can vary each year, you can stay up-to-date with destination-specific websites tracking the blossoms.

Ideal length of stay:

- **Japan:** Spend four to six nights to get the most out of Japan's blossoms.
- **Seoul:** Three to five days is ideal to experience the blooms and cultural events.
- **Washington DC:** Three to five days is perfect to explore the major attractions.
- **Vancouver:** Three to four days is the right amount of time to enjoy the cherry blossoms.

Japan



Image courtesy of Hotel The Mitsui Kyoto

Fusing deep-rooted traditions with cutting-edge modernity, Japan is unique and unforgettable. Tokyo is packed with skyscrapers that glow neon all night long. Kyoto moves at a slower pace, characterized by wooden teahouses and ornate temples.

The practice of viewing cherry blossoms is such a tradition the Japanese have a word for it — *hanami*. Tokyo's blossoms tend to peak at the end of March, with Kyoto seeing the best time in the beginning of April. Aside from Tokyo and Kyoto, don't miss the cherry blossoms and relaxing onsens around Mount Fuji.

Where to stay

The Tokyo EDITION, Toranomon: A high-rise escape highlighted by the EDITION's signature understated luxury. Sleek interiors, a rooftop terrace and hidden speakeasy make it feel like Tokyo's best kept secret.

- **Fora's Marriott STARS** partner perks include a \$100 hotel credit, daily breakfast, an upgrade and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

The Ritz-Carlton, Kyoto: An elegant hotel along the Kamo River blending traditional Japanese design with modern luxury. Exquisite dining and serene gardens accentuate the experience.

- **Fora's Marriott STARS** partner perks include a \$100 hotel credit, daily breakfast, an upgrade and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

HOTEL THE MITSUI KYOTO: This restored samurai residence turned luxury hideaway is near Nijo Castle. A central courtyard garden and private onsen baths make it its own destination.

- **Fora Reserve perks** include a \$100 hotel credit, a welcome amenity, daily breakfast, an upgrade and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

Seoul



Image courtesy of the Banyan Tree Club And Spa Seoul

Seoul is a city of contrast. Towering skyscrapers sit beside centuries-old palaces, while neon-lit streets are just steps from quiet neighborhoods. You'll find buzzing markets in Myeongdong and tranquil hiking trails in Bukhansan. Temples, museums and art galleries can even be found across the city. Street food lovers can look forward to *tteokbokki* (simmered rice cakes) and *hotteok* (pancakes stuffed with sugary syrup).

In the springtime, cherry blossoms bring out the best of the city. Boat around one of the lakes, and take in the historic cultural sites, all while surrounded by cherry blossoms. Peak viewing is often the first two weeks of April but can vary depending on weather and climate.

Where to stay

Conrad Seoul: This elegant retreat overlooks Yeouido Park, a hub for cherry blossoms. Refined dining, a serene spa and rooms with panoramic windows make it a luxurious urban escape.

- **Fora's Hilton for Luxury** partner perks include a \$100 hotel credit, daily breakfast, an upgrade and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

Banyan Tree Club And Spa Seoul: On the slopes of Namsan Mountain, the hotel's holistic spa, gourmet dining, and in-room private pools make it a relaxing city hideaway.

- **Fora's Accor by HERA** partner perks include a \$100 hotel credit, daily breakfast, an upgrade and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

Signiel Seoul: An elegant, ultra-luxury hotel at the top of Lotte World Tower, the fifth tallest skyscraper in the world. Michelin-star dining and an infinity pool make it an unforgettable stay.

- **Fora Perks** include a \$100 food & beverage credit, daily breakfast, an upgrade and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

Washington, DC



Image courtesy of Riggs Washington D.C.

The US capital weaves together contemporary energy with a storied past. The Potomac River runs alongside the city that's home to numerous monuments, museums and scenic viewpoints. DC is also home to a burgeoning food scene and cultural communities.

The city's famous cherry trees were a gift from Japan in 1912. The then Mayor of Tokyo sent them as a symbol of the growing friendship between the two countries.

