



東京の桜

Tokyo no Sakura

Cherry blossoms of Tokyo

Best spots & photography tips

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With almost 3 decades of collective experience shooting photos and videos around Japan, we thought that our sheer wealth of knowledge and extensive stock of pictures would make for an ideal basis to write a first guide to anyone who wants to enjoy the beauty of Japanese cherry trees (*sakura*). This guide naturally covers the most popular spots but also a number of secret ones, usually free of tourists.

Although widely spread in the Northern hemisphere, the sakura tree is nowhere as important as it is in Japan, where it holds the status of national flower. The abrupt transience of its blossoms, the delicate and ephemeral beauty of its flower has led Japan to associate the sakura tree with mortality and is therefore richly symbolic. The sakura flower can indeed be found in many aspects of the daily life in Japan: from the 100 yen coins, to dishware as well as on Kimonos.

All sakura trees are not made equal and, believe it or not, there are 200 different types of sakura trees in Japan! They differ by the flowering period, number of petals and each variety features flowers with a unique shape and colour, which ranges from white - often seen in Tokyo - to a deep pink. There is even a more yellowish variety known as the *ukon* family of sakura.

We hope that this first guide dedicated to the Tokyo area, will help you enjoying sakura trees and perhaps discover new spots to practice the Japanese art of hanami: cherry blossom viewing. Our photo tips should also help you to capture in the best possible way this unique time marking the beginning of spring in Japan. Please do not hesitate to contact us if your favourite spot is not on the list.

Gonzague Gay-Bouchery, Pierre Caillault, Benoist Sébire



Koishikawa Korakuen Gardens

小石川後樂園

The place

Founded in 1629, Koishikawa Kōrakuen is one of Tokyo's oldest parks, and as such offers several varieties of sakura trees including the early blooming weeping trees often featured in landscape miniatures mimicking famous Japanese locations.

Like Koganei Park, Koishikawa Kōrakuen features both plum and sakura trees, which will allow you to take pictures of blooming trees from early March to early April.

Please note that a small area of the park is currently under renovation and this will continue at least until the end of 2016.

Pro photo tips

This garden has many big sakura trees planted here and there. The main interest of the park is to display them in a variety of decors, all exceptionally Japanese-looking. Moreover, ladies in kimono often come to watch the blossoms during this period.

In order to catch this specific atmosphere, explore the park first (it is not so big) and find the scenery you like. Then use a standard zoom lens, between 35mm and 50mm, to frame the blossoms, a part of the garden, possibly some water (there is plenty), and hopefully a lady in a kimono to make your shot a Japanese cliché. If possible try to avoid the middle of the day, since the light is usually too harsh and will bleach the picture. Right after the opening, or a little after 16:00 will offer the best light, remembering that the park closes rather early.

A few more things...

Access: Korakuen Station (Marunouchi, Namboku Lines)
Entrance fees: ¥300
Opening time: 09:00 - 16:30 except on Monday

Kids friendly: yes (not too big)
Food stalls: yes (one)
Picnic: no







Shakuji River

石神井川

The place

The Shakuji river is located in the northern part of Tokyo. The interesting part of it (from an hanami perspective), stretches from the JR Oji station to the location where it crosses the motorway near Itabashi Honcho.

This is an almost 4km walk along the river, which you can also cover by bicycle. Along the river you will find grassy areas - ideal for a hanami picnic - and playgrounds - if you plan to visit it with kids. Scattered food stalls will keep you full with snacks and drinks.

This river is not as famous as for instance Meguro, but it offers a similar layout, minus the crowds. It is a really special spot, which takes roughly a day to enjoy properly.

Pro photo tips

This walk offers a unique opportunity to shoot «dreamlike clichés». The river is often narrow, and the sakura branches are long enough to cover it entirely in some places, producing a white canopy, thick and dense, through which colourful bridges occasionally emerge. Shooting through the blossoms, aiming at the bridges makes for really wonderful shots, in which people seem to walk upon some kind of sakura clouds. A telephoto lens will be perfect for this spot. To make those creamy «cotton» shots, 135mm seems to be a minimum requirement. The sweet spot is between 200mm and 300mm. In order to increase the «cotton» effect, use your lens wide open, or opened enough to have a good bokeh, at least in the foreground. The best part for this is between the French school and the motorway.

A few more things...

Access: Oji (JR Line)
Entrance fees: none
Opening time: 24h

Kids friendly: long walk, but playgrounds and picnics
Food stalls: yes (not many)
Picnic: yes







Edogawa Koen

江戸川区公園

The place

This little park is an excellent choice for a family hanami. Not too famous, and invisible from the street, the park is accessed through a little walkway along the river. After a while you will reach a big playground with slides and swings.

Here you can rest, let the kids play, and have a hanami picnic. Usually two food stalls (yatai) are opened during this season, selling simple snacks such as sausages and steamed soy beans (edamame). Since it is unknown to most tourists, this location is a very local one, with ladies in kimono often coming to enjoy the blossoms.

At dusk a beautiful set of pink and white paper lanterns is lit, adding again to the charm of the location.

Pro photo tips

Although quite small compared to the bigger parks mentioned in this guide, it offers many interesting sights for a camera addict.

