



Vancouver's Stanley Park is the scene for this rider last March. This year the 'Bike the Blossoms' route has yet to be announced.

Photo Credit: CP / Darryl Dyck

Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival begins

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The **Cherry Blossom Festival** gets underway in Vancouver today. The weather is cooperating with a balmy 12 degrees celsius under mostly sunny skies.

The blossoms have been a little delayed this year following the cool temperatures left over after a harsh winter in the region.

But for the next two weeks, people will enjoy the splendour of one of nature's crowning glories.

Vancouverites will witness the coming to life of the city's 43,000 cherry trees, from 54 cultivars.

Linda Poole is the woman behind the event, now in it's eleventh year.



A young skateboarder soars under the blossoms in downtown Vancouver in April 2011 © CP/Darryl Dyck

It was on a posting in Haiti, with her husband, a member of the Canadian Foreign Service, that Poole met the Japanese diplomat, Knobu-san.

He told her all about the long tradition of Sakura Festivals in Japan, when the blooming trees are celebrated and purposefully enjoyed.

During her time abroad, Poole had always missed the spring renewal in Vancouver and when she returned to the city, she began creating what is now recognised as one of the best garden festivals.

“There is no stranger under the cherry tree”

“In our universal response to their beauty, we are united. Especially during these times we must connect back to nature. Reminiscent of the famous Issa haiku, truly ‘there is no stranger under the cherry tree.’ The ephemeral nature of the blossoms reminds us to seize the moment and celebrate life now.” Poole has written on her web site.



A paradise for photographers, the trees are observed and experienced in many ways. There are more than 20 events, including walks, and bike tours, most of them free. Best of all perhaps, may be the simple practice of ‘Hanami’, or flower viewing.

The Japanese tradition of ‘flower gazing’ takes place under the trees, on a Vancouver innovation, the ‘petal mat’. This is a small tarp that that can unfold into a star pattern and zip up to others to connect and expand the picnic.

This year they have Cherry Blossom festival-curated lunch boxes to provide for the spontaneous experience.

The cherry trees that blossom today began with the 800 trees that Japan gave to the city of Vancouver during the 1930's.

Vancouver's festival would be a great destination for many in Eastern Canada. Newfoundland and Labrador are under a blizzard, and the city of Montreal is getting ready for another 10 cm of snow tomorrow.

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