

National Cherry Blossom Festival

MARCH 20 – APRIL 16, 2017



#61: Best Media Relations Campaign

IFEA Pinnacle Awards

July 2017

RECORD-BREAKING 4.8 BILLION IMPRESSIONS



Introduction and background of campaign/event

The National Cherry Blossom Festival is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization that strives to produce and promote the nation's greatest springtime celebration in Washington, DC. The Festival welcomes more than 1.5 million people to the region with four anchoring weekends and exciting daily events that feature diverse and creative programming while promoting traditional and contemporary arts and culture, natural beauty, and community spirit. From March 15 to April 16, 2017 the Festival commemorated the anniversary of the gift of trees from Tokyo to Washington, DC and presented memorable experiences that showcased DC to the world.

The Festival prides itself on providing four weeks of programming that extends beyond the trees at the Tidal Basin and into the entire region, welcoming local, national, and international attendees to celebrate spring in our nation's capital. This year marks the 90th anniversary of the first Festival, a small affair that took place in 1927 and has since evolved as one of the world's great celebrations of spring.

Purpose/objective of media relations campaign

Because the Festival consists of 40+ events over 28 total days, effectively communicating our messages and keeping audiences engaged is challenging. Further, some events are paid and ticketed, some are free and open to the public and general audiences, some are well suited for families and children, and some appeal to niche audiences. Overall, this complexity must be addressed through media relations, with the campaign's primary purpose to **expand the Festival's reach to new and diverse audiences.**

2017 Media Campaign Objectives:

- Build upon the excitement of peak bloom in order to increase attendance at signature events
 - Peak bloom is defined as the days on which 70% of the blossoms are open, and has come to symbolize Washington's beginning of spring with an explosion of life and color that surrounds the Tidal Basin.
 - The 2017 signature events were: the Pink Tie Party, Opening Ceremony, Blossom Kite Festival, National Cherry Blossom Festival Parade, Southwest Waterfront Fireworks Festival, and programming held on the ANA Performance Stage at the Tidal Basin Welcome Area.
- Inform the public of new Festival information, including dates, locations, and details of each event and their promotional appeal

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- Relay marketing messages devised by sponsors per their benefit agreements
 - Feed the DC news cycle with fresh, upbeat stories that provide lifestyle and community appeal, and address the DC communities' love of the Festival and the iconic trees around which it centers.

Outline of entire media relations campaign

To meet our media objectives, a robust mix of media strategies was engaged. This includes a heavy emphasis on print, broadcast, and online media; earned media, some paid media, and this year, utilized social media at a new level.

November 2016 – Launch Event

Created specifically to generate PR in the off-season, provided a preview of Festival news and entertainment.

Key Messages:

The first announcement of the dates of the Festival's signature events.

Media Worthy Moments:

Unveiling of the 2017 Official Artwork and Lapel Pin, created for the first time by a DC-based artist, who has earned popularity with celebrity clients such as Rihanna, Spike Lee, and LeBron James.

Results:

The Launch Event resulted in local broadcast and online coverage in the off-season, which is important to maintaining the Festival's relevancy year-round.

December/January – Sing Into Spring Competition

Singing competition where local soloists and groups audition for a chance to perform for thousands in the National Cherry Blossom Festival Parade®. The live audition was emceed by a news anchor from WJLA/ABC7.

Key Messages:

Through the solicitation of participants, the Festival focuses on a message of inclusivity and the opportunity for local involvement in a national event.

Media Worthy Moments:

The three winners (two soloists and one college acapella group) provided a unique opportunity for the media to highlight up-and-coming local talent.

Results:

Two of the winners performed on local news stations ahead of their Parade performances, proving that this event is a successful in its ability obtain media interest and generate publicity.



March 3 – Press Conference



All eyes are on spring once March hits Washington, and the media eagerly attend our press conference, which is considered the predictor of the beautiful season's official arrival.

Key messages:

- Peak bloom dates predicted by the National Park Service
- Embrace **“Welcome to Spring in Washington”** as an underlying theme throughout all aspects of the press conference as a way to reinforce that the Festival represents a nonpartisan celebration

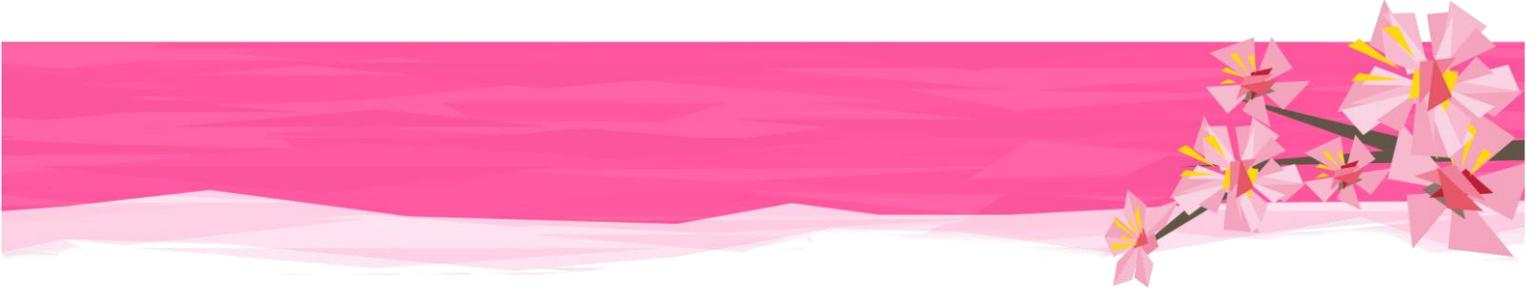
Media Worthy Moments:

- High school marching band greeted guests
- Staged photo-op of peak bloom prediction, where faces of the DC hospitality industry revealed the dates
- Announced that programming at the Tidal Basin Welcome Area would begin five days early

Results:

- **1,600 news clips** (online and broadcast) mentioned the cherry blossoms or the Festival.
- Outlets who covered included: Associated Press, Reuters, The New York Times, The Washington Post, NBC Nightly News, Today, and hundreds of local news stations throughout the country. Many of these outlets also used video or photos of the peak bloom reveal to accompany their stories.





