

# Cherry Blossom Time

Dear Sammy,

How are you? Is there still snow where you live? Where I live here in Japan, we get snow in the mountains in wintertime. But the snow is almost gone. Cherry trees are starting to flower now! I think there is nothing as pretty as a cherry tree in spring.

Each spring, we wait for the cherry blossoms to come out. There are four main islands of Japan: Kyushu, Shikoku, Honshu, and Hokkaido. Kyushu is in the farthest south, so cherry blossom time starts there and moves north. Announcers on the television news programs show us how the cherry blossom "front" is coming north, as if they are talking about some snowstorm. It is very exciting! When the cherry trees start to bloom, schoolchildren leave the classrooms and go to the parks. We sketch, paint, and have picnics under the cherry trees. Families and co-workers also take time to gather under the blossoms. We call this time *ohanami*. *O* means "honourable", *hana* means "flower", and *mi* means "to see".

When the cherry blossom front comes to the countryside around my town, it is like pale pink snow on the trees. After a while, the pink snow falls to the ground in the breeze. Cherry blossom time lasts such a short time – maybe that's why we love it so much.

I recently found out there are also many cherry trees in Vancouver and Washington, D.C. So they should have cherry blossom time, too. Do you have cherry blossom time where you live, Sammy? Why don't you come to Japan someday and see the beautiful blossoms with me and my family?

Your pen pal,

Kiyoka

