

# GLOBAL WARMING SHORTENS CHERRY BLOSSOM SEASON AND AFFECTS TOURISM IN JAPAN



The Empire of the Rising Sun has surpassed its pre-COVID-19 tourism figures. In February 2024, the country welcomed 2.79 million travelers, higher than the inbound tourist numbers of 2019.

Global warming hurts Japan's beloved cherry blossom season, attracting millions of tourists each year. Rising winter temperatures have delayed the blossoms' opening and shortened their blooming phase. **As a result, the ancient Japanese tradition of hanami, or cherry blossom viewing, is becoming a shorter experience.**

The cherry blossoms bloom earlier and for shorter periods due to global warming. Since 1953, the blooming period has advanced by 1.2 days per decade, according to Daisuke Sasano, head of climate risk management at the Japan Meteorological Agency. This trend has profound economic implications for Japan, as many cities rely heavily on tourism revenue during cherry blossom season.

"The blooming of the Japanese cherry tree is expected to occur on March 25, 2024, which is earlier than it has in the past 1,212 years due to the mildness of spring," wrote agroclimatologist Serge Zaka on X (former Twitter). According to the researcher, there have only been eight March blooms in the past 1,200 years, occurring once every 150 years. However, since 2020, the cherry trees have bloomed every year. Zaka relied on a graph of data on Kyoto cherry tree blooms, which has been maintained by the Japanese since the year 812. In 2021, the Japanese cherry trees bloomed on March 26, a record high for full bloom. Zaka believes climate change is responsible for the earlier blooming of the cherry trees.

The earlier blooming of the cherry trees means that their growth cycles have been altered. Japanese cherry trees need a certain number of "cold hours" during their winter rest to grow and flourish like other trees. Without this cooling, the growth of buds and their hatching are negatively affected. This can lead to an increase in flower fall, and their production may become more modest over a shorter period.

**Many people visit Japan in the spring to watch the cherry blossoms bloom.** The blossoming period is becoming shorter, which could hurt tourism in Japan, specifically in destinations where the cherry blossoms generate economic benefits. According to a study by Kansai University in Osaka, the cherry blossom season brought in over €4 billion in 2023 for Japan, out of the €33 billion that tourism brought in that year. This is a significant share for the country, as it is becoming an increasingly attractive tourist destination. In December 2023 alone, Japan welcomed a record-breaking 2.73 million travelers.

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