March 20 – April 16 – National Cherry Blossom Festival

The Festival faced a peculiar situation this year as an uncharacteristically late snowstorm arrived just as the blossoms began the early stages of their blooming process. A growing concern among the public became whether or not the trees would bloom at all, leading to widespread media coverage. As a way to reclaim the message and mitigate concerns, the Festival held an “emergency” press briefing with the National Park Service to make it clear that there was nothing to worry about. Even with such short notice, all of the local TV networks and local newspapers attended, where they were assured that many of the blossoms were not damaged in the snowstorm and that the Festival would go on. Luckily, the blossoms reached peak bloom just in time for the Opening Ceremony, creating the perfect narrative for the media to get excited for the Festival’s four weeks of events ahead.

Throughout the Festival itself, constant communication with the press was essential. This included updating all mediums with timely information, conducting interviews, liaising with media on-site at events, and more.

A decorative header featuring a pink gradient background with a cluster of stylized pink and yellow flowers in the top right corner.

Target audience/demographics for the media

Because the Festival's signature events have a wide range of attendees and appeal to a variety of audiences, the Festival must reach out to a diverse and comprehensive list of media representatives to ensure that a wide range of demographics are reached. This year's signature events were pitched to hundreds of outlets based on the following audience characteristics:

Pink Tie Party

- 25+ age demographic
- Individuals interested in nightlife events
- Charity-minded individuals
- DC locals
- Current and prospective sponsors

Opening Ceremony

- Fans of Japanese music and culture

Blossom Kite Festival

- Kite-flying community (competitive and stunt kite fliers, American Kitefliers Association members, etc)
- DC locals of all ages, including families with children
- National and international tourists

Southwest Waterfront Fireworks Festival

- DC locals of all ages, including families with children
- National and international tourists
- Millennials

National Cherry Blossom Festival Parade®

- Families
- East coast tour groups
- National and international tourists
- DC locals of all ages, including families with children

Sakura Matsuri – Japanese Street Festival

- Fans of Japanese culture and food

Cherry Blast

- Millennials

Tidal Basin

- Tourists and locals
- All ages

Target location (communities/cities/states) for media

Given that the National Cherry Blossom Festival celebrates a gift of trees from Japan and the friendship between our two countries, media coverage garners a great deal of attention among news outlets throughout Japan.

As a testament to the Festival's global PR reach, at least 25 stories about the Festival ran in Japanese publications. In particular, stories about the Opening Ceremony were picked up by newspapers all over Japan, including Hokkaido, Nagasaki, Shizuoka, Gifu, Kyoto, and more. (This is not an exhaustive list as the Festival does not have a mechanism to conduct a thorough analysis of Japanese media results; the information listed above was provided by The Embassy of Japan, with the understanding that there are likely additional clips that we cannot account for). Additionally, a popular Japanese TV show called *J-Melo* on NHK covered the Festival and obtained interviews with audience members at the Opening Ceremony.

The Festival also worked closely with top local media entities to enhance regional coverage and impressions, valued at nearly \$1.5 million. This included partnerships with the Washington Post Express, ABC-7NewsChannel8 (WJLA), and many others.

Other regional coverage included continuous updates in *The Washington Post*, including previews of the Festival's events each week in the Going Out Guide and Things To Do sections.

National coverage of the 2017 Festival was also strong. The possible threat of this year's winter weather conditions on the Festival made national headlines, including on *CBS Overnight News*, *CBS Evening News*, *Today*, and a variety of programming on The Weather Channel, to name a few. Additionally, national coverage of the Parade on *Good Morning America* with *Dancing With The Stars* judge Carrie Ann Inaba and meteorologist Rob Marciano proved



that media interest extends beyond just the trees.



Types of mediums used

The National Cherry Blossom Festival used a variety of traditional and non-traditional mediums throughout the campaign, including the following:

- **Press conference:** advisory distributed to extensive media contacts, daybooks, and newsrooms
- **Press releases:** more than 20 distributed via press kits
- **Weekly media alerts**
- **Website:** nationalcherryblossomfestival.org received over 1 million unique visitors
- **Social media:** Facebook (100,718 followers), Twitter (11,500 followers), Instagram (5,290 followers), Snapchat

Measureable results

MEDIA REACH: 4.8 BILLION IMPRESSIONS

2017 continues to be a unique year in Washington, unprecedented in the dramatic changes in the White House, communication styles and methods, and the overall mood of the city. The Festival worked hard to break through the noise that was especially prevalent early in the year, when we were launching the event. A tight PR strategy that included innovative, persistent media relations outreach, creative content creation, and delivery through targeted channels ensured that the 2017 Festival's objectives were reached and surpassed. Overall, our media impressions saw an 18% increase from 2016, reaching an audience of billions with a minimal budget investment.

Number of publications/cities/states targeted

Media strategy included a mix of proactive outreach and strategic response, given that the Festival received hundreds of inquiries and requests for interviews, which begin up to six months before the Festival begins, and during the four weeks of the Festival. Targeted outreach included segmenting more than 500 media contacts into specific categories according to their beat, topics of interest, etc. Understanding that a significant portion of our event attendees are from the DC area, 90% of publications targeted were based out of DC, Maryland, and Virginia.



Percent of distribution that covered the news

- 210 (100%) of Nielson DMAs in the U.S.
- Approximately 860 TV networks
- 1,597 unique online sources
- 25+ Japanese newspapers
- Nearly all local outlets and publications, including the major network affiliates (ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX) in Washington, DC, top daily newspapers (*The Washington Post*, *The Washington Times*), magazines, blogs, and weekly publications

Attendance and income results based on media outreach

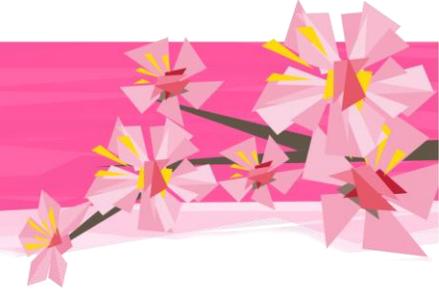
Across the board, attendance at all of the Festival's signature events increased. The media's ongoing coverage allowed us to see growth in the following areas:

- Grandstand ticket sales at the Parade
- Attendance at the Pink Tie Party fundraiser (more than 800 people attended)
- All tickets for the Opening Ceremony were claimed

Longevity of media coverage

Despite the challenging proposition of breaking through this year's news about politics and the unusual weather, the Festival received **extensive coverage each week** starting with the press conference on March 1, and continuing through the finale weekend on April 16.

