

Publicity

cherry blossom

The waiting's over, it's cherry-blossom time

The "sakura," or cherry tree/blossom, has been a favorite of the Japanese for centuries and has often been referred to as the emblem of their character. "Kokugaku (nativism)" scholar Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801) expressed this sentiment as follows:

"Isles of blest Japan!
Should your Yamato spirit
Strangers seek to scan,
Say—scenting morn's sunlit air.
Blows the cherry wild and fair!"

In Japan, cherry trees have been planted and cultivated for their beauty, and to adorn gardens and grounds since the eighth century. Thinker-educator Nitobe Inazō (1862-1933), whose likeness is on the ¥5,000 note, says in his book "Bushido": "The refinement and grace of its beauty appeal to our aesthetic sense as no other flower can."

Every year the Meteorological Agency tracks the "sakura zensen (cherry-blossom front)" as it moves north

up the archipelago with the approach of warmer weather, and the nightly forecasts in the weather segment of news programs are watched closely.

The blossoms appear first in Okinawa in January, and typically reach Kyoto and Tokyo in late March or early April. They proceed into areas at higher altitudes and northward, arriving in Hokkaido a few weeks later. After carefully studying the sakura zensen, large numbers of people head to parks, shrines and temples with family and friends to hold "hanami" (flower-viewing) parties.

The hanami custom dates back many centuries. The eighth-century chronicle "Nihon-shoki" records hanami festivals being held as early as the third century. Cherry blossoms mark the annual arrival of spring and the Japanese have traditionally celebrated this with hanami under a blossoming cherry tree.

In Tokyo, five parks have been chosen among the "best

100 sakura spots" by the Flower Association of Japan. They are: Ueno Park, Shinjuku Gyo-en National Garden, Sumida Park, Inokashira Park and Toritsu-Koganei Park.

Ueno Park, located close to JR Ueno Station, has about 1,200 cherry trees of various species, including "somei-yoshino." On both sides of "Sakura-dori," crossing the midsection of the park, there are especially created spaces for hanami parties, where groups of visitors can enjoy food and drink. During the sakura festival period, some 1,500 paper-covered "bon-bori" lanterns illuminate the cherry blossoms from 5:30 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Shinjuku Gyo-en, a large park under the jurisdiction of the Environment Ministry, is home to about 1,500 cherry trees. It is a few minutes' walk from the Tokyo Metro's Shinjuku Gyo-en-mae Station on the Marunouchi Line or Sendagaya Station on the JR Chuo-Sobu Line. It is open from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Last



Party time: People celebrate the arrival of cherry blossoms in Ueno Park, one of the most famous "hanami" spots in Tokyo.

admission is 4 p.m. Admission is ¥200 for adults and ¥50 for children.

Koganei Park, established to observe the 2,600th anniversary of the Imperial era, has 1,800 sakura of 50 species. There are various kinds of facilities for sports and activities. Many events, including dance and music performances, and parades, are held during the hanami season.

For access, get off at Musashi-koganei on the JR Chuo Line and take a Seibu bus to Koganei Koen Nishiguchi.

Inokashira Park straddles Musashino and Mitaka in western Tokyo, and has some 500 cherry trees, about half of them around its lake. Visitors can rent a rowboat or a pedal boat to view the blossoms from the lake. There may be a long line for the boats, but it's worth the wait to glide through the pink and white flurries of snowlike petals as the wind commits the blossoms to a watery grave.

The park has a petting zoo and a small aquarium, and is a popular marketplace for vendors, and "stage" for musicians, artists and street performers.

It is a five-minute walk from Kichijoji Station on the JR Chuo Line or a one-minute

walk from Inokashira Koen Station on the Keio Inokashira Line.

Sumida Park, along the banks of the Sumida River by the Asakusa district, has about 1,000 cherry trees, which create a beautiful sakura tunnel when in full bloom. During the hanami season, many events are held, including traditional dance and music performances on both banks of the river, where the eighth Toku-

gawa Shogun Yoshimune (1684-1751) is credited with planting many sakura. It is a five-minute walk from Asakusa Station on the Tokyo Metro's Ginza Line, Toei Asakusa Line and Tobi Line.

