

Japan: Seasonal Series

April Cherry Blossom Viewing

The Japan Society with Katy Simpson (2019)



Cherry blossom (*sakura*) is often considered to be the symbol of spring in Japan. When delicate pink flowers come into bloom they mark the end of the harsh conditions of winter and show signs of the new life to come. The cherry blossoms are also said to represent the transience of human life since they only bloom for a couple of days before wilting and scattering their petals. Cherry blossom are also therefore viewed with a tinge of sadness in that something so beautiful can only last for such a short time. Over the centuries, many poets have been inspired by these tiny blooms and there are many poems and haiku reflecting the cherry blossom season.

Cherry blossom viewing is taken very seriously in Japan and the national weather forecasts will even give regular updates on which part of the country has the most flowers in bloom at any one particular time. Japanese people will celebrate the flowers by attending 'flower watching parties' or 'O hanami'. This generally involves sitting under the cherry blossom trees and enjoying a picnic with friends/family or colleagues.



This period also coincides with the school entrance ceremony, called *nyu-gaku-shiki* (入学式). This is a nervous time for most children although many look forward to it with eager anticipation. The welcoming ceremony for the new school year takes place around 5 April. Thus the start of school nearly always coincides with the opening of the cherry blossom flowers and these blooms have become a symbol that the new academic year is about to commence.