Ideally you should bring two different lenses: a telephoto (200mm and above) and a standard focal one (35~50mm). The telephoto will be useful for the lanterns in the cherry blossoms: the long focal can isolate one or two lanterns, losing the others in a very colourful bokeh. It can also capture the ladies in kimono who can be seen strolling around the park. Since the park is usually free of tourists, they might be reluctant to be photographed, so a little bit of distance may help. The standard focal lens will help you catch the local ambiance of the place. Towards the end of the season, it will also give yours shots a snowy effect.

A few more things...

Access: Edogawabashi (Yurakucho Line)
Entrance fees: none
Opening time: 24h

Kids friendly: yes, yes and yes !
Food stalls: yes
Picnic: yes



Kitanomaru Koen

北の丸公園

The place

Located on the other side of the moat of Chidorigafuchi is Kitanomaru Koen. The park opened to the public in 1969 and features sakura trees worth visiting. Unlike the Chidorigafuchi moats, this park allows people to enjoy hanami parties as well as a direct access to Tokyo's National Museum of Modern Art.

The park has a main yard with a few sakura trees along the pond and many others at the back of the park. Do not hesitate to explore a little bit. You can sit on the grass and eat while kids play around, but please note they may not be allowed to use balls or others items, like frisbees, that could harm others. There are no food stalls in this park, but there is a restaurant in front of the Nippon Budokan.

Pro photo tips

Kitanomaru offers some nice simple views. What makes it interesting from a photographic viewpoint is the quantity of people enjoying hanami parties, a 100% Japanese tradition which you will be able to share and shoot.

A standard zoom would be perfect for this exercise, such as a solid 24-70mm. When the water is steady you can even capture nice reflections of the sakura trees in the pond.

Note that the park also offers nice views of Chidorigafuchi, from the other side of the canal. If you intend to shoot the boats as well, do not forget a longer zoom such as a 70-200 mm.

A few more things...

Access: Kudanshita (Hanzomon, Shinjuku, Tozai Lines)
Entrance fees: none
Opening time: 24h

Kids friendly: yes
Food stalls: no
Picnic: yes







Ueno Koen

上野公園

The place

Ueno Koen is everything that you can expect from Japan: crazy and magnificent at the same time! Boasting over a 1,000 sakura trees and a pond, it is Tokyo's most famous destination for hanami. Do not expect it to be calm and serene as the park hosts some of the largest hanami parties you can find in Tokyo. If your dream is to shoot pictures of Japanese people having fun, Ueno Park is definitely the place for you! It is also home to an early blooming variety of Sakura trees that are often the first to bloom in Tokyo. Beware though, the location is so famous for hanami that it is often overcrowded, so arrive early in the morning if peace is what you are looking for. Improvisation will not work there and a hanami picnic will require booking a spot. Note that various events also take place during the hanami season such as geisha make-up workshops, shows, etc.

Pro photo tips

Ueno Koen offers various photo opportunities, but so different that you may easily face situations forcing you to change your focal length very quickly, skipping from wide-angle to long telephoto. The best solution would be to carry one long zoom (such as a 18-200mm for instance), or two high-end lenses covering the whole range, our weapons of choice being the 24-70mm and the 70-200mm or 100-400mm.

The park is so crowded during the hanami season that using longer telephoto lenses (300mm and beyond), or very fast lenses (f/2.8 for the zoom lenses) can help create a nice bokeh as well as perfectly isolate your subject in this very dense environment. Remember that using a small aperture may result in messy shots in which the subject literally drowns in the crowd.

A few more things...

Access: Ueno (JR Line)
 Entrance fees: none
 Opening time: 05:00 - 23:00

Kids friendly: not really (overcrowded)
 Food stalls: yes (and restaurants, cafés)
 Picnic: yes







Zojo-ji Temple

増上寺

Located next to Shiba Koen and in front of Tokyo Tower, Zojo-ji Temple is one of Tokyo's most famous and visited temples.

While the temple does not feature as many sakura trees as other places, it does give you the possibility to get some of the most gorgeous shots that Tokyo can offer by combining a remarkable weeping cherry tree, the temple itself, and Tokyo Tower as a backdrop. Really it would be hard to get a more picturesque shot. If you want something more unique then quickly walk toward the collection of Jizo statues located on the right end side of the temple and here as well, some of the most amazing pictures are just waiting for you to snap them.

Access: Daimon (Asakusa, Oedo Lines)
 Entrance fees: none
 Opening time: 09:00 - 16:00



Nakano Boulevard

中野

Made famous for its indoor shopping district - Nakano Broadway - Nakano offers on its main road (N420), a few dozen sakura trees.

Alongside the typical Japanese city landscape you will get the chance to shoot urban pictures featuring beautiful sakura trees.

Once your little sakura shoot is done, make a little stop at one of Nakano's many little Izakaya near the station and Nakano Broadway for a one-of-a-kind, authentic Japanese moment with friends or family.

Access: Nakano (JR and Tozai Lines)
 Entrance fees: none
 Opening time: 24h



Kasai Rinkai Koen

葛西臨海公園

Located in the Chiba prefecture, only one stop away from Tokyo Disneyland, Kawai Rinkai Koen is worth checking if you have the chance.

With more than 600 sakura trees of 6 different varieties, and closely located near Tokyo Bay, Kasai Rinkai Koen is not only ideal for a good walk but also for anyone looking to enjoy a hanmi nap.

Access: Kasai Rinkai Koen (JR, Keiyo, Musashino Lines)
 Entrance fees: none
 Opening time: 24h



Asukayama Koen

飛鳥山公園

Located on the north side of Tokyo, Asukayama Koen is one of the oldest hanami spots in Tokyo at 280 years old.