Inokashira Park straddles Musashino and Mitaka in western Tokyo, and has some 500 cherry trees, about half of them around its lake. Visitors can rent a rowboat or a pedal boat to view the blossoms from the lake. There may be a long line for the boats, but it's worth the wait to glide through the pink and white flurries of snowlike petals as the wind commits the blossoms to a watery grave.

The park has a petting zoo and a small aquarium, and is a popular marketplace for vendors, and "stage" for musicians, artists and street performers.

It is a five-minute walk from Kichijoji Station on the JR Chuo Line or a one-minute

walk from Inokashira Koen Station on the Keio Inokashira Line.

A 'hanami' without sake is just another party

As well as good company and food, sake is an essential part of any "hanami (flower-viewing) party."

It is said that in ancient times, farmers left sake under cherry trees as an offering to the "god" or spirit of the rice fields. It was believed in agricultural communities that cherry blossom indicated the arrival of this god, which lived in the mountains in winter and came down to villages when the rice planting began. People held parties under the cherry trees to welcome the god and wish for a rich harvest.

You'll see many pink-labeled bottles in stores at this time of year, but it's the sake inside that will help everyone to enjoy the cherry blossoms and the arrival of spring at your hanami.

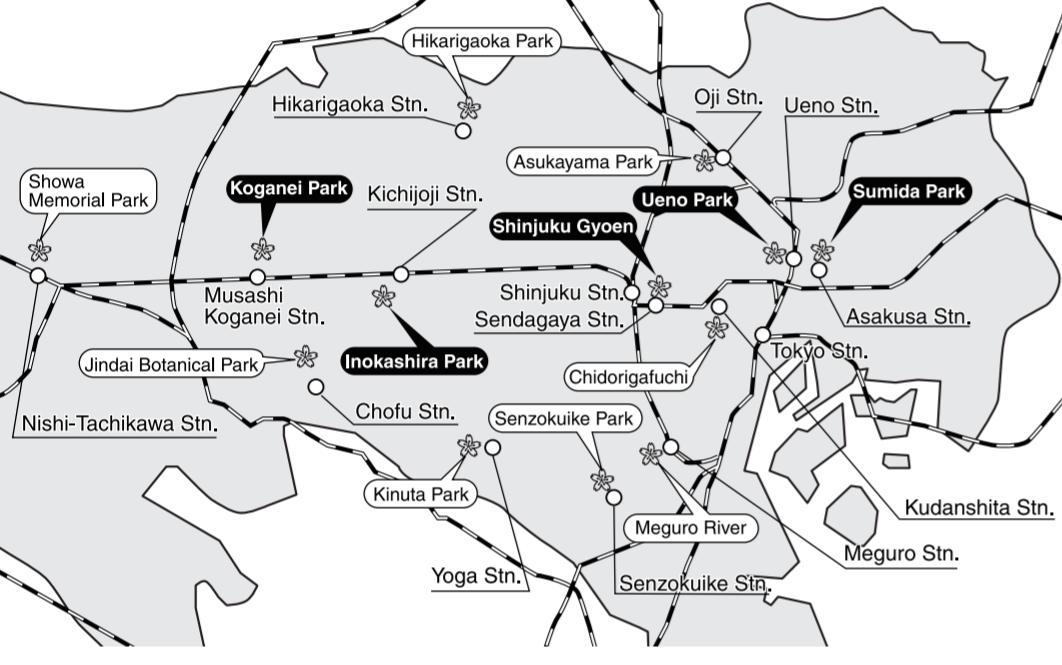
When you are looking for sake for your hanami, try to choose one in a pretty, "sakura"-motif bottle, and make sure it's a sake that tastes best when served "hiya (cold)" or at "jo-on (room temperature)," unless you have some means of making "kan (hot)" sake at the party site. The

best temperature for the sake is usually indicated on the label.