Make sure not to miss the annual National Cherry Blossom Festival, featuring events, exhibits and concerts — there's even a parade and fireworks.

Where to stay

Riggs Washington D.C.: This historic boutique hotel in the Penn Quarter features colorful Art Deco rooms, a European-style brasserie, and basement lounge with a hidden speakeasy.

- **Fora Perks** include a \$100 hotel credit, daily breakfast, an upgrade and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

The Dupont Circle: This modern, elegant retreat on Dupont Circle is known for its attentive service, hip dining, and rooms with floor-to-ceiling windows.

- **Fora Perks** include a \$100 hotel credit, daily breakfast, an upgrade and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

Salamander Washington DC: A luxury hotel near the Tidal Basin with elegant rooms, Potomac River views and a Forbes-rated spa.

- **Fora Perks** include a \$100 food & beverage credit, breakfast daily, an upgrade and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

Vancouver



Image courtesy of Rosewood Hotel Georgia

Nature and urban life coexist perfectly in Vancouver. The nearby mountains are reflected in the skyscrapers' windows, and walking trails weave through Stanley Park at the edge of the city.

Head to Granville Island for artisan markets or historic Gastown for trendy cafes and boutiques. At the right time of year, you can ski in the morning, kayak in the afternoon and finish the day with a seafood dinner overlooking Vancouver Harbour.

The streets and parks in springtime become covered in white and pink cherry blossoms. While peak viewing can vary, the first through third weeks of April are your best bet to catch the blooms.

Where to stay

Fairmont Pacific Rim: A modern luxury hotel right on Vancouver Harbour with contemporary styled rooms, a world class spa and refined dining.

- **Fora Perks** include a \$100 hotel credit, daily breakfast, an upgrade and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

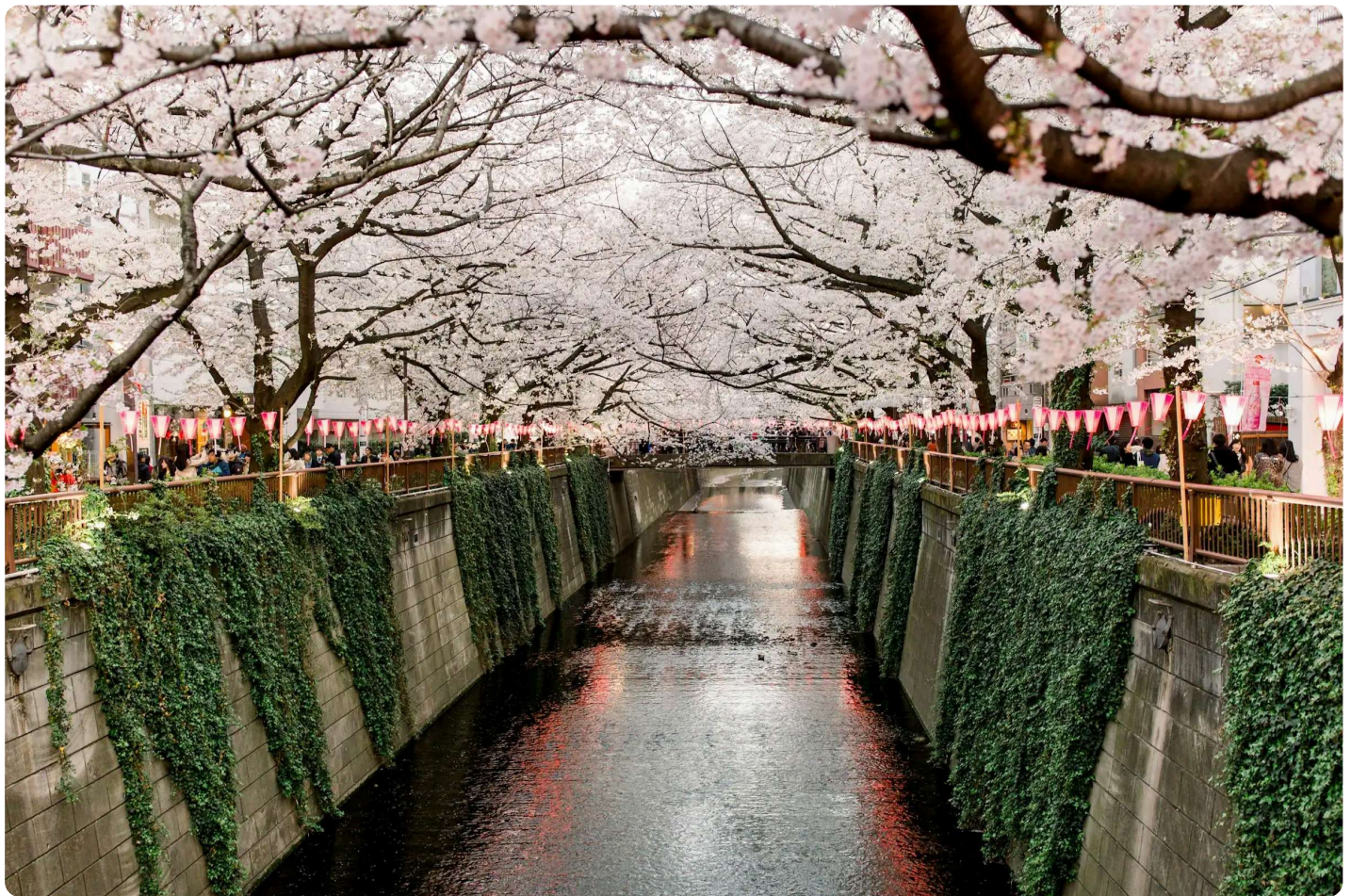
Rosewood Hotel Georgia: A historic landmark steeped in modern elegance with sophisticated, spacious rooms, a vibrant dining scene and a renowned spa with indoor saltwater pool.

