

THE DELIGHTS OF SPRING, THE BLESSINGS OF SPRING

Cherry blossoms are known worldwide as a symbol of spring in Japan. But there are other attractions during this season that rival them. Tea and edible wild plants, which are essential to Japanese cuisine, are also springtime delights that many Japanese people love. Please enjoy spring in Japan not only with your eyes, but also with your taste buds.



TADAO KIMURA/AFLO

DELICACIES OF SPRING

Along with cherry blossoms, Japanese people look forward to the appearance of edible wild plants in spring. After the cold winter, plants sprout fresh buds offering the gifts of nature. They have had their admirers since long, long ago, appearing in poetry that is more than 1,200 years old. A diverse range of varieties grows in different climates and terrains, and in addition to being collected in the wild, today the plants are widely cultivated. Although they have a distinctive bitterness, the flavor of wild plants is also a characteristic of Japanese cuisine that makes it so tasty. While traveling throughout Japan, you can try dishes using the wild plants of each area.

MIYAJIMA IN BLOOM

Miyajima is a top tourist destination in Hiroshima Prefecture. An object of worship since ancient times, the island is home to a number of Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples. Itsukushima Shinto Shrine, said to be founded in the sixth century, has structures remaining from 1168, and has been inscribed as a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site. The large vermilion *torii* gate erected in the sea is a symbol of the island. Atop the nearby hill is a five-storied pagoda that stands about 28 meters high and contains a splendidly colorful interior. The island, retaining traditional streets and untouched virgin forest, is covered in cherry blossoms when they reach full bloom in spring. This May, the G7 Summit 2023 will be held in Hiroshima. MO PHOTOS/AFLO



TEA FIELD WITH MT. FUJI

Shizuoka is Japan's greatest tea-producing prefecture. Its more than 20 production areas account for about 40% of the country's tea plantations. Thanks to a warm climate and advanced technology, farmers can produce quality tea that people in many countries beyond Japan also enjoy. Running from April to May is the season of new tea—tea made from carefully hand-picked young tea leaves, offering a distinctively invigorating sweetness and fresh aroma. In the tea fields of the city of Fuji, you can have fun joining an organized tea-picking activity while gazing upon stunning Mt. Fuji, a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site and another of Shizuoka's attractions. KAZUO OGAWA/AFLO