

7 destinations to see the cherry blossoms in bloom

From traditional places such as Kyoto to cities like Edinburgh, your spring break is here

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Image Credit:

Few things can compare to the vista of seeing Mother Nature in bloom during springtime.

While thousands pack their bags annually to follow the turn of the season during the annual Cherry Blossom season, the travel industry goes a step further to cash in on the craze through a blitzkrieg of flight deals and tourism campaigns.



Visitors row boats past cherry blossoms in full bloom in Tokyo in this March 2018 file picture. Cherry blossom season is feverishly anticipated by locals and visitors alike.

Image Credit: AFP

The bouquet of Insta-worthy moments promised plays right into the narrative that Expedia describes in its annual overview of emerging travel trends. On its blog, the travel site explains: "It's important for destinations to understand the role of social media in travel – and their inherent opportunities."

For years, popular destinations such as Kyoto and Washington DC have successfully marketed the annual occurrence through a series of packaged holidays centred solely on chasing the bloom. Online hotel reservations provider Agoda offers up ideal cities to bring you that much closer to the festivities, while Airbnb goes a step further by offering opportunities to 'increase your Instagram followers and get more likes and comments' as well with add-ons to your itinerary such as cooking classes and immersive experiences during the spring break.

With the UAE approaching a two-week long sojourn for schools in less than a month, Gulf News tabloid! chases the bloom to bring you a guide to the hottest cities to catch the annual event.

Washington DC, US

The three-week-long National Cherry Blossom Festival celebrates the dawn of spring while honouring both American and Japanese cultures. The 3,000 trees that can be seen here are a symbol of friendship between the two countries and were gifted by Tokyo's then mayor, Yukio Ozaki, in 1912.

During the festival, the Washington DC tourism site advises the most popular place to visit the cherry blossom trees is at the Tidal Basin, which provides great photo ops near the Jefferson Memorial, Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial and the Martin Luther King, Jr Memorial.

The festive spirit is contagious as you stroll down the shoreline of the East Potomac Park, extending to Hains Point. The National Mall stretch, north of the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument, also has a few clusters that allows you to take in the vista minus the selfie sticks peppering the skyline.

When to visit: This year's National Cherry Blossom Festival takes place from March 20 until April 13.

Where to stay: Staying near the Tidal Basin is the ideal spot to explore the bloom. Agoda suggests staying at the The Hamilton-Washington DC, located in the arts and shopping district.

Kyoto, Japan

There is rarely a city that can match the magic of Kyoto when the cherry blossoms are in full bloom. The destination is also home to some of the best walking trails, including the Philosopher's Path, a canal lined with hundreds of sakura trees.

Allow your strolls to take you towards the city's Maruyama Park, the oldest in Kyoto, which is home to 680 cherry blossom trees, with its central weeping trees particularly famous. They are 87 years old (second generation cherry blossoms), according to Kyoto's official tourism site, with illumination lighting up the trees at night during the season.

When to visit: As per the latest forecast, the best time to view this year is between March 30 to April 7.

Where to stay: Hotels around the Maruyama Park such as the Gion Hatanaka Ryokan Kyoto offer a good base. Also consider areas near the Kamo-gawa River, where trees line up the banks, making it a perfect venue for a lazy afternoon stroll.

Jinhae, Changwon, South Korea

The Jinhae Gunhangje Festival attracts roughly two million visitors annually. Historically a memorial service to commemorate Admiral Yi Sun-sin, it is now South Korea's biggest spring festival.

Enjoy the festival by taking a stroll down the picturesque Romance Bridge, where cherry blossoms canopy the Yeojwacheon Stream, or head to the Gyeonghwa Station where the trees line the railway track.

When to visit: The best time to visit is late March to April.

Where to stay: The bus ride from Seoul to Jinhae is about four hours. You can choose to commute from the South Korean capital or stay close to the Gimhae Airport.

Edinburgh, Scotland

Pack a picnic and head to The Meadows in Edinburgh. Once you've laid claim to one of the benches along the tree-lined paths, you can take a breather and soak in the pink-hued scenery. Edinburgh's tourism site also recommends the Princes Street Gardens, while the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh opens the gates to gorgeous cherry blossom-lined walkways.



Edinburgh, Scotland - May 6, 2018: View of The Meadows, a large public park in central Edinburgh beside Edinburgh University on a sunny early evening in spring. The trees that line many of the footpaths and cycleways are in full bloom. Hundreds of folk are out on the grass enjoying the sunshine. In the foreground is a rather eclectic collection of chairs used by customers of the small cafe behind the shooting point.

Image Credit: Getty Images

When to visit: From late March to mid-April or even early May during some years.

Where to stay: Stay at the retro inspired Eden Locke apartment that's just a 10 to 15-minute walk to Edinburgh old town attractions, including the Edinburgh Castle and the Royal Mile.

Paris, France

Few places are as romantic and picturesque as the beloved City of Lights. Every spring, neighbourhoods and parks in the French capital are dotted with cherry blossoms. For prime viewing, take a stroll through Jardin du Palais Royal or even the Parc du Champ de Mars, set in the shadows of the world-renowned Eiffel Tower. Another viewing spot to consider is south of the famous Notre Dame Cathedral, where a fluff of pink flowers frame a picturesque setting.

When to visit: While there's isn't a firm forecast for the peak bloom, the magic usually happens between the last week of March, heading into mid-April.

Where to stay: The Shangri-La Hotel Paris, a former residence of Prince Roland Bonaparte and listed in the French 'Monuments Historiques'.

Tokyo, Japan

Kyoto may claim the crown for its sakura blooms, but Tokyo comes a close second. The popularity of Japan's capital city saw nearly 7,600 people from the UAE visited the country, up 11 per cent from 2017, according to the Japan National Tourism Organisation (JNTO).

For the spring experience, Airbnb recommends the Yanaka neighbourhood in Tokyo, an area known for Japanese sweets, tea and artisanal shops. Springtime, interestingly, sees Yanaka Cemetery bursting with expansive cherry blossom trees.

When to visit: For 2019, Tokyo's sakura blossoms are expected to start opening around March 21, with peak bloom around March 30 according to the latest forecast released.

Where to stay: Hotels around the Shinjuku Gyoen National Garden, one of the key places to catch the bloom is ideal.

Vancouver, Canada

The city is bursting with nearly 40,000 cherry blossom trees that bring a new shade to the British Columbia capital every spring. Vancouver's original 500 cherry blossom trees that were gifted in the 1930s by the mayors of Yokohama and Kobe are nestled in the Van Duses Botanical Gardens.

Don't miss out on a stroll through the Queen Elizabeth Park and Stanley Park for a stunning vista as well.

When to visit: The Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival runs from April 4 until April 28 with fairs, live music and a big picnic day. It is serious business for the Canadians.

Where to stay: Yew Street in Vancouver's Kitsilano neighbourhood is perfect setting to be close to the blooms.