- **Fora Perks** include a \$100 hotel credit, daily breakfast, an upgrade and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

Clayoquot Wilderness Lodge: This exclusive luxury retreat features deluxe safari-style tents in the middle of the remote wilderness, only a 45-minute seaplane ride from Vancouver.

- **Fora Perks** include a \$100 hotel credit, daily breakfast, an upgrade and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

Best spots to see the blossoms



Some of the best cherry blossom sightings you'll have are by strolling around each city, picnicking in the parks and heading to local festivals. For the best viewing spots, here are some of top recommendations.

Tokyo

Aside from walking or biking, many of Tokyo's lakes and rivers may offer boat rides or boat rentals. Nighttime viewing is also very popular, with many sites lit up at night.

- Meander under the blooming cherry blossoms at **Shinjuku Gyoen** and **Ueno Park**, two of the best parks in Tokyo.
- Take in the historic **Imperial Palace** and nearby **Kitanomaru Park** for blossoms set against a quieter backdrop.
- Stroll along the **Meguro River**, with reflections of the cherry blossoms canopy.
- Lay out a blanket in **Yoyogi Park** and enjoy a *hanami* (flower viewing) picnic under the floral canopies.
- Visit the **Meiji Shrine** for a peaceful retreat, walking treelined pathways.
- Near **Ueno Park** you can savor *sakura*-themed sweets at cafes or enjoy some casual street food.

Kyoto

Kyoto is a popular daytime city to view the blossoms. Popular spots are best visited in the early morning or late afternoon to avoid crowds.

- Take in the cherry blossoms around **Heian Shrine**, with the grand torii gate and beautiful surrounding gardens.
- Follow the **Philosopher's Path**, a peaceful stone walkway lined with cherry trees and tea houses for some reflective moments.
- **Maruyama Park** is the most popular cherry blossom spot in Kyoto, perfect for a hanami picnic beside the iconic weeping cherry tree.
- Stroll through **Gion's** historic streets with wooden teahouses and lantern-lit alleyways amongst the cherry blossoms.
- Head to **Arashiyama** for towering bamboo groves and river views alongside cherry blossoms.
- Take in *sakura* around the five-storied **To-ji Temple**, a UNESCO World Heritage Site dating back to 796.
- Visit **Shimogamo Shrine**, one of the oldest Shinto shrines in Japan and another UNESCO World Heritage Site, to see the blooming cherry trees amidst a sacred forest.