When the unexpected March snowstorm hit DC a few weeks after the press conference, all eyes were on the Festival. Concern about the blossoms made headlines around the country as the public anxiously awaited to see if the trees could brave the storm. To much anticipation, once the blossoms emerged along the Tidal Basin, the media continued to join in on the celebration, and coverage of the Festival's events and programs remained strong.



Increase in media from previous years*

2017 total media reach: **4.8 billion impressions:**

2016 total media reach: 3.9 billion impressions:

2017 total media value: **\$76 million**

2016 total media value: \$51.5 million

2017 # of broadcast clips: **13,500 clips**

2016 # broadcast clips: 9,215 clips

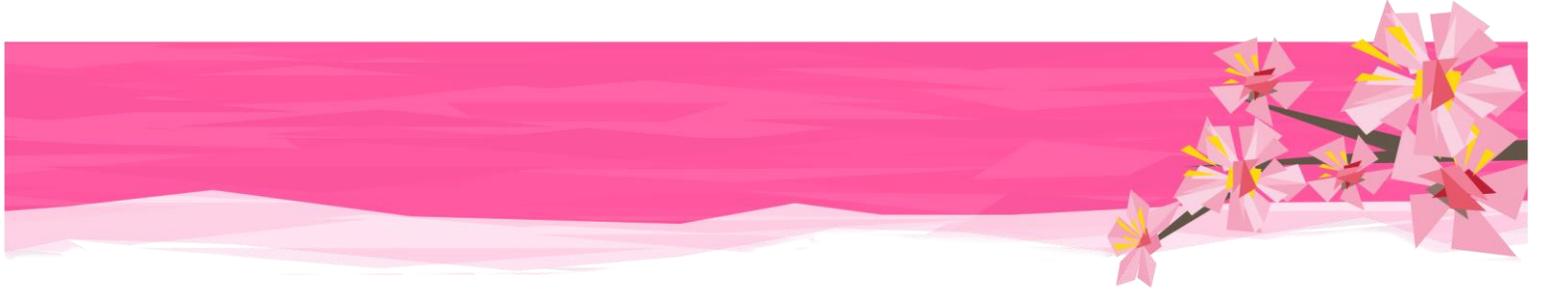
2017 online reach: **4.3 billion people**

2016 online reach: 3.6 billion people

(*Results provided by Meltwater and TV Eyes)

Social media engagement also significantly increased across all platforms in 2017:

	Facebook	Twitter	Instagram
2017	100,947	11,500	5,290
2016	91,813	10,300	2,939
2015	67,500	9,230	1,750



BIZBASH
EVENT PLANNING NEWS, IDEAS & RESOURCES

CAPITOL FILE

NHK WORLD

VOA
Voice of America

Rachael Ray
everyday

KYODO

AP



REUTERS

HUFFPOST



USA TODAY

BBC NEWS

food network
magazine

Daily Mail

Overall effectiveness of the campaign

This year's media relations campaign reached **record-breaking** PR results. We were able to effectively maximize all challenges that came our way in order to yield strong coverage that met our communications objectives. Select examples of our successes are listed below:

Media Results – Highlights:

Print:

- 40 articles in various sections of *The Washington Post* and washingtonpost.com mentioned the Festival in some capacity. Inclusion of every signature event in weekly "Going Out Guide"
- Coverage in more than **25 Japanese newspaper articles**. Articles specifically about the Opening Ceremony were printed throughout Japan, including the cities of Nagasaki, Kyoto, Shizuoka, Gifu, Hokkaido, and more.

Broadcast:

- Mentions on **national** programming including:

Today, Early Today, Good Morning America, Live with Kelly, NBC Nightly News with Lester Holt, The Chew, CBS Overnight News, CBS Evening News With Scott Pelley, CBS This Morning, CBS Morning News, America This Morning, multiple programs on The Weather Channel, Charlie Rose: The Week, CNN Newsroom, Closing Bell on CNBC, Fox News Sunday, Full Measure With Sharyl Attkisson, and more.

- Live national coverage on **Good Morning America: Weekend Edition** on April 16 from Parade setup. Included segment with **Dancing with the Stars** judge Carrie Ann Inaba with Parade dancers, and news teasers with national meteorologist Rob Marciano. (Value: \$724,321)
- Segment about Japanese pop singer May J's performance in the Opening Ceremony was featured on a popular Japanese music show that runs on the NHK network called *J-Melo*



Extensive coverage by official media partner ABC-7/NewsChannel 8 (WJLA), which included:

- Coverage of the Press Conference, Pink Tie Party, Opening Ceremony, Blossom Kite Festival, Parade, Southwest Waterfront Fireworks Festival, and more
 - Sneak peek of Parade floats and dance rehearsal during week of Parade
 - Interviews with key spokespeople and Parade talent both in-studio and on the field throughout the Festival
- 167 clips on various programming on The Weather Channel, valued at over \$1.7 million

Online:

- BBC News interview with Festival President on Facebook Live (240,000+ views)
- Article in *BizBash* about the success of the Pink Tie Party titled: "How to Use Influencer Marketing to Increase Event Attendance"



Source: @SebastianLovesLuna on Instagram

The Festival also saw major growth on its social media platforms, exceeding 100,000 likes on Facebook and showcasing the Festival to millions. #CherryBlossomDC was even trending on Twitter on March 1 and again on March 25. The Communications Team encouraged talent and partners to share the Festival on social media with their followers, which resulted in tweets and Instagram posts from Carrie Ann Inaba, Rob Marciano, Miss America, and more. Additionally, several of the Festival's signature events were featured on Snapchat's local "Our Stories" page, including the Pink Tie Party, Parade, and Blossom

Kite Festival. The Festival also reached out to social-media influencers, including the DC-based Instagram account @SebastianLovesLuna, where the two Insta-famous dogs with a following of more than 73,000 joined the fun with an "engagement shoot" among the blossoms. The adorable photo (pictured left) was shared online in the Huffington Post, BuzzFeed, PEOPLE, Today, Mashable, Brides.com, the New Zealand Herald, The UK Telegraph, and more.