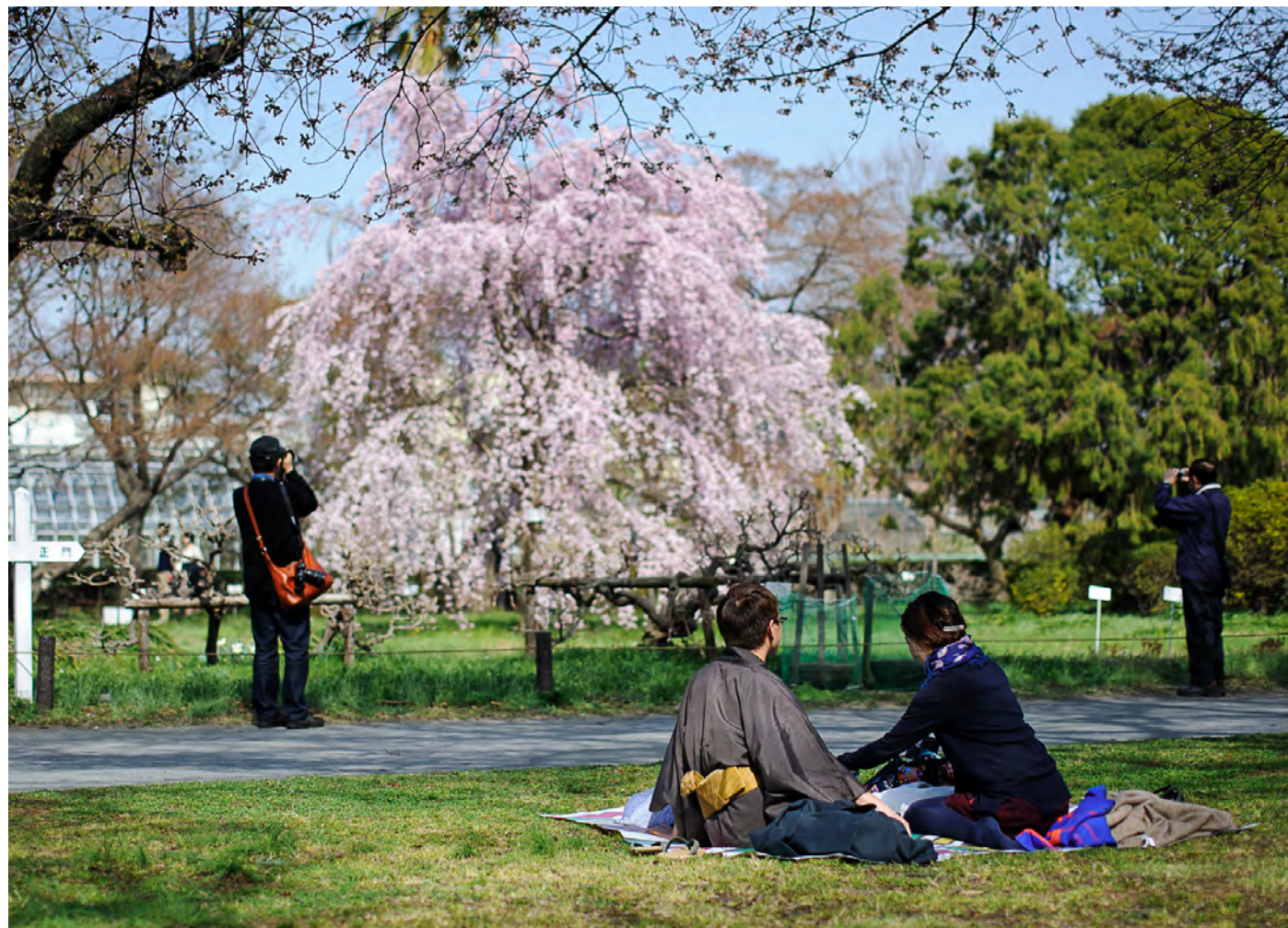
With more than a hundred sakura trees and many picnic spots, Asukayama Koen will charm you with its simple atmosphere and elegance.

Most parks and gardens in Tokyo were originally built for Shoguns, Daimyo or other tycoons as part of their mansions and so had their access restricted. Asukayama however has always been for regular citizens and quickly became so popular that many people came from all over Edo (Tokyo) to enjoy the place with friends and family.

Access: Oji (JR, Namboku Lines)
 Entrance fees: none
 Opening time: 24h







Koishikawa Botanical Gardens

小石川植物園

The place

Birthplace of Japanese botanical research and among the oldest gardens in Japan (1684), the Koishikawa Botanical Gardens boasts over a thousand different species of plants, including medicinal ones, and even a herbarium with over 1.4 million specimens.

As such, the Koishikawa Botanical Gardens, features a wide variety of sakura trees. Most of them are located in the upper part of the gardens, on very large lawns, making it a perfect spot for hanami.

You can enjoy your picnic under the trees, letting children play around you. Relatively off the beaten track, it is rarely overcrowded and thus the perfect spot for a quiet hanami party - unlike Ueno and Shinjuku Gyoen.

Pro photo tips

These botanical gardens are a wonderful place to snap some pictures in a relatively quiet environment. A wonderful weeping sakura tree, superbly pink, can be shot with a 50mm or equivalent (remembering that walking on some of the lawns here is forbidden).

