

# Vancouver chefs serve up the flavours of Sakura Festival at gala dinner

To many Vancouverites, the annual Cherry Blossom Festival (Sakura Festival), is an opportunity to see, snap and share photos of the bountiful cherry blossoms on display all around the city.

**ALEESHA HARRIS**

More from Aleesha Harris

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Chef Ken Nakano of the Shangri-La Hotel Vancouver is pictured enjoying sakura blossoms in Japan. PNG



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## Sakura Night Gala

When: April 22 | Doors Open at 6:30 p.m.

Where: Stanley Park Pavilion, 610 Pipeline Rd.

Tickets and info: \$160 plus tax; [ycbf.ca](http://ycbf.ca)



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To many Vancouverites, the annual [Cherry Blossom Festival](#) (Sakura Festival), is an opportunity to see, snap and share photos of the bountiful cherry blossoms on display all around the city.

But, to others, the sakura season represents that and so much more.

"As sakura season is so short, it symbolizes the impermanence of life, and relates to Japanese philosophy of 'mono no aware' (the pathos of things)," chef Ken Nakano of Market by Jean-Georges at the Shangri-La Hotel, Vancouver, says.

"This time of year is a reminder to be more introspective and appreciate what we have in the moment."



For Nakano, observing the Japanese custom of hanami, or "flower viewing," affords him an opportunity to pause and reconnect with his culture. And, this sakura season, Nakano rounded up his family and headed back to Japan in order to experience the festival in full force.

"It (was) truly magical for us to all be in Japan during hanami season," he says. "We had the opportunity to visit my grandmother's peaceful mikan orange farm in Wakayama, travelled to Osaka, Hiroshima and Kyoto, and then finished with the crazy hustle and bustle of Tokyo. While it was a lot of ground to cover, we were able to experience hanami in several cities and truly appreciate how everyone celebrates this cycle of nature."

Nakano says the trip gave him a greater appreciation for nature, and afforded him a stronger connection to his family's heritage.

"Japan as a nation shares a collective pride and dedication for tradition; it's ingrained in Japanese culture and never ceases to inspire me," he says.



Visitors view cherry blossom trees as they relax on Mount Yoshino on April 3, 2018 in Yoshino, Japan. The town of Yoshino in Nara Prefecture has become famous throughout Japan for the thousands of cherry trees that blossom in the spring, covering the slopes of Mount Yoshino and nearby hillsides. The cherry blossom is deeply symbolic in Japan, it only lasts for around one week and marks the beginning of spring. It draws millions of visitors to picturesque blossom sites around the country and is mapped by meteorological agencies as the blossom spreads north from Okinawa with the warmer spring weather. CARL COURT / GETTY IMAGES

"The appreciation for 'mono no aware' is far greater there. The entire country celebrates the impermanence that this fleeting floral beauty symbolizes, and everyone takes this time of year to reflect and appreciate the pathos of things."

It's an appreciation he hopes to convey bite to attendees at the Sakura Night Gala on April 22. Nakano will join and a handful of other Vancouver chefs who will create Asian-fusion dishes at the Stanley Park Pavilion.

The evening will also include drink pairings curated by Vij's mixologist Jay Jones and a full culinary roster including chef Taka Omi of Benkei Ramen, presenting Tori-Shio Ramen with Cherry Blossom paired with a pick from Stanley Park Brewing; chef Nathan Lowey of Dosanko presenting spring harusame noodle salad and sakura onigiri paired with a pick from Powell Brewery; chef Masayoshi Baba of Masayoshi presenting albacore tuna and sakura mochi paired with a pick from Fujiyama Imports; chef Will Lew of Notch8 Restaurant & Bar presenting venison-wasabi leaf smoked cherry tartare, maple kuromitsu cured quail yolk and more, paired with a pick from Hugging Tree Winery; chef Nobu Ochi of Zen Japanese Restaurant will prepare bao buns paired with a pick from Lunessence Winery; and James Coleridge of James' Gelato will present salted sakura gelato and ume wine sorbetto for dessert.

GALLERY:

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"I like supporting our Vancouver Japanese community whenever I can. Vancouver is where I choose to raise my family and it is important to keep the Japanese tradition," Masayoshi says.

"Sakura Night is also a night when me and my fellow chef friends get together and work hard for a great cause. And the after party with some cold beer is always nice!"

Proceeds from the dinner will go toward the non-profit [Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival](#), which works to fund cultural festivals and community arts and engagement throughout the city.

"I hope they will learn more about this beautiful season through our food," Masayoshi says. "It is a season where we all gather and celebrate."

For the meal, Masayoshi says he was inspired by the predominant hue of the festival, pink.

"I used spring colours and seasonal ingredients to create the two dishes," he explains.

Masayoshi will be serving tuna, with the sakura flowers being represented by albacore tuna, fresh bamboo represented by zucchini, and soil being plated in the form of maitake mushrooms.

Nakano looked to his family's culinary creations as a main source of inspiration for the dishes.

"With this Japanese-Western menu, there were multiple sources of inspiration," he says. "I relied on childhood memories of my mother's cooking, wanted to incorporate authentic Japanese products, and always get excited about showcasing the bounty from our local producers."

"My favourite is the saikyo miso sablefish. The sablefish from [Gindara](#) is sustainably raised on the West Coast of Vancouver Island, and the miso from Kyoto is truly the best combination of local and imported ingredients, and the perfect way to showcase this classic flavour."

In addition to the Sakura Night Gala dinner, Nakano will be offering a special five-course Rooted in Heritage tasting menu through April 30 at [Market by Jean-Georges](#) for \$110 per person, intended to further showcase his appreciation for the festival.



A selection of dishes from the Rooted in Heritage tasting menu created by Chef Ken Nakano of Market by Jean-Georges at the Shangri-La Hotel in Vancouver. LILLIA KWOK

"I want to continue the tradition of offering a sakura-inspired menu at the restaurant, and promote hanami within our community," he explains of the special menu, which includes salmon onigiri with ikura and genmaicha, cold smoked Yesso scallop and creamy matcha castella.

"With our Rooted in Heritage menu, we are showcasing the finest ingredients both of our countries have to offer.

"Sharing these special dishes during this sakura season is a wonderful way to show our tradition and appreciation for one and other and mono no aware."