

Cherry Blossoms in Hakone

Cherry blossom season is one of the most beautiful times of the year in Hakone. It usually comes around between late March and mid April, when several types of *sakura* trees burst into bloom throughout the area. One especially impressive spot for flower-viewing is the Haya River in Miyagino, where more than 100 trees planted along the water are illuminated at night with paper lanterns, adding to the festive atmosphere.

By Lake Ashi, the huge, almost 100-year-old Oshima cherry tree outside the Hakone-en Aquarium is worth the detour. Blooming in light pink and white, this tree was originally a group of saplings, brought over from the Izu peninsula south of Hakone and planted next to each other. Having found the local climate agreeable, in time they grew into one, forming the grand tree we see today.

In Hatajuku, two *yamazakura* (wild cherry) trees growing side by side appear to be reaching for each other's branches. This "embrace" has given them the name "Husband and wife cherry trees." The happy couple has the support of local residents and businesses, who tend to the trees' health throughout the year and are rewarded with the sight of vivid pink flowers every April.