You can also do some close-ups of the blossoms, since many trees have very low-hanging branches. Bring a macro lens, or a good telephoto. To snap the atmosphere, a wide-angle (24-35mm) will be perfect.

Once again the general ambiance here is very relaxed and you can bring a bag with several lenses, change them, and leave your bag at your picnic spot without worrying about your hardware.

A few more things...

Access: *Todai-Mae (Namboku Line)
Myogadani (Marunouchi Line)*
Entrance fees: *Adults ¥330 / Children ¥110*

Opening time: *09:00 - 16:30 except on Monday*
Kids friendly: *yes*
Food stalls: *yes (little snacks... bring your picnic)*
Picnic: *yes*





Mount Takao

高尾山

Located fifty minutes away from Shinjuku by train, Mount Takao, or Takaosan, is surprisingly still located in Tokyo.

This small (599m) yet extremely popular mountain receives around 2.5 million visitors each year for its eight different hiking courses. Featuring many temples and a dense forest, Mount Takao will surprise you with its large variety of sakura trees.

Note that despite being pretty accessible, comfortable walking shoes should be preferred to high heels as a few of the trails can be somewhat challenging.

Access: Takaosanguchi (JR, Keio-Takao Lines)
Entrance fees: none (cablecar: ¥930)
Opening time: 24h (cablecar: 08:00 to 17:45)



Omiya Koen

大宮公園

Located approximately forty minutes away from Shibuya, and actually outside of Tokyo, Omiya Koen hosts more than 1,200 sakura trees and unlike Tokyo, the park is pretty much empty of foreigners.

Featuring many small food stalls, Omiya Koen offers the most picturesque Japanese experience that you could wish for and is definitely worth the long trip needed to reach it.

Note that this park also includes the quaint little Museum of History and Japanese Folklore, open most days, except Mondays, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Access: Omiyakoen (Tobu-Noda Line)
Entrance fees: none
Opening time: 24h



Gokokuji

護国寺

Founded in 1681, Gokoku-ji is the Buddhist temple headquarters of the Buzan school of the Shingon sect of Buddhism. Gokoku-ji is also one of the few temples in Tokyo that survived unscathed from the wrath of mother nature and wars over three centuries.

Like most temples, Gokoku-ji features a few beautiful sakura trees that are mainly located around the temple and at the bottom of the stairs leading to the main yard. There, using a semi-long telephoto lens (85mm / 135mm), beautiful shots can be made by framing the roofs and the cherry blossoms. In the main yard, a weeping sakura tree can be snapped, using a good 50mm, with nice Japanese traditional architectural elements in the background. Another sakura tree near the main building will require a wide-angle lens (16~24mm) to frame both the sakura tree and the shrine correctly.

Access: Gokoku-ji (Yurakucho Line)
Entrance fees: none
Opening time: 05:00 to 16:30



Bunkyo Sakura Matsuri

文京さくらまつり

If you plan to visit Koishikawa Botanical Gardens for hanami, you may take the Metro to Myogadani station, and walk along this long pedestrian alley, starting on Kasuga Dori. The alley is filled with three dense lines of large beautiful sakura trees, decorated with pink lanterns. The walk is quite impressive. In the evening the lanterns are lit, making the view even more spectacular.

Long perspectives are usually very nicely rendered with long focal lenses... a 70-200mm will be fine. A good 135mm opened wide will make dreamy shots with a marvellous white bokeh (pink spots in the evening). Do not hesitate to use your lenses at their widest aperture to play on the depth of field for some nice cotton-effect.

Access: Myogadani station (Marunouchi Line)
Entrance fees: none
Opening time: 24h







Sumida Koen

墨田公園

Located close to Tokyo Skytree, and on the banks of the Sumida River, Sumida Park is a small space that is still worth checking out thanks to its 1,000 sakura trees.

Unlike other places, the Sumida Park hanami parties are gatherings of a more mature crowd with *ojichan* and *obachan* enjoying a nice beer quietly.

Note that it is also possible to board a boat for a small hanami cruise along the Sumida River and its many sakura trees.

Access: Asakusa (Asakusa Line)
Entrance fees: none
Opening time: 24h



Koganei Koen

小金井公園

Koganei Park is the second largest park in the Tokyo area, and is a famous attraction for both local residents and tourists alike.

Featuring both plum trees and sakura trees, it is possible to enjoy the park in its full spring colours from March up to April.

Here as well you will find many hanami parties, and if architecture photography is your thing, we cannot recommend enough that you visit the Edo-Tokyo Open Air Architectural Museum located here.

Access: Hanakoganei (Seibu-Shinjuku Line)
Entrance fees: none
Opening time: 24h



Inokashira Koen

井の頭恩賜公園

Located near Kichijoji Station on the Chuo Line, Inokashira Park with its 1,000 sakura trees is another famous hanami spot.

Because of its location and proximity to universities, Inokashira Park is mostly crowded with students all year long and especially during the hanami season. Like the Chidorigafuchi Moat near the Imperial Palace, the park features a little pond where it is possible to rent a boat giving you a unique opportunity to take some really cool shots.

However, according to the urban legend, any couples that ride a boat together on this pond are doomed to break up: Benzaiten, a goddess located in a temple overlooking the pond, becomes jealous of lovers on the pond and curses them.

Access: Kichijoji (JR Line)
Entrance fees: none
Opening time: 24h



Yoyogi Koen

代々木公園

Famous for its young crowds, Yoyogi Park also features around 600 sakura trees.