"Kanpai": A shop displays bottles of sake "suitable for 'hanami.'" In spring, many seasonal sake are released, often with cherry blossom-motif labels.

Major cherry blossom-viewing spots in Tokyo



Inside and out, new services cater to needs of all cherry-blossom fans

Wouldn't it be nice for once to sit back and enjoy your party with your guests without having to worry about whether everyone has enough to eat and drink or whether everyone is comfortable and having a good time?

If you are organizing a large party, a catering service can

it will also bring a totally different style to your hanami. Cold draft beer is served instead of cans of beer and hot, quality dishes instead of street food while you enjoy the cherry blossoms at a table instead of sitting on a tarp. You can even have a chef making sushi in front of you.

You can discuss with the shop over the phone or by e-mail exactly what you want depending on your budget. Dishes can be chosen from over 50 items, including cold and warm appetizers, salad, fish and meat dishes, pizzas and pastas, fruit and desserts, and more.

There are also packaged plans starting from ¥3,000 for less than 15 people (minimum order ¥35,000) and from ¥1,950 for a group of more than 15 people (minimum order ¥50,000). Drink sets can be chosen from three selections, each featuring beer and wine, "shochu" or wine and cham-

pagne.

The site setup and management fee is separate from the food and drinks. A delivery charge may be added depending on the area.

Call (03) 3795-4608 or visit www.banquetajin.com for more information.

If you love cherry blossom but cannot cope with the winterlike chill that often accompanies the hanami season or simply do not want to worry about whether it's going to rain, or securing a good spot for your party, maybe an indoor hanami is for you.

Some restaurants offer views of cherry blossom from windows and prepare special cherry-blossom courses. But Xen Bamboo Bar in Roppongi, Tokyo, goes one step further and has real cherry trees inside the restaurant. While guests enjoy the blossoms in the stylish and warm restaurant, a special "sakura"-motif course will be served in "ju-



Under cover: Xen Bamboo Bar in Roppongi, Tokyo, offers a stylish indoor "hanami."

bako" boxes, just like "hanami bento," the special boxed lunches people traditionally take with them when they go to view the blossoms.

The course is ¥5,000 per person, including two hours of unlimited drinks, and is available between March 23 and April 3, from 5 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. Xen Bamboo Bar is in Roppongi Hills, adjacent to Roppongi Station. For reservations, call (03) 5413-9577.



Catering to your needs: Some of the dishes Banqueta Jin can deliver to your "hanami" party site in and around Tokyo.

March 23 (Mon.) to April 3 (Fri.) - 5 p.m. ~ 10:30 p.m. (L.O.)

oh! HANAMI NIGHT'09

Indoor cherry blossom viewing?

If you plan a cherry blossom-viewing party this season, please come to XEN / Bamboo Bar. Real cherry trees will be at the restaurant! You can enjoy eating & drinking under the real cherry trees in the restaurant's stylish & warm atmosphere. We offer a Special OHANAMI Course (¥5,000 per person), including 2 hours' all-you-can-drink during the event. Food will be served in multi-tiered boxes.

Xen Bamboo Bar Tel: 03-5413-9577

5F West Walk in Roppongi Hills, 6-10-1, Roppongi, Minato-ku, Tokyo



Catered Flower-viewing Parties

What about a different style flower-viewing party? We serve cold fresh draft beer, warm and delicious French, Japanese, cuisine, etc. And clear the site afterward.

What about a stylish flower-viewing party with a message? How about giving only one present with your message through flowers? Your kindness will never be forgotten.

Before your eyes, a chef makes sushi in Tokyo or New York fashion for you. Another chef slices roast beef. And how about having freshly boiled pasta instead of "fried noodles?"