Seoul

Like other cities, enjoying the cherry blossoms by bike or on foot is best. The public transit system will help get you around to even more sites. While walking tours are readily available, escape the crowds by doing it yourself.

- Stroll along the lakeside paths of **Seokchon Lake** for seasonal street food with *sakura* reflections in the water.
- The **Yeouido Cherry Blossom Festival** in Yeouido Park is bustling, with arching cherry trees lining the walkways.
- Picnic alongside the **Han River** or enjoy sunset views amidst the area's blossoms.
- Hike the trails of **Namsan Park** for sweeping city views and cherry trees lining the hillside.
- Head to the historic **Gyeongbokgung Palace** for beautiful cherry blossoms and on-site museums.

Washington, DC

Exploring DC by bike or walking at your own pace afford the best scenery. Get around quicker with the Metro, but avoid walking tours as they follow large crowds anyway. The weather can

also be unpredictable, so dress in layers for cooler mornings and warmer afternoons.

- The **Tidal Basin** is one of the stars to see the city's cherry blossoms, with views of the Jefferson Memorial, Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial, and Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial.
- Follow the **East Potomac Park** pathways for views to Hains Point.
- Journey through the **National Mall** for pockets of cherry blossoms near the Lincoln Memorial and Washington Monument.
- Hit up **Dumbarton Oaks, Stanton Park, the National Arboretum, Anacostia Park, and Oxon Run Park**, all lesser-known spots so you can escape the crowds.
- Make sure not to miss the **National Cherry Blossom Festival**, featuring such events as the Blossom Kit Festival and Petalpalooza.

Vancouver

You can choose to join a guided tour, or stay flexible by designing your own exploration on your own schedule.

- Walk under **Stanley Park's** cherry blossoms that frame the Seawall with stunning harbor and mountain views. Stop at Lost Lagoon and the Japanese Canadian War Memorial for great photo opportunities.
- Take in the skyline views at **Queen Elizabeth Park**. The Quarry Garden is perfect for a walk, and the sprawling lawns are great for a picnic.
- The **VanDusen Botanical Gardens** are 55 acres of walking paths, bridges over ponds and themed gardens, including cherry blossom trees.
- Head to the **Arbutus Greenway** for a laidback afternoon, walking or biking the blossom-lined path dotted with cozy cafes.

If not cherry blossom season...



Blossoms and wildflowers can be found all over the world. If you want other destination ideas mixing rich culture and seasonal landscapes, consider these alternatives.

Japan (fall foliage): Aside from spring, Japan is a great place to visit in the fall for. Reds and oranges take over Lake Chuzenji and Kegon Falls in Nikko. Explore the bamboo grove in Kyoto's Arashiyama. Hakone Open-Air Museum has stunning mountain views.

Netherlands (spring): Each spring, tulips bloom across the Netherlands. Make sure to visit Keukenhof, known as the Garden of Europe and one of the world's largest flower gardens. The Bloemencorso Flower Parade is the biggest in the world. Amsterdam's canals are lined with blossoms and cultural events during springtime.

Mexico City (spring): The purple jacaranda flowers explode across the city in spring. Paseo de la Reforma and Chapultepec Park are key spots to see them. Take in historic landmarks like the Palacio de Bellas Artes and wander the flower-lined park next to it.

Iceland (summer): All over the Golden Circle you'll find stunning wildflower meadows. You can take a dip and relax in the Blue Lagoon. Hike up to Skogafoss and Seljalandsfoss waterfalls for picturesque landscapes.

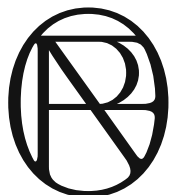
New Zealand (winter): While snow hits the northern hemisphere, New Zealand sees their warmer months. Pink and purple lupin blooms all around Lake Tekapo and Lake Pukaki, making a vibrant landscape. Hike the trails of Aoraki / Mount Cook National Park for even more sightings. Lindis Pass is surrounded by grasslands where flowers bloom, perfect for a scenic drive.

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