The best way to describe the place would be to compare it to another famous location: Shinjuku Gyoen, but with no entrance fee and alcohol allowed. As a result, Yoyogi Koen features some of the wildest hanami parties that Tokyo offers and you will surely enjoy taking pictures of people having a good time under some of the park's many sakura trees.

Access: Harajuku (JR Line)
Entrance fees: none
Opening time: 24h







Yasukuni Jinja

靖国神社

The place

Sakura trees have been spotted in various places around Tokyo, but the official blossom date is announced only when a special *someiyoshino* - a variety of cherry tree - at the Yasukuni Shrine comes into bloom. It is one of the government-designated benchmark cherry trees that sets the blossom date for each region. In addition to this benchmark, Yasukuni Shrine blesses its visitors with over 600 sakura trees. To make things even more interesting, the shrine holds a yearly sakura festival where most - if not all - professional sumo wrestlers are invited for a one-of-a-kind event. Moreover, in the main alley, you will find dozens of food stalls. You can have lunch there, and even dinner since those temporary restaurants stay open after the official closing of the shrine itself.

Pro photo tips

There are endless possible shots at Yasukuni Shrine at this time of the year making it hard to give one specific piece of shooting advice. However, the safest configuration would consist with the “Magical Duo” of a 24-70mm and 70-200mm, as well as bringing a bokeh-specific one such as a 85mm or 135mm.

With such a configuration you will be well equipped to face almost every situation the shrine has to offer, from framing cherry blossoms to gargantuan sumo wrestlers.

Finally, please note that this shrine has very strict policies when it comes to shooting photos and/or videos. Tripods are not allowed and in some areas taking photos and videos are strictly forbidden.

A few more things...

Access: Kudanshita (Hanzomon, Shinjuku Lines)
 Entrance fees: none
 Opening time: 06:00 to 18:00

Kids friendly: yes
 Food stalls: soooo many of them !
 Picnic: yes







Chidorigafuchi

千鳥ヶ淵

The place

Just behind the Imperial Palace East Garden entrance, the Chidorigafuchi Moat features hundreds of sakura trees, lining each side of the moat. Incredibly picturesque when in full bloom, the Chidorigafuchi Moat is among the most famous hanami spots in Japan.

To make things even more magical it is possible to rent a rowboat for a peaceful hanami cruise. If you are lucky enough to come late in the season, you will have the chance to see the moat water turn into a magnificent parterre of petals. Keep in mind also that the sakura trees along the canal are illuminated in the evenings, offering magnificent and unique views of the blossoms.

Pro photo tips

Due to the moat's design, a good 70-200mm is the perfect weapon of choice when shooting at Chidorigafuchi.

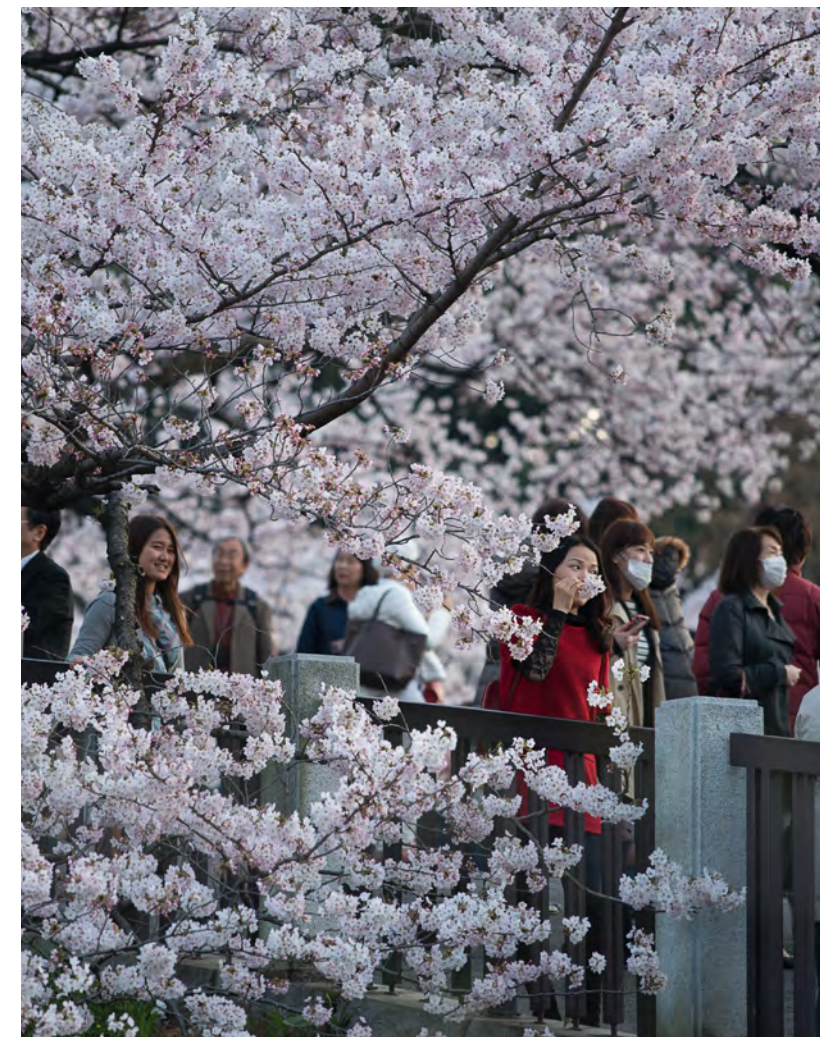
With most subjects rather far away, the 200mm makes a lot of sense, while zooming backwards to 70mm will allow you to capture nice perspectives along the canal.

