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## Japanese spring traditions are in the air at the Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival

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With cherry-blossom viewing being a national pastime in Japan, it's not at all surprising that many Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival events have a Japanese connection that goes beyond the ritual singing of "Sakura, Sakura". (A title that, by the way, translates as "Cherry Blossoms, Cherry Blossoms".) Take, for example, the Cherry Jam Downtown Concert at Burrard Station next Thursday (April 5). Yes, the event will feature the Vancouver Chinese Music Ensemble (with

erhu virtuoso Ji Rong Huang), pianist Ken Cormier, and the appropriately ecumenical Sound Eclectic choir, but its dramatic highlight will almost certainly be the collaboration between shakuhachi master Alvin Ramos and Richmond's Tetsu Taiko drum troupe.

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Japanese heritage is built into the VCBF's Sakura Night Gala, at the Stanley Park Pavilion on April 22. Your \$160 ticket will allow you to sample the creations of eight top chefs and mixologists, several of them of Japanese or Japanese-Canadian descent. Among the delights on offer will be gourmet ramen and sushi; harusame noodle salad; savoury mochi with duck and shiitake mushrooms; a venison, wasabi-leaf, and smoked-cherry tartare; a wild knotweed dish; and, for dessert, sake macarons.

And then there's the Sakura Days Japan Fair, at VanDusen Botanical Garden on April 14 and 15, which looks rather like the Powell Street Festival, were that annual celebration of Japanese culture magically transported to a more scenic, if less historically significant, location. Under the garden's plentiful cherry trees you'll be able to sample Japanese festival foods; hear Kohei Honda and Keita Kanezashi perform on Tsugaru shamisen and percussion; experience several different forms of Japanese dance; and get up close—but not too close—to hand-crafted samurai armour and weaponry.

Of course, we won't judge those who opt to grab a Hershey's Cherry Blossom chocolate and scarf it down under a neighbourhood tree, but with so many other floral options to choose from, why not explore?

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