We were proud to be able to successfully guide the media to cover a wide breadth of our various messages, spanning many different aspects of what the Festival encompasses. Below are just a few sample headlines that reflect the various topics covered by the media:

Cold snap damages cherry blossoms but doesn't deter tourists



By Kathy Stewart | @KStewartWTOP
and Liz Anderson
March 18, 2017 2:56 pm



EVENT REPORT

How to Use Influencer Marketing to Increase Event Attendance

The Cherry Blossom Festival turned to social-media influencers to promote its annual Pink Tie Party—and saw results.

Enthusiasts turn out for National Cherry Blossom Kite Festival (Photos)



By Jenny Glick
April 1, 2017 3:54 pm



Local Music Artists to Perform in Cherry Blossom Parade

February 6, 2017 WI Web Staff 0

The National Cherry Blossom Festival and a panel of local celebrity judges have selected an a cappella group and three soloists as winners of the fourth annual "Sing Into Spring" vocal competition. [...]

Cherry Blossom Festival's opening ceremony celebrates blossoms' resiliency



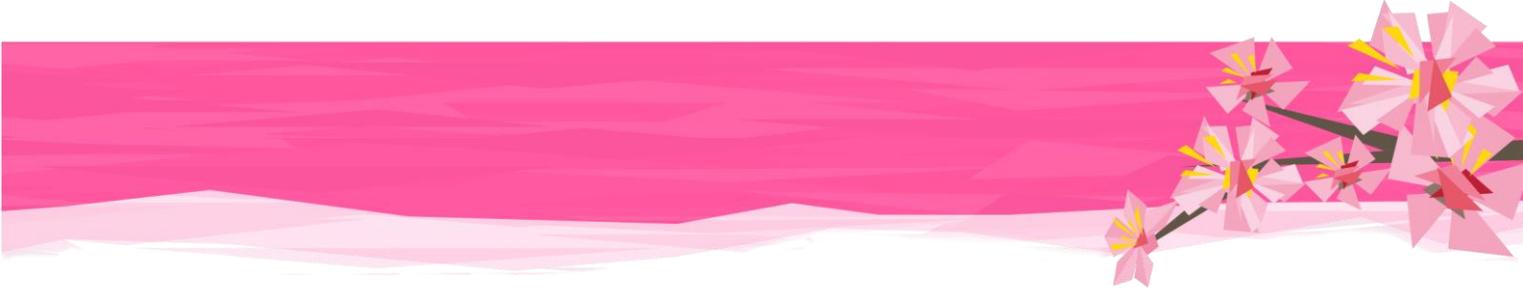
Volunteers Sought for 2017 Cherry Blossom Festival

February 6, 2017 WI Web Staff 0

Friendly, cooperative and reliable volunteers of all ages are invited to acquire some behind-the-scenes experience while supporting the nation's greatest springtime celebration. [...]

Floats (and floating surprises) planned for cherry blossom parade

Fireworks bring Cherry Blossom Festival to a close



What did you do to update/change this promotion from the year before?

Several changes were made to this year's campaign, some of which were part of a larger strategic plan while others were established to meet challenges that required flexibility.

As said earlier, 2017 presented significant challenges and needs in gaining the visibility we needed to meet our media objectives. These were:

- Reacting quickly and efficiently to press inquiries about the atypical weather and its potential effect on the Festival.
- Meeting PR expectations for high-level sponsors
- Reaching new and diverse audiences
- Break through the political noise in DC

Here are the key highlights of how we met those challenges:

- Worked closely with the National Park Service to ensure that messaging about the trees remained consistent. Updating the media with correct information became a priority, and utilizing a spokesperson from the National Park Service to explain the blooming process was crucial.
- Implemented a new social media campaign, #BlossomMoments, on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram as a way to relay messaging about one of our sponsors. The campaign celebrated our 90th anniversary by encouraging people to share their favorite Festival moments and memories by using the hashtag and tagging the sponsor for a chance to win two round-trip airline tickets to Tokyo. The campaign resulted in more than 2,700 entries, and included nostalgic photos and heartfelt stories from Festivals past and present. This was a grassroots campaign done completely in-house among everything else that goes on during the Festival, and the execution costs were absorbed within the already minimal budget allocated for the Festival's communications efforts. Through the use of collateral materials, signage, speaking remarks, and cross-platform social media posting, the campaign exceeded the sponsors' expectations.
- A true innovation this year in media relations was the creation of an Influencer Committee to increase ticket sales for the Pink Tie Party, which is the key fundraiser for the Festival and the only high-end, ticketed event targeted exclusively to Washington's social and business elite. The influencer committee consisted of well-connected socialites and media personas in DC who could use their networks and social platforms to drive awareness of the event in



exchange for two tickets to the Party. Members included stylist and TV personality Paul Wharton and *Real Housewives of Potomac*'s Karen Huger, among others. The success of this new marketing initiative was covered in a BizBash article titled "How to Use Influencer Marketing to Increase Event Attendance" which noted that "The Cherry Blossom Festival turned to social-media influencers to promote its annual Pink Tie Party – and saw results."

- The Festival utilized the press conference as a way to "take back our city" among the deluge of political news. To carry out the theme of "Welcome to Washington", members of the press were greeted by an energetic performance by a local high school marching band and a pink carpet entryway where faces of hospitality industry welcomed guests. As a way to further amp up excitement, we gathered front line employees from key DC hospitality entities (including a hotel bellhop, a chef, National Park Service Rangers, and more) to each reveal a custom-made poster that together presented the dates of the peak bloom prediction. By strategically creating this photo-op, the media had a strong message along with a compelling visual, and it ensured that our priority key message was ultimately the one that would stand out the most.

The Festival is proud to have been able to rise above key challenges to result in record-breaking media results. In a year full of divisive news coming out of Washington, we welcomed the challenge to break through the clutter with uplifting messages of friendship and celebration that come hand-in-hand with the National Cherry Blossom Festival.

Supplementing Materials

The New York Times

POLITICS

Cherry Blossoms in Washington Could Peak Early

By NICHOLAS FANDOS MARCH 2, 2017

Photo





Budding Yoshino cherry trees around the Tidal Basin in Washington on Thursday. Credit T.J. Kirkpatrick for The New York Times

WASHINGTON — The iconic blossoming cherry trees that ring the Tidal Basin here have symbolized the arrival of spring for nearly a century. This year, they will be one more sign of wacky and warming weather.

