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CELEBRATE SPRINGTIME

*Explore the nation's capital
with a floral festival unlike
any other*

BY SUSAN LANIER-GRAHAM

Washington, D.C. is much more than politics and what happens behind the closed doors of Capitol Hill and the Oval Office. One of the most iconic symbols of Washington, D.C. in the springtime is the cherry blossom tree. Celebrate the nation's heritage among the beautiful blooms during the month-long National Cherry Blossom Festival (www.nationalcherryblossomfestival.org), which runs from March 20 through April 16 this year.

History of the Trees

Cherry trees haven't always been a part of the District's landscape. In March 1912, Tokyo Mayor Yukio Ozaki transferred 3,000 cherry trees from the banks of Japan's Arakawa River to the banks of the Potomac as a gift to First Lady Helen Herron Taft.

Three short decades later, however, the U.S. found itself at war with Japan, and after some of the trees were cut down, the government started calling them "Oriental flowering cherry trees" to protect them. The ploy worked and the trees survived. Following the war, the trees became a symbol of renewed goodwill between the U.S. and Japan. In 1965, Japan gifted another 3,800 trees to Lady Bird Johnson.



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The gifts and annual celebration honor the lasting friendship between the U.S. and Japan.

National Cherry Blossom Festival

With so many flowering trees dotting the nation's capital city, it seems only appropriate to celebrate them. For four weekends stretching from mid-March through mid-April, millions of people come from around the world to celebrate the arrival of spring, marked by the trees' iconic pink blooms.

The festival is filled with events, most of which are free and open to the public. One of the most beautiful events is the



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Blossom Kite Festival held April 1, where attendees can watch kites flying in front of the Washington Monument. The Southwest Waterfront Fireworks Festival takes place during the final weekend with live music, food trucks, a beer garden and activities at the District Wharf, followed by fireworks.

Of course, simply ambling along the National Mall, strolling from the Capitol toward the Lincoln Memorial is an event in and of itself with the cherry blossoms in full bloom.

Luxury Lodging

The Mayflower Hotel, now part of Marriott's Autograph Collection, opened in the District more than 90 years ago and has been a landmark ever since. Now on the National Register of Historic Places, it has had some famous guests walk through its doors, including every U.S. president as well as visiting royalty and celebrities.

The Mayflower recently underwent a \$20 million renovation, and a stay there is an ideal central location during the Cherry Blossom Festival. The hotel is a few steps from the Metro, which delivers you right into the heart of the festival activities. Even walking through the marble lobby, which retains a touch of yesteryear, gives you an appreciation for the history of our country.