Occasionally a good 35mm or 50mm may help widening the frame making for some sumptuous shooting under a beautiful blue sky.

A few more things...

Access: Kudanshita (Hanzomon, Shinjuku Lines)
Entrance fees: none
Opening time: 24h

Kids friendly: no (overcrowded)
Food stalls: no, but Yasukuni is right behind...
Picnic: not really (too many people)







Meiji Shrine Gyoen

明治神宮御苑

Despite being located close to Yoyogi Koen, Meiji Shrine Gyoen is in fact part of Meiji Shrine itself and as such is physically separated from Yoyogi Koen by a fence.

Meiji Shrine Gyoen may not offer as many sakura trees as Yoyogi Koen, but will however give you a more sophisticated landscape and atmosphere than its neighbouring park with a gorgeous, traditional Japanese garden, a pond and a tea house.

Please beware that this place is also not too friendly to tripod-wielding photographers though.

Access: Harajuku (JR Line)
Entrance fees: ¥500
Opening time: 09:00 - 16:30



Rikugien Garden

浜離宮

Considered by some, including ourselves, to be among Tokyo's most beautiful gardens - at any time of the year - Rikugien shines most in spring.

During the hanami season, you will have the possibility to enjoy and shoot some of the most picturesque Japanese scenery that Tokyo can offer, and it is open late at night.

Being extremely popular this garden is very crowded and, as you would expect, tripods are not allowed.

Access: Komagome (JR Lines)
Entrance fees: ¥300
Opening time: 09:00 to 21:00
except every Monday
and from Dec. 29 to Jan. 1



Happo-En

八芳園

Happo-En may not feature the most sakura trees, but it will make up for this thanks to its beautiful garden, bonsai tree collection and numerous tea houses.

Often used by Japanese people for wedding photos and ceremonies, it is not uncommon to stumble upon a Japanese couple wearing traditional clothes roaming the park. If you kindly ask, they may even let you take a few shots of them under some of the garden's beautiful sakura trees.

Access: Shirokanedai (Mita Line)
Entrance fees: none
Opening time: 10:00 to 20:30 (Weekday)
and 09:00 to 20:30 (Weekend)



Roppongi Hills

六本木ヒルズ

Roppongi Sakurazaka may not be the biggest park in Japan, neither does it offer the biggest selection of sakura trees, but it does have 75 sakura trees and a few in the Mori Garden.

It offers (at least at night) a decent chance to take some pictures of sakura trees with Tokyo Tower lit up in the background. Please note that you should definitely be using a fast wide-angle and tripod there.

Access: Roppongi (Hibiya Line)
Entrance fees: none
Opening time: 07:00 to 23:00





Meguro River

目黒川

The place

Just a few stations away from Shibuya, the Meguro River is another famous hanami spot in Tokyo and will welcome you with more than 800 sakura trees on each side of the river.

Beautiful by day, it is however by night that the place comes to life thanks to its many lanterns and lights. It is extremely popular at night, so be ready to face a huge crowd, making it hard to use a tripod.

Pro photo tips

Shooting at Meguro means shooting by night. If you have an opportunity to deploy your tripod, don't hesitate. But the crowd may be so dense that even thinking of it could be too much already.

For light cameras, a Gorillapod attached to a guardrail may actually be the best solution.

Otherwise pack light, use your fastest lens, crank-up the ISO a little and then you will have the chance to take some mind blowing sakura-at-night shots! A 35mm or 50mm equivalent should be enough, but in case you cannot use any tripod at all, try to use the fastest lenses you have in your bag.

A few more things...

Access: Naka-Meguro (Hibiya, Tokyu Toyoko Line)
Entrance fees: none
Opening time: 24h

Kids friendly: no (overcrowded)
Food stalls: yes
Picnic: not really (too many people)





Iidabashi

飯田橋

The place

Iidabashi is famous for its line of sakura trees along the canal. Walking along Sotobori Dori will offer beautiful views, since the blossoms form a kind of archway over your head.

Crossing the bridge towards Chiyoda will allow you to find a second line of sakura trees, under which you will be able to have a nice picnic in the purest hanami style.

But beware, there is a university nearby and the students also enjoy hanami party so this side might be a little bit crowded. If you really need a rest, you will be able to sit at the Canal Café, near Iidabashi station, and even rent a rowboat for a hanami cruise.

Pro photo tips

The long line of sakura trees along Sotobori Dori allows you to frame superb shots of people watching the flowers.

Those shots will be fantastic if you manage to isolate your subjects, by playing with the depth of field. Use the longest telephoto or zoom you have in your bag, and use it at its maximum aperture. Wait somewhere along the road, and snap your shots as soon as a nice subject arrives.

A few more things...

Access: Iidabashi (JR, Namboku, Oedo, Tozai, Yurakucho Lines)
Entrance fees: none

Opening time: 24h
Kids friendly: yes
Food stalls: no (but restaurants and cafés nearby)
Picnic: yes





Yanaka Cemetery

谷中霊園

The place

Located near Ueno Koen, Yanaka Cemetery, like Aoyama Cemetery, is a famous hanami spot. Mixing traditional Japanese burial places with its Thoba (Japanese wooden memorial boards) as well as a playground for children and small parks, Yanaka Cemetery will offer you a unique perspective on how Japanese culture integrates death into their society.

