



## OKINAWA WELCOMES JAPAN'S EARLIEST CHERRY BLOSSOM WITH SERIES OF EVENTS



*Left to right: Cherry blossom at Nakijin Castle, Nakijin Village and Okinawan cherry tree Hikanzakura*

**19 December 2022.** Okinawa is gearing up for the cherry blossom season with a series of events and festivals to welcome visitors keen to witness the earliest showing of this magical display. Thanks to its subtropical climate, the southernmost prefecture of Okinawa enjoys the earliest blooming cherry blossoms in the whole of Japan with some seen as early as mid-January, and they do not only arrive earlier but have a unique vibrant pink colour, darker than the shades seen elsewhere in Japan.

The most common cherry trees in Japan are the Yoshino Cherry (Somei-Yoshino) and the Yamazakura Hill Cherry, both enjoying a pale pink - almost white - colour when in bloom. Whilst these species can be found in the archipelago, the most common variety of cherry tree in Okinawa is the Hikanzakura, which have a dark pink petal. Additionally, cherry trees in the prefecture finish their bloom differently with its dark pink flowers falling almost intact to the ground as opposed to other varieties which lose their petals one by one... Okinawa offers a truly unique cherry blossom experience altogether!

The arrival of these beautiful and delicate flowers is a highlight of Japan's events calendar with various festivals taking place throughout the first months of the year. Here the Okinawa Convention and Visitors Bureau highlights some of the events due take place on the Okinawa Main Island in 2023:

### **Nakijin Cherry Blossom Festival (late January)**

From the 21-29 January, the ancient ruins of Nakijin Castle become the backdrop of the weeklong festivities. The UNESCO-listed 13th century castle is the second largest in Okinawa with more than 1.5 kilometres of walls, which during the festival are illuminated allowing visitors to enjoy the cherry blossoms also at night. An array of traditional Ryukyu arts and performances take place all week. Additionally, this is a site of great historical importance for the prefecture and, for those keen to learn more, [guided tours](#) are available from ¥3,000 (approx. £18). Further information about the event is available [here](#).

### **Nago Cherry Blossom Festival (late January)**

Held at the Nago Central Park, the Nago Cherry Blossom Festival is due to take place on January 28th and 29th. The highlight of this two-day event is the two-kilometre path lined with over 20,000 cherry blossom trees, a beautiful sight year-round, but extra special at this time of the year. This event also presents an opportunity for travellers to enjoy the traditional Okinawan dances of *eisa* and Ryukyu with performances scheduled to take place both days. Further details are available [here](#).

### **Naha Chura Cherry Blossom Festival (early February)**

In February, Manko Lake Park, in the capital Naha, will host a one-day event (date is to be confirmed) with traditional dance performances and local food stalls to welcome the blooms. The approx. 400 trees at the park are at full bloom all month so visitors can celebrate their very own cherry blossom festival throughout February. The well-known [Kokusai-dori Street](#) is walking distance from the park and offers a 1.6-kilometre stretch of stores, restaurants, bars and sightseeing options to enjoy before and/or after taking a relaxing stroll at the park. Further details about the event are available [here](#).

Additionally, from January to May, Okinawa also sees the bloom of a myriad of many other flowers and celebrates the [Okinawa Flower Carnival](#), which takes place in different shapes and forms throughout the prefecture with highlights including the Higashi Village Azalea Festival, the Ie Island Lily Festival, and the Okinawa Bougainvillea Fair.

For further information about Okinawa, please visit: <https://visitokinawajapan.com/>

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### **About Okinawa:**

Japan's southernmost prefecture, Okinawa, comprises 160 subtropical islands boasting a year-round warm climate comparable to Hawaii, Miami and Cancun. Just 3 hours by air from Tokyo and blessed with incredible natural beauty, from lush forests to crystal blue waters with abundant coral and golden sands, Okinawa is perfect for beach lovers and sport enthusiasts alike whilst still appealing to culture seekers thanks to its unique history and heritage.

Using the bountiful fresh produce its natural environment produces, Okinawa's culinary culture is also unique and is believed to be a key factor in Okinawa's status as one of five longevity hotspots in the world.

*For further media information and images contact:*

*Be Okinawa – UK & Ireland Representative, Laura Boo: E: [laura@humewhitehead.co.uk](mailto:laura@humewhitehead.co.uk) / T: +44 (0) 203 375 4056*