The [National Park Service](#), which maintains the trees, said on Wednesday that the pink and white blossoms could reach their peak as soon as March 14, a full three weeks earlier than normal. If the flowers indeed pop on that date, it will be the earliest bloom on record.



That is thanks to spring like weather that has made a roaring early advance across much of the United States in recent weeks, breaking records from New England to the Deep South and punctuating a mild winter.



In Texas, which experienced temperatures in the high 80s on several days in February, flowers and trees are in bloom well ahead of schedule. Chicago has had only dustings of snow so far this year — far below the 9.1 inches expected in February.

And in New York State, maple syrup producers started tapping their trees two months before they normally do.

“The key thing is it’s not just the East Coast and the blooming of cherry blossoms,” said Kevin Trenberth, a climatologist at the [National Center for Atmospheric Research](#). “This is going on all over the world.”

Here in Washington, the warmth has organizers of the annual [National Cherry Blossom Festival](#), a monthlong series of performances and other events, racing to meet the early flowering.

Diana Mayhew, the festival’s president, said officials made the decision on Tuesday to begin five days earlier than planned, on March 15, after representatives from the Park Service briefed them on their forecast.

Ms. Mayhew said she expected as many as a million and a half people to take part in the five-week festival, with many of them crowding the blossom-shaded pathways that line the Tidal Basin from dawn to well past dusk.

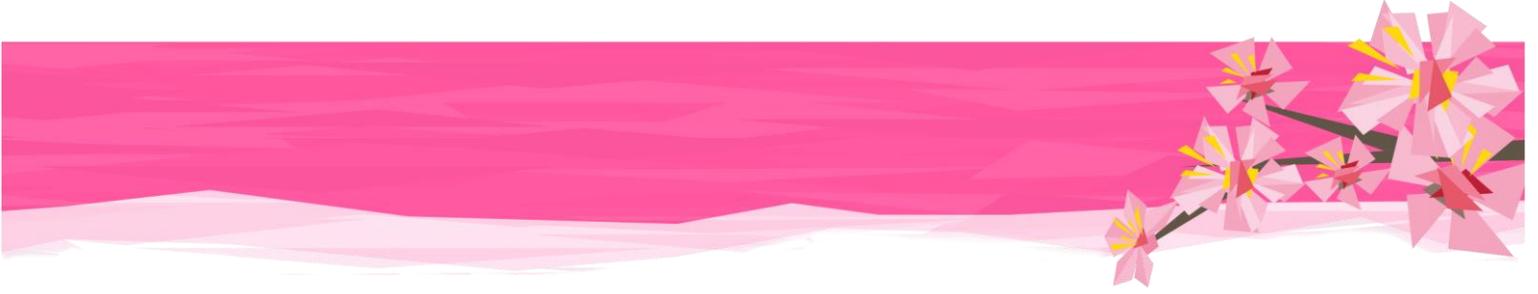
The cherry trees date to 1912, when Japan gave some 3,000 of them to the United States as a gesture of friendship.

Only a handful of the original trees remain, but thousands more have been planted since.

Michael Litterst, a spokesman for the National Park Service, said the agency made its annual bloom prediction based on history, natural indicators on the trees and the weather forecast.

The trees are considered to be in peak bloom when 70 percent of the basin’s most common variety, Yoshino, are in flower. In a typical year, that comes on April 4.

But not this year. Given the mild winter and rare February warmth, the Park Service says the peak should come between March 14 and 17, depending on the weather in the coming weeks.



A twig with buds of Yoshino cherry blossoms at the Tidal Basin. The Yoshino variety is the basin's most common. Credit T.J. Kirkpatrick for The New York

The record, set in 1990, is March 15.

Like much of the central and eastern United States, Washington has seen a winter of record and near-record warmth.

February here was the warmest on record, with average temperatures almost 9 degrees above normal and one degree higher than a normal March.

This year may be a partial anomaly, Mr. Litterst said, but the average date of peak bloom has [shifted forward by almost five days](#) since record keeping began in 1921.

On Thursday, as wind cutting across the Tidal Basin tossed heavy buds through the air, a small group of blossom hunters clustered near a lone, rippling flower that they said they were happy to welcome early.

Ryan Cook was delighted to be among them. On a work trip to the capital with his son, Noah, Mr. Cook had been monitoring the blossoms' development online in hopes of catching a glimpse before leaving town.

As they stopped to take a picture, though, Mr. Cook said he was a bit uneasy with a winter that even at home in Morral, Ohio, has been unusually warm — “scarily so.”

“Just the fact that winter isn't what it used to be — it just doesn't make sense,” he said, saying it was almost certainly a sign of the changing climate that scientific studies describe. “I'll go with the scientists.”

###

The Washington Post

Your guide to navigating the annual Cherry Blossom Festival



These things are tourist magnets, drawing tens of thousands of them to the Tidal Basin each spring. (Jacquelyn Martin/AP)

By [Robert Thomson](#) March 18

The National Cherry Blossom Festival officially began on Wednesday, but you really haven't missed a thing — for better or worse.



The serious challenges to enjoying the festival, or just getting around the vehicle and pedestrian congestion, are just getting started. They will continue until April 15, when the celebration wraps up with a fireworks show on the waterfront.