Yanaka has a lot to offer to the foreign tourist in terms of atmosphere. The area is very old and filled with shrines. You can end your journey here by visiting Yanaka Ginza, a remarkable little shopping street that will lead you to the JR Nippori station on the Yamanote line.

Pro photo tips

The interest of the place lies mostly in its juxtaposition of contrasts. Life and death express themselves side-by-side through the graves and the cherry blossoms.

In order to frame these surprising contrasts, a standard focal lens is perfect. A good 35mm, and a 50mm would be the perfect companions for your exploration of this amazing place. Their field of view will allow you to include the blossoms and some parts of the graveyard in the frame.

Using a longer focal range, like a 85mm or a 135mm, will allow you to make wonderful portraits with a shallow depth of field, turning the graveyard into a unique background.

A few more things...

Access: Nippori (JR, Keisei Lines)
 Entrance fees: none
 Opening time: 24h

Kids friendly: yes
 Food stalls: no
 Picnic: no



Shiba Koen

芝公園

Not to be confused with Chiba the prefecture, this tiny little park is located at the foot of Tokyo Tower and features around 70 sakura trees.

Because of its location and limited size, Shiba Park might be the most crowded place there is for hanami, but with a bit of patience, and if you are ready to wake-up very early, you may be able to enjoy the natural beauty of the park alone.

Access: Akabanebashi (Oedo Line)
Entrance fees: none
Opening time: 24h



Hamarikyu Gardens

浜離宮

Hamarikyu Gardens only offers a few dozen sakura trees in total, but this huge park ranks very high in our hearts for its fantastic Edo-era style gardens, its large pond, and the different tea houses.

We also love it for its unique location with one side of the park surrounded by a salt water moat and the other by huge skyscrapers that form the Shiodome business district.

Being a hub that connects Tokyo and Odaiba together, there is a high chance than you will have to stop at Shiodome station during your next trip to Tokyo, and we can highly recommend you visit Hamarikyu Gardens whether you are looking for a hanami spot this spring or not.

Access: Shiodome (Oedo, Yurikamome Lines)
Entrance fees: ¥300
Opening time: 09:00 to 16:30



Hibiya Park

日比谷公園

Sandwiched between the Imperial Palace and the very business-oriented Shinbashi district, this huge (161,632m²) and aesthetically pleasing park was first designed as a military drilling ground during the early part of the Meiji Period. It was later transformed into a westernized urban-style park that became accessible to the public in 1903.

The park offers a few sakura trees that are worth checking on your way to the Imperial Palace and the Chidorigafuchi Moats.

