

## Heralding the Spring



Cherry Blossoms (*sakura*): Hirosaki Castle, Aomori Prefecture

The cherry blossom is the flower most representative of Japan, heralding the arrival of spring. Since ancient times, cherry blossom viewing has been one of the greatest pleasures of springtime for the Japanese. At this time of year, all Japan is obsessed with cherry blossoms. People track the “cherry blossom front line,” the map showing the geographic area where the cherry trees are in bloom, as the leading edge moves up the Japanese archipelago from south to north, dyeing the nation with the pale pink of spring. Hirosaki Castle, in the Tohoku region, is surrounded by beautiful cherry trees and renowned as one of the best settings in Japan to view these picturesque blossoms.



Carp Streamers (*koi nobori*): Tsuetate Onsen Hot Springs, Kumamoto Prefecture

Japan enjoys four distinct seasons. Various festivals throughout the year mark the turning of the seasons. One of these, the *tango no sekku* (Boys' Day Festival), is held on May 5 each year, when people wish for the health of male children. Households mark the occasion by hoisting carp streamers and displaying other traditional items in the home. In the gardens of Japanese homes, the colorful carp streamers flutter in the warm breeze against the blue sky, creating an image of spring. There are festivals at which many carp streamers are displayed, such as the one at Tsuetate Onsen in Kumamoto Prefecture where over 3,500 streamers are hung out each year as if swimming upriver.