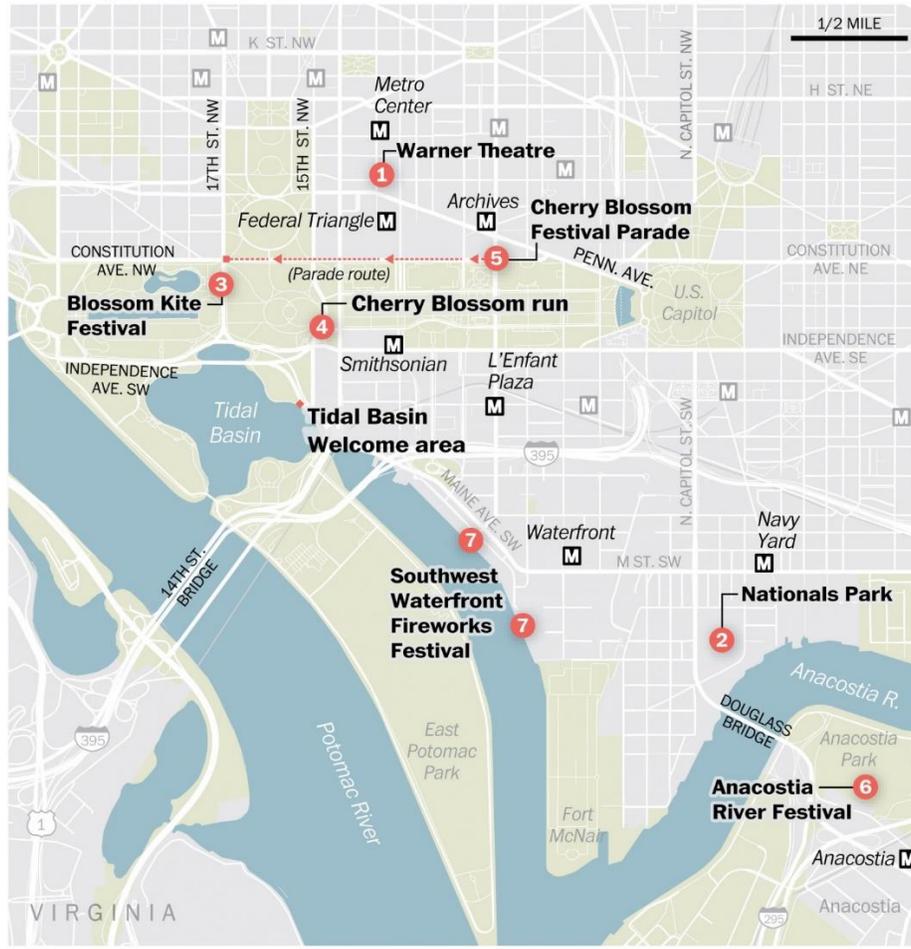
This guidance for visitors and locals alike should help make the next few weeks less challenging.

Key events

1) March 25. Opening ceremony, 5 to 6:30 p.m., Warner Theatre, 513 13th St. NW. The tickets for the performance have been distributed. Nearest Metro stations: Metro Center, Federal Triangle.

2) March 31-April 3. The Nationals return home to Nationals Park for a preseason game against the Red Sox at 4:05 p.m. March 31. They play their home opener against the Marlins at 1:05 p.m. April 3.

Cherry Blossom Festival events



The nearest Metro station, Navy Yard, will be especially crowded before and after the home opener. Traffic will be slow near M and South Capitol streets on the Southeast-Southwest Freeway and on the 14th Street, 11th Street and Douglass bridges. Leave plenty of extra time to make first pitch.

3) April 1. Blossom Kite Festival, 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Washington Monument grounds near 17th Street and Constitution Avenue NW. The festival includes competitions, but also has open areas for flying kites. It's highly dependent on good weather. The rain date is April 2. Nearest Metro stations: Smithsonian, Federal Triangle.



4) April 2. Cherry Blossom 10-Mile Run and 5K Run-Walk. The 10-mile run starts at 7:20 a.m. and the 5K at 8:40 a.m. They both launch from 15th Street NW near the Washington Monument grounds and finish in the same area. The nearest Metro stations are Smithsonian and Federal Triangle, but note that this is a Sunday, so Metrorail won't open till 7 a.m.

5) April 8. Cherry Blossom Festival Parade, 10 a.m. to noon. The floats and marching bands proceed along Constitution Avenue from Seventh to 17th streets NW. Tickets are required for the grandstands, but stand for free between Ninth and 15th streets. Nearest Metro stations: Archives and Federal Triangle.

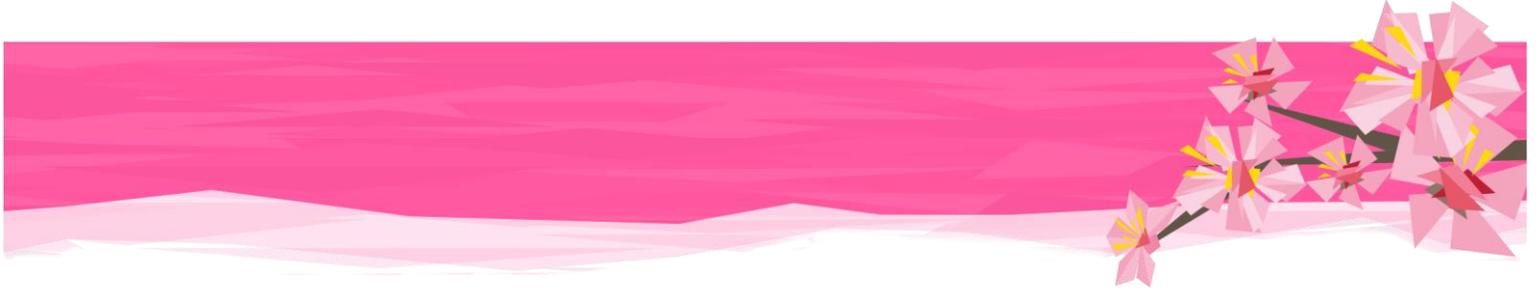
6) April 9. Anacostia River Festival, 1 to 5 p.m., Anacostia Park, at Anacostia Drive and Good Hope Road SE. The festival offers opportunities to canoe, play lawn games and enjoy the local arts scene, but this year's event also includes a special celebration of biking, with trail rides, safety classes and quick bike tuneups.

Nearest Metro station: Anacostia. The walk is about 10 minutes, but there also will be a free shuttle bus between the station's Howard Road exit and the festival. Note also that weekend parking is free at the station garage.

7) April 15. Southwest Waterfront Fireworks Festival. The fireworks are scheduled for 8:30 p.m. over the Washington Channel. But the event begins with a music and food festival from 2 to 9:30 p.m. at the District Wharf, 600-650 Water St. SW, with more entertainment from 6 to 9 p.m. at the Titanic Memorial in the Southwest Waterfront Park. The rain date for fireworks is April 16. Nearest Metro stations: Waterfront and L'Enfant Plaza.

Travel tips

Metro. The transit crowding that occurs during cherry blossom time is most noticeable on weekends and at midday during the week — and at the Smithsonian station, which is nearest to the Tidal Basin.



This is the first, and probably the only festival to occur during Metro's SafeTrack maintenance program. The current edition of SafeTrack, which affects service on the Blue and Yellow lines, is scheduled to continue until April 9, though the April 2-9 phase involves the Yellow Line only.