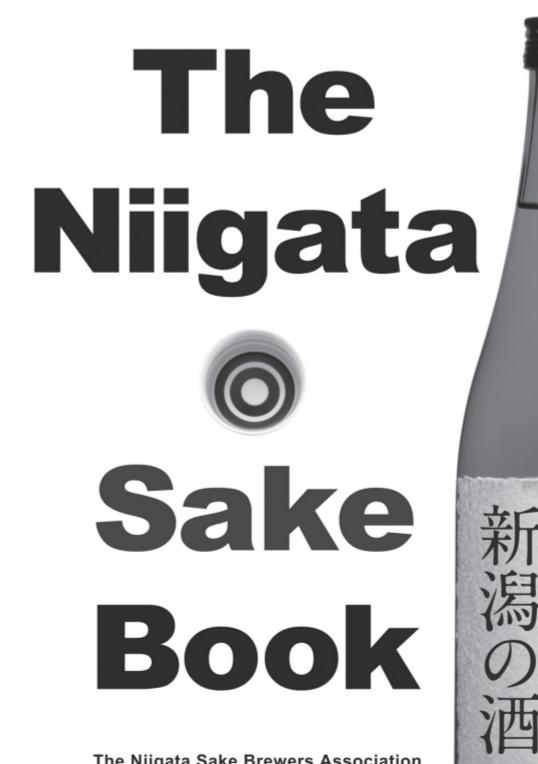
Banqueta Jin

4-39-8, Ikejiri, Setagaya-ku, Tokyo
Tel: 03-3795-4608 Fax: 03-3795-4665
<http://www.banquetajin.com>



The Niigata Sake Book

"The Niigata Sake Book" is an English translation of the Japanese (Niigata Sake Expert Textbook) and contains additional information for English-language readers.

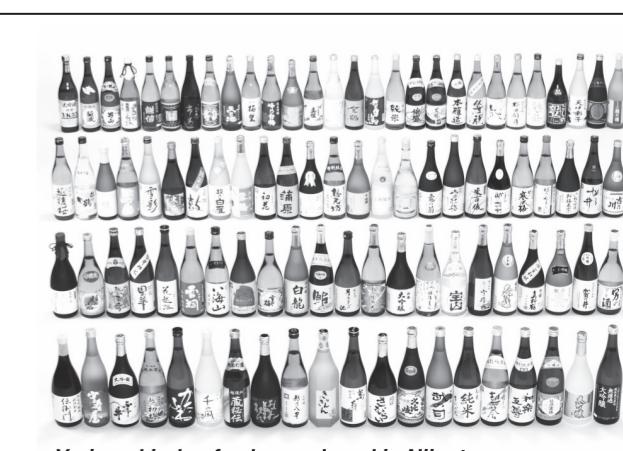
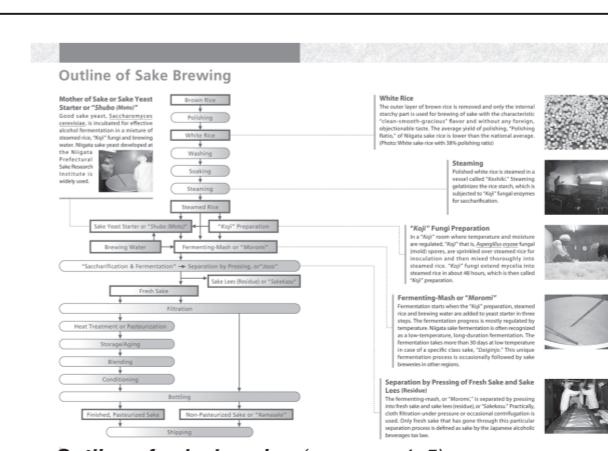


The Niigata Sake Brewers Association

- Color-page descriptions of 96 breweries in Niigata
- Easy-to-understand explanations of the sake-making process
- Contacts with Niigata's history and culture that has nurtured the development of quality sake
- A full menu of sake-related topics, such as "what food is good with sake?" and "why does sake have a fruity aroma despite being made from rice?"

Edited and supervised by:
The Niigata Sake Brewers Association

A-5 softcover, 128 pages, with 32 color gravure pages
¥2,100 (including tax) ISBN: 978-4-7890-1353-6



The Japan Times Publications Dept.

4-5 Shibaura, Minato-ku, Tokyo 108-0023
<http://bookclub.japantimes.co.jp/>