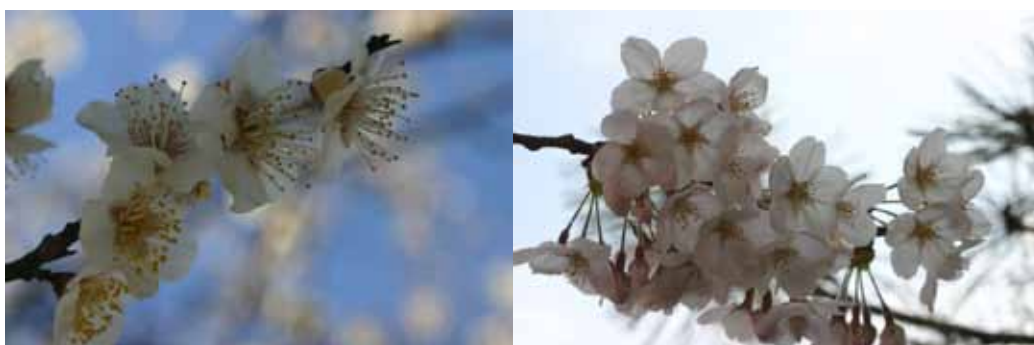

Flowers in Japan

- Christine Banerjee

It has been nine years for me to live in Tokyo. Before coming to Japan I thought that Sakura (Japanese cherry blossom) is the only flower I wanted to see in Japan. Over the years, I found that I had missed a lot of chances to see many other types of beautiful flowers in Japan and now, I try to be on the lookout for places to see different kinds of flowers. Here are some of my favorites.

Can you tell the difference between cherry blossom (sakura) and plum flowers (ume no hana)?



They look very similar, right? I could not tell them apart before I learned to look for the minor differences. The photo on the left is a photo of plum flowers (taken at Mogusaen on the Keio line) which you will see has flowers flowering on the main branch and you can see the stamens clearly in each flower. In addition, the flower buds are more numerous and longer in case of plum flowers compared to the buds of the cherry blossom. Plum flower season in Tokyo is between January to February.

The photo on the right is that of cherry blossoms (taken near Sophia University at Yotsuya on the JR Chuo line). You will see that cherry blossom flowers are also growing on the sub branches – this is something that does not happen usually in the case of plum flowers. So from next year onwards, when you see white or pink flowers, try to look a closer look to see if you can distinguish between plum and cherry blossom flowers!

Boats and flowers, anyone?



When the flower season arrives, taking a boat to do the flower watching is quite popular in many areas. Seeing the flowers growing on land from the water gives you a different view of the flowers compared to the view that you can get from the land and being on a boat is often a lot of fun. Boats and flowers come in various styles. Some places, like the Sawara Water Plant Park in Chiba (left photo) try to recreate a bit of history by having a lady dressed up in old-style costume to show you the park and tell you the story of that area. The flowers in the photo are iris. Incidentally, this park is the biggest iris park in Japan with more than 400 kinds of iris being grown. The peak season is from the middle of April until the end of June. You may not believe it, but there are 150 million flowers growing there during the season!

The photo on the right was taken at Chidorigafuchi in the Kudanshita (Hanzomon Line) area during

the sakura (cherry blossom) season. After you enter the famous “sakura tunnel” at Chidorigafuchi, walk past the Indian Embassy and keep walking straight. You will eventually reach a boat house where you can rent boats that you can row yourself in the moat and enjoy viewing the tunnel of flowers from the outside. Try to go early as in the peak season you may have to wait for a couple hours to rent a boat! If you do not have that much time it is still fun enough to see people on the boats as you walk slowly through the sakura tunnel. You too may want to compose a photo with the pink and white sakura, the green water of the moat and the blue boats with happy smiling people rowing them!

How many colors of Wisteria (fuji no hana) do you know?



Doesn't the purple wisteria on the left look like one of the trees in the movie Avatar? When I saw this big tree-like vine, I was very surprised and could not believe that it is one single vine with such beautiful flowers and without any leaves. Actually, wisteria smells like grapes and for a moment you may forget that they are flowers and may really want to eat them! I felt like I was on another planet! This wisteria trellis is in the Ashikaga Flower Park in Tochigi and is the biggest wisteria in Japan covering more than 1000 square meters and still growing. It is 140 years old. It is said that this wisteria is one of the most beautiful wisterias in the world.

Besides the purple wisteria, there are white (middle photo) and yellow ones (photo on the right) too. There is even a tunnel of white wisteria. The tunnel is about 80 meters long and full of white flowers that smell very sweet. They also have a yellow wisteria tunnel that is 80 meters long. This wisteria park is perhaps my favorite and after going there I often tell my family and friends that they have to go there at least once in their lives!

The season for wisteria is from the middle of April to May but the park has many different kinds of flowers growing throughout the year.

Cycling around Poppy fields?



For those of you who do not want to travel far from Tokyo, you could consider going to a place close by like Showa Memorial Park in Tachikawa (JR Chuo Line). Showa Memorial Park used to be an air field

but now has many types of flowers growing through the seasons. For example, if you go in April, you may be able to enjoy some lovely poppy flowers. Poppy flowers have different colors, e.g. red, white, yellow and orange although red is probably the most common.

In other seasons you can see tulips, cherry blossoms (sakura), azaleas (tsutsuji), peony (botan) and cosmos. The park has lots of open spaces where you can have a picnic and there is also a small lake. You can rent bicycles to go around the park or even rent a swan boat to go around the lake.

Tulip – is this the Netherlands or Japan?



Absolutely, it is Japan! These photographs were taken at Hokkaido, Kamiyubetsu Tulip Park in May. There are 120 different kinds of tulips and in total 120 million flowers growing in the park. I have never been to any tulip park in the Netherlands yet but this tulip park is very impressive. I believe it is the biggest tulip park in Japan with a total area of 12.5 hectares.

Since the park covers a very large area, besides walking around you can consider taking the park shuttle bus to watch the flowers as the shuttle bus drives around the park. Not only that, you may also take a helicopter ride inside the park and see the whole view of the park up from the sky!

Phlox (shibazakura) – Have you ever seen pink hills?



You might have seen phlox in Tokyo or somewhere around Tokyo. However, if you want to see two big hills of pink color then a trip to Hokkaido, Higashimokoto Shibazakura Park is recommended. This is not just a field of flowers but two entire hills full of flowers! The phlox flower season is from April to mid-June. The flowers actually have different colors like white, pink, purple and red. Each flower is very small with a diameter of only 1.5 cm but when they flower together they cover the entire hill. Walking on the pathways between the flower beds make you feel like you are in a dream!

Why don't you too search for flowers near and far and share your thoughts with friends and family over a cup of chai?