This is also the first festival without the late-night rail service on weekends. Metro now closes at midnight seven days a week. It opens at 5 a.m. weekdays and 7 a.m. weekends.

On the upside, visitors this year are more likely to ride on one of the new trains, which are always eight cars long. They look better and smell better than the old trains. Also, they have more signs to tell riders in crowded rail cars what the next stop will be.

Crowds are rarely distributed evenly, especially when the train is eight cars long. The last two cars of an eight-car train often are less crowded.

Tell your out-of-town guests: On the escalators, we stand to the right and walk on the left. Don't try to hold the train doors open for others to board. They don't bounce back like elevator doors.

It will be crowded, so whether you're an infrequent local rider or visiting the city, buy your SmarTrip card in advance and make sure it's with enough money for your trip to avoid long lines at the fare machines.

D.C. Circulator. The Circulator's Mall route is a great option during the festival. This is not a tour bus, but it's a convenient way to reach many sites. The red, silver and yellow buses pass by Union Station, the Smithsonian museums, the Mall monuments and the Tidal Basin.

The fare is \$1. Although the Circulator fareboxes take exact change, it's better to use a SmarTrip card for the free reboardings and transfers between buses within two hours after first boarding. Maps and more details are available from the Circulator website at dccirculator.com.

Driving and parking. The festival is an international tourist magnet. During the peak bloom and beyond, drivers are likely to wander in confusion and frustration seeking parking near the Tidal



Basin. Visitor parking is available along Ohio Drive SW between the Lincoln and Thomas Jefferson memorials, but there is nowhere near enough space to accommodate the demand. Our best advice is to avoid driving and use Metro.

Parking for people with disabilities is available along West Basin Drive at the Roosevelt Memorial and along Ohio Drive on the Washington Boundary Channel side of Hains Point, north of the intersection with Buckeye Drive.

At festival time, Ohio Drive will be one way northbound between Inlet Bridge and 23rd Street.

Walking. Even if you drive, do it in sensible shoes, because you will wind up doing a lot of walking. Parking garages are at least a few blocks from the Tidal Basin, mostly on the north side of the Mall.

Then there's the Tidal Basin. If you visit during the peak bloom, you will not be power walking. It's like rush hour on I-66, only you're more likely to crash into a person. Be patient.

While Smithsonian is the closest Metro station to the Tidal Basin, it's also jammed at blossom time. If the weather is pleasant, get off the train at L'Enfant Plaza, Federal Triangle or Foggy Bottom. Or get bonus views by exiting the Blue Line at the Arlington Cemetery station and crossing the Potomac River on the Memorial Bridge and walking past the Lincoln Memorial to the Tidal Basin.

Central Washington, with its grid pattern of streets, is fairly easy to navigate. But if you set off without a walking plan, you will discover that it is, in fact, possible to get lost.

Consult visitor maps on downtown streets or the ones posted by the National Park Service around the Mall. Bus shelters also often display large maps. Metro stations display maps of their surroundings.

Biking. Ride your own bike or rent from one of the many Capital Bikeshare stations. You can sign up for a single trip, passes of 24 hours or three days, or memberships of a month or a year, then take a bike from any station. A pass for a single trip of up to 30 minutes costs \$2; a 24-hour membership costs \$8.



See more details at capitalbikeshare.com.

While riding around the area is delightful, the bike parking is very limited at popular times. Capital Bikeshare has announced it will offer a free corral service near the Washington Monument at Jefferson Drive and 14th Street SW this weekend and this Monday through Friday.

Navigation aids

This section offers guidance for people navigating via smartphone. It's just a sampler of the possibilities.

Twitter. The official festival feed is [@CherryBlossFest](https://twitter.com/CherryBlossFest). It's good for event announcements and updates. Follow [@Metrorailinfo](https://twitter.com/Metrorailinfo) for information on the subway and [@Metrobusinfo](https://twitter.com/Metrobusinfo) for the buses.

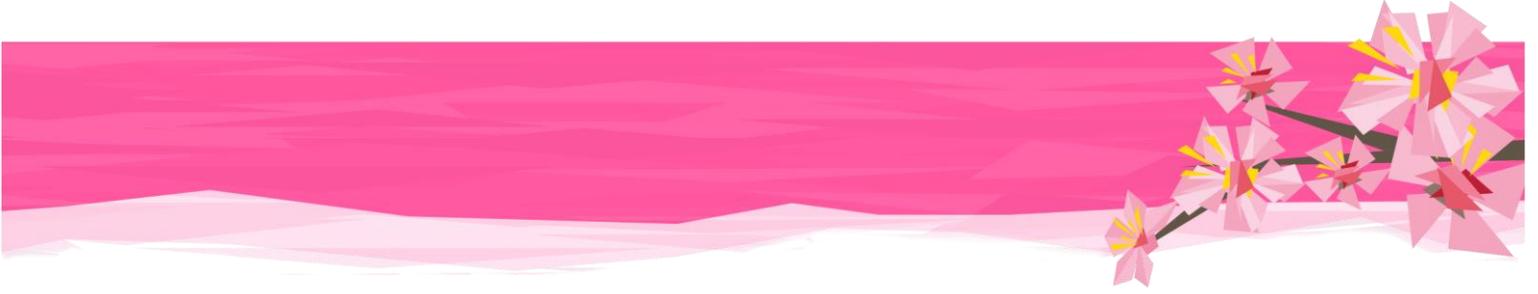
The D.C. Circulator bus system sends alerts on its Twitter feed, [@DCCirculator](https://twitter.com/DCCirculator). The Capital Bikeshare feed is [@bikeshare](https://twitter.com/bikeshare).

Getting around. As a general guide for driving, transit, biking and walking, try the [Google Maps](https://www.google.com/maps) app. With your GPS enabled, it's an easy way to quickly explore travel options and follow turn-by-turn directions. Many travelers also recommend the [Waze](https://www.waze.com) app. It provides real-time guidance, drawn from a community of drivers, and as with Google Maps, it provides voice directions, so you don't need to take your eyes off the road.

Biking. The [SpotCycle](https://www.spotcycle.com) app works for cities in many nations, but for festivalgoers, it can display a tappable map of the closest Capital Bikeshare locations, their addresses and how many bikes and empty docks they have. Also try BikeArlington's RackSpotter, a crowdsourced guide to bike parking locations throughout the D.C. region, at rackspotter.com. It displays many options near the Mall and Tidal Basin.

