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A Vancouver picnic inspired by the cherry blossoms

The ephemeral nature of cherry blossoms is celebrated at the annual Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival every March and April with petal picnics and more.





Linda Poole is the founder and executive director of the Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival.
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By **JENNIFER BAIN** Travel Editor
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VANCOUVER — Under a brilliant canopy of cherry blossoms, on interlocking petal mats that say, “There is no stranger under the cherry tree,” we tuck into pretty, pink bento boxes and gamely ignore the dreary skies and drizzle of rain.

It’s picnic time at the [Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival](#) and [Cocktails and Canapés is catering](#). The Blossom Bliss box has Ocean Wise sockeye salmon sushi plus furikake-seasoned chicken baguettes with miso-marinated slaw, pickled cucumbers and Sriracha-Japanese mayo. The

vegetarian/gluten-free Sakura V box has avocado sushi plus colourful tofu-and-veg rice paper rolls. There's kale and soba salad with each meal, plus rose-petal white-chocolate squares.

But Linda Poole, resplendent in a pink sweater and scarf, her lips and nails splashed with pink, only has eyes for the trees here in Queen Elizabeth Park. "Look at the blossoms," she says with a blissed-out grin. "I mean, it's gorgeous."

Poole started this festival in 2006, after living abroad with her Canadian Foreign Service husband, pining for cherry blossom season and learning about Japan's sakura festivals while posted in Haiti and then returning to Vancouver.

"A lot of people said this was a festival waiting to happen," Poole says, pointing out that Japan gifted the B.C. city with cherry trees in the 1930s and there are now 43,000 of them. "It just ignited everyone's love for the trees."

The only catch is that the festival depends on temperamental **spring** weather every March and April. The 54 cultivars of the ornamental cherry tree bloom at their own pace, so the timing is always tricky. Most festival events are free, [like the picnic](#), Bike the Blossoms, tree talks/walks and **Spring** Lights Illumination. Big shebangs, like the Sakura Days Japan Fair and Sakura Night Gala, are ticketed.

As I slurp my matcha and cherry blossom shake and munch on caramel corn with toasted white and black sesame seeds, I think about how Japan and Washington, D.C., are well known for their cherry blossoms, but how even Canadian cities like Toronto and Vancouver have enough trees to create celebrations.

Poole's dream, I learn, is that grassroots block parties will take off to celebrate the blossoms. "The beauty of the blossoms is indescribable. After winter, there are no leaves and the blossoms just emerge from these sticks. Like our lives, they're so fleeting, so you have to capture the moment."

Jennifer Bain (jbain@thestar.ca) was hosted by Tourism Vancouver and Destination B.C., which didn't review or approve this story.

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