Access: Hibiya (Hibiya Line)
Entrance fees: none
Opening time: 24h



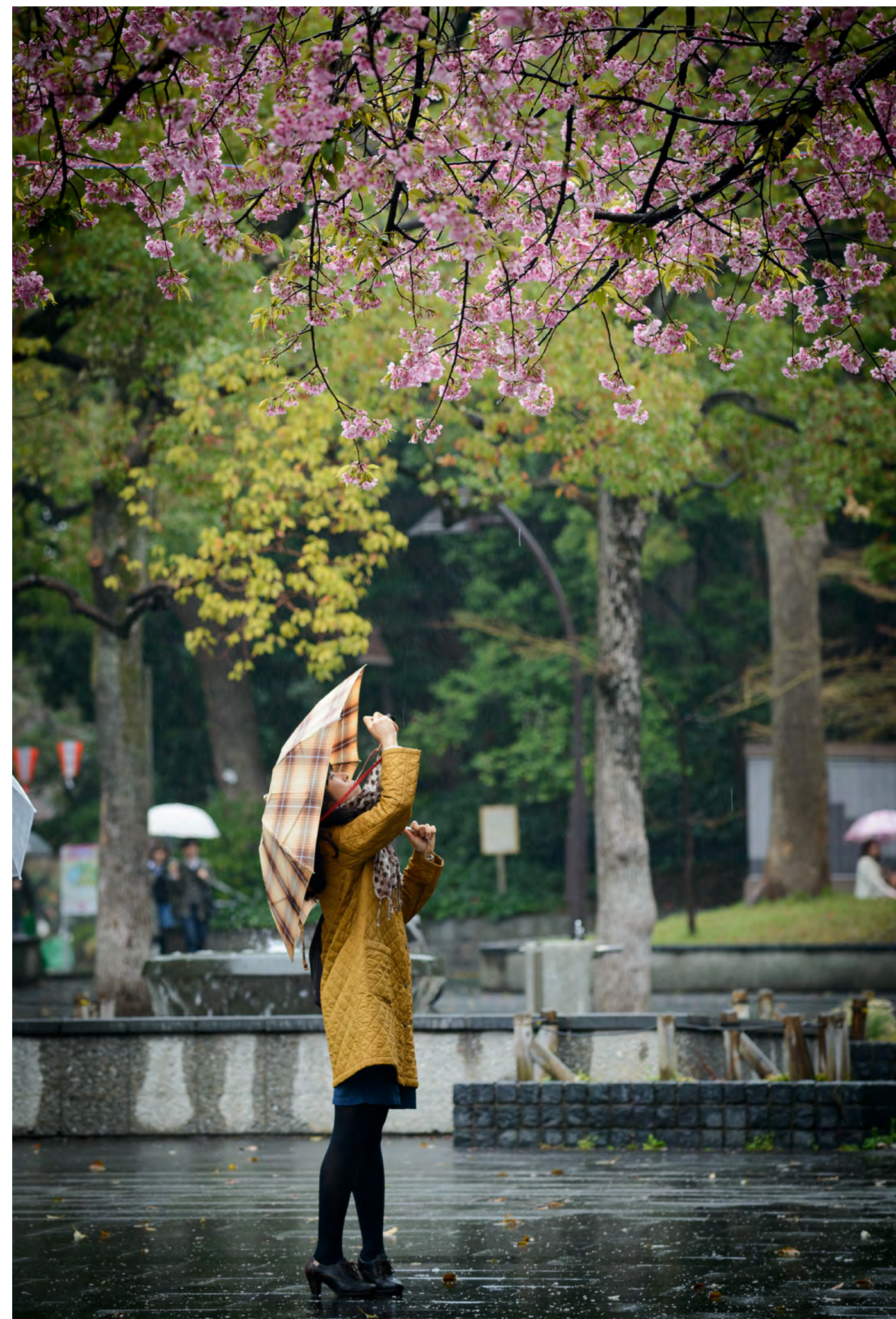
Kinuta koen

砧公園

Located in Setagaya, and not too far from Shibuya, Kinuta Koen is a massive 390,000m² park featuring many plum and sakura trees that will give you the chance to enjoy hanami from March to April.

Unlike many other large parks in Tokyo, Kinuta Koen is a lesser known hanami spot and by far one of the quietest ones. With more than 240,000m² of grass, a river, a bird sanctuary, the Setagaya Art Museum, a small soccer field, two baseball fields and even a French restaurant, Kinuta Koen has everything you could expect for when looking for a quality hanami.

Access: Yoga (Tokyu Den-en-toshi Line)
Entrance fees: none
Opening time: 24h







Shinjuku Gyoen National Garden

新宿御苑

The place

Featuring more than a dozen of varieties of sakura trees, Shinjuku Gyoen will welcome you with around 1,500 cherry trees and a chance to challenge your photography composition skills with its sheer contrast between nature and the modernity of its surrounding buildings. If you are lucky enough and an early bird, you can for example shoot the famous Mode Gakuen Cocoon Tower surrounded by sakura trees.

Shinjuku Gyoen is a wonderful place for hanami but beware, it is forbidden to bring any kind of alcohol into the park. Many first-timers are surprised, and have to get rid of their beers and wine bottles before entering the venue. And do not try to sneak alcohol in the park as the security guards patrolling the park will spot you.

Pro photo tips

Wandering into the park and will give you dozens of scenes to frame: from pure park views made of sakura trees and ponds, to hanami shots featuring people enjoying their picnics under the blossoms, not forgetting the contrasts offered by Shinjuku's skyscrapers just behind the trees.

All this will require a lot of adaptability. A good multi-purpose lens such as a 24-70mm can be of great help in this kind of environment.

Try waiting until the last moments before the park closes to enjoy a much better light, or try to be there for the opening.

A few more things...

Access: Sendagaya / Shinjuku Gyoen mae stations (JR Line)
Entrance fees: Adults ¥200 / Children ¥50
Opening time: 09:00 - 16:00 except every monday

Kids friendly: yes
Food stalls: no
Picnic: yes (alcohol free)







Showa Kinen Koen

昭和記念公園

Located in the western suburbs of Tokyo, Showa Kinen Koen is one of Tokyo's largest public parks.

Formerly a Japanese air base operated by the US military, it was only in 1977 that the land and base were handed back to the Japanese government.

While they still maintain and operate the old military runway, most of the place has been turned into a large park, home to more than 1,500 sakura trees.

Access: Tachikawa (JR Line)
Entrance fees: Adults ¥ 410 / Children ¥80
Opening time: 09:00 to 16:30
(except from Dec 31 to Jan 1 and the fourth Monday/the following day of February)



Komazawa Olympic Park

駒沢オリンピック公園

Not too far from Shibuya and close to the Kanazawa University, Komazawa Park was built for the 1964 Summer Olympics games and is still used today for some major sport events.

Because of its location and sport-centric atmosphere, the park is a famous hanami spot in Tokyo and will greet you with more than 100 sakura trees for family friendly hanami parties.

Access: Komazawadaigaku (Tokyu Den-en-toshi Line)
Entrance fees: none
Opening time: 24h



Imperial Palace East Gardens

皇居東御苑

The Imperial Palace East Gardens are in fact part of the inner palace itself and open all year long to the public, with the exception of few special days.

As such, these gardens are well-kept and only open during the daytime. While there are not as many sakura trees as there are in other places, the Imperial Palace East Gardens still offer an opportunity to anyone interested in grabbing a few nice shots in gardens that used to surround the former Edo Castle.

Access: Otemachi (Chiyoda, Hanzomon, Marunouchi, Mita, Tozai Lines)
Entrance fees: none
Opening time: 09:00 to 16:30
except every Mondays, Fridays



Aoyama Cemetery

青山霊園

Located in the heart of Tokyo, this 263,564m2 cemetery is actually Japan's first public cemetery and Tokyo's only foreigner-friendly one.

Unique in so many ways, this cemetery also features a gorgeous avenue that, twice a year, is turned into a beautiful nature-tunnel with cherry blossoms in April and a red/orange one in Autumn when the leaves turn red.

Access: Nogizaka (Chiyoda Line)
Entrance fees: none
Opening time: 24h