Transit. Since the last festival, Metro has redesigned its website for easier use with mobile screens. Go to wmata.com on your mobile device and add the Metro site to your home screen.

The mobile version offers a basic guide to bus and rail travel, including Trip Planner, Next Train and Next Bus, as well as service advisories for when things aren't going so well. Using the "Service Near



Me” feature, you could tap in “Tidal Basin” and see all the transit options within walking distance. See also the “Tourist & New Riders” feature to find answers to frequently asked questions.

The easy to manage [RideDC Trip Planner](#) app can use GPS locator services to help find nearby transit, and plan a route to your destination that may involve several modes of travel.

The Post’s [DC Rider](#) app has revamped its home screen since last spring. A touch-screen map links to station names with service details. There is a trip planner feature and links to the latest stories by The Post’s transportation writers.

Parking. These websites and apps are helpful in finding parking spaces: [Parking Panda](#), [Spot-Hero](#) and [ParkWhiz](#). They allow motorists to find and reserve parking spaces in garages that are in the vicinity of the festival events. The app versions use your device’s GPS information to create maps and display parking availability and rates.

The [Parkmobile](#) app can do some off-street parking reservations, but it’s also a way to pay for street meters without carrying a bag of quarters.

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BIZBASH

EVENT REPORT

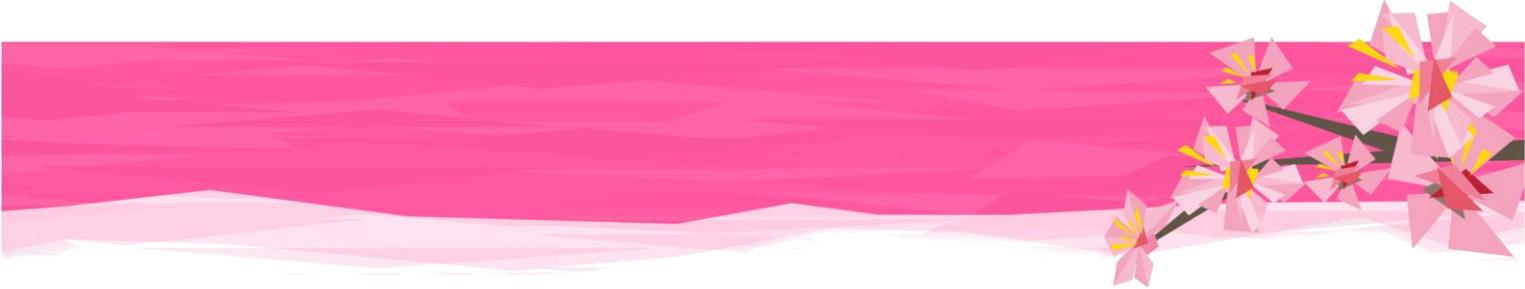
How to Use Influencer Marketing to Increase Event Attendance

The Cherry Blossom Festival turned to social-media influencers to promote its annual Pink Tie Party—and saw results.

By **D. Channing Muller** March 27, 2017, 7:15 AM EDT



WASHINGTON, D.C. The official kickoff to the National Cherry Blossom Festival, Washington's annual celebration of Japan's gift of the cherry trees to the U.S. in March 1912, begins each year with the Pink Tie Party. The 11th annual gathering at the [Ronald Reagan Building and International](#)



[Trade Center](#) on March 16 saw a 25-percent increase in attendance, to more than 750 people, after organizers rebuilt the host committee and turned to local influencers to promote the party.

“By diversifying our inroads to be a part of the party, engaging people who we hadn't engaged in the past by giving them a specific role, and rebuilding the committee, we tapped into the energy of those [new] members,” said Lillian Iversen, senior director of events and marketing for the National Cherry Blossom Festival.

The event's 25-person host committee saw significant turnover after members either moved away from the city or scaled back their involvement. The committee drew 20 new members through a call for commitments via the event website. The new committee members amplified the event's marketing through their own social networks, as well as brought connections to local influencers such as *REAL HOUSEWIVES OF POTOMAC*'s Karen Huger who has more than 27,000 followers on Instagram and another 13,000 on Twitter.

That connection spurred a new outreach campaign to other influencers who had connections with the party, like ABC7's Michelle Marsh, who served as M.C. and has 8,000 Instagram and Twitter followers, and stylist and TV personality Paul Wharton, whose network of followers exceeds 30,000 between Instagram and Twitter. Each of the influencers lent their name to the host committee list and published at least one promotional post on their respective channels prior to the event, as well as additional promotion during and after the event. In return, they received complimentary admission to the pre-event reception for themselves and a guest, a \$600 value.

Though exact ticket sales tracked back to the influencers has yet to be determined, Iversen noted the effort did give traction to the exposure of the event and ticketing pages.

In another promotional change, *WASHINGTONIAN* magazine took over as the event's media partner, a position previously held by *CAPITOL FILE*, and provided new advertising opportunities for the party including leaderboard ads at the top of its website as well as multiple mentions in its e-newsletters.



“The party is about celebrating the season of the blossoms and to get people in the community to have a touch point with the festival, and with WASHINGTONIAN that resonated better,” said Iversen.

Sponsor activations were designed to be interactive like All Nippon Airways (ANA) business class experience, Tesla’s Design Studio, makeup applications from GlamSquad, and more.

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[NATIONAL](#)

Washington kicks off annual cherry blossom festival



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WASHINGTON – The opening ceremony of the National Cherry Blossom Festival was held in Washington on Friday to celebrate the iconic pale pink flowers brought to the Tidal Basin as a gift from Japan.

“The National Cherry Blossom Festival is the biggest celebration of Japan-U.S. friendship in the United States,” Japanese Ambassador to the United States Kenichiro Sasae said in an address at the event. “I’m proud of it.”

The cherry trees were donated by Tokyo in 1912 as a symbol of friendship. About 3,800 of them bloom along the Potomac River, captivating visitors every spring.

Due to a cold snap that hit in mid-March, however, fewer trees than usual are in bloom this year.

Japanese singer May J. and other artists performed at the ceremony.

The festival, scheduled to run through April 16, will include several events to showcase Japanese culture.