

# Season of Sakura

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The Japanese flowering cherry (*Prunus serrulata*) is not like other sour cherry and sweet cherry trees – it does not bear fruit, but evokes only admiration for its profuse blossom. The custom of contemplating the cherry trees – „Hanami“ has a centuries-old tradition in Japanese culture and every year brings genuine aesthetic delight not only to the local population, but also to the thousands of tourists who come especially to observe the abundant flowering of the trees. The time of cherry blossom in the island nation is also considered the beginning of spring.

Part of the preparation for this unforgettable event is the cherry blossom forecast. In Japan, flowering is not simultaneous, because the country is an island state and geographically lies both in the subtropical and in the temperate zone; furthermore, the influence of the ocean is very strong. The cherry blossom begins its journey in

the south from the island of Kyushu from mid to late March and then moves northeast until it reaches Hokkaido at the beginning of May.

Thus each of the 58 meteorological stations located on Japanese territory forecasts when the cherry trees in their area will come into bloom. In Tokyo, for example, all lovers of the pink blossoms can enjoy their profuse flowering usually at the end of March. This, of course, depends on the meteorological conditions, and every year the cherry season begins at a different time. One of the most famous places for the "Hanami" custom is in Tokyo, in Shinjuku Park, where 1,500 sakura trees of 75 species grow.

„Sakura”, as the Japanese cherry is called, comes from the word „sakuya“ (blossom, flowering) and is associated with the name of Princess Kono-hana-sakuya-Hime, whose temple-tomb is located at the top of Mount Fuji. Legend has it that the princess fell from the mountain onto a cherry tree in those ancient times in Japan when it was believed that the word „flower” actually meant cherry blossom. Nowadays there are nearly 300 species of sakura. Some of the most widespread are Yama-sakura or mountain cherry, Ito-sakura, also called Shidare-sakura or weeping cherry, Higan-sakura or equinoctial cherry, Takane-sakura or summit cherry, Kan-sakura, also called Ganjitsu-sakura, New Year cherry, Shiro-sakura or Miyama-sakura, cherry from the interior of the mountain, and Mejiro-sakura or Kome-sakura, rice cherry. The most common colours in which sakura blossoms are pink and white, but it can also bloom in red and yellow.