

How to Enjoy Hokkaido

How to enjoy Hokkaido on the cheap! Tips for visitors from abroad!



Plum blossom perfection

Japanese have long celebrated the *junban-ni* (orderly) blooming of flowers. Each new variety is admired with poetry, painting, *kisetsu-no-ryori* (seasonal dishes), and even festivals. This can be seen in Honshu, especially with the *ume* (plum blossom) season that generally occurs in February and the well-known *sakura* (cherry blossom) season that is generally in late March to mid-April. In contrast, after a long Hokkaido winter when springtime finally arrives, there seems to be a sudden rush of flowers *ippen-ni* (all at once) blooming. In Sapporo, *ume* generally bloom around the beginning of May, almost at the same time as *sakura*. With good timing and luck, visitors to Hokkaido can experience viewing both cherry blossoms and plum blossoms! Actually, the expression “plum blossom” can cause some confusion because it does not refer to the plum that is eaten as a fruit. In fact, *ume* is a *kotonaru-tane* (distinct species) of Asian plum tree which is related to both the plum tree and the *apurikotto* (apricot) tree. In English, this tree is called Chinese plum or Japanese apricot, but its flower is usually called plum blossom. Leaving this confusion aside, where can visitors to Hokkaido go to experience *ume* viewing? One well-known spot is Hiraoka Kooen (park), located 11 km southeast of central Sapporo. The 66.4-hectare park is divided into two areas, mainly with sports facilities in the eastern area and *shinrin-chitai* (woodlands) in the western area. This contains a 6.5-hectare *bairin* (plum grove) that is a symbol of the park. Hiraoka Park's *bairin* contains about 1,200 trees of the Bungo variety, about 40% of which have red blossoms and 60% of which have pale pinkish-white blossoms. The blossoms, especially those of the white *ume*, have a very sweet and pleasant *kaori* (fragrance), adding to the visitors' enjoyment. The *ume* trees in Hiraoka Park usually bloom around May 8, lasting for about two weeks. Of course, the exact date varies depending on the weather—and climate change. Temporary kiosks are set up while the trees are in bloom, and every year a huge number of visitors come to enjoy the late spring in Hokkaido. Hopefully, you will be able to join them!

J

花の美しさと香りが楽しめる「梅の花見」で、北海道の春を満喫しよう。

北海道もようやく花見の季節。運が良ければ桜と梅の両方の花見が体験できます。梅の花見スポットで有名なのは、札幌中心部から南東11kmに位置する「平岡公園」。6.5ヘクタールの敷地に約1,200本の梅の木が植えられており、約6割が淡いピンクがかった白い花、約4割が赤い花を咲かせます。色の美しさだけでなく芳醇な香りも楽しめるため、開花期間中は多くで約20万人が来園します。特に白梅の香りが強く、満開になると梅林内が甘い香りに包まれます。開花時期は例年5月8日前後で期間は2週間ほど。梅の花とともに限定の「梅ソフトクリーム」もおすすめです。今年は北海道の遅い春を平岡公園で満喫しませんか？

文＝米坂スザンヌ(米国カリフォルニア生まれ、フランス語学士、英語修士。1983年から札幌在住。北海学園大学人文学部名誉教授。)

Born in California, Suzanne Yonesaka received her BA in French and her MA in English, and has lived in Sapporo continuously since 1983. She is professor emerita in the Faculty of Humanities at Hokkai-Gakuen University.