



Chasing the Cherry Blossom: A Spiritual Journey through Japan

Lowell Sheppard

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The flowering of the cherry blossom is a powerful symbol of hope in Japan. The first buds open in March and within six weeks the whole country has celebrated the blossom's return as a signal of new beginnings. Intrigued by this unique national celebration, and by Japan's rapid modernization in the last 60 years, Lowell Sheppard sets out on a six week adventure through the 2000 mile length of the country, following the flowering of the blossom as it progresses north. Travelling on a bicycle, he experiences at close hand both everyday Japanese life and the glorious visual feast of the blossoms as he visits 100 viewing sites before the season is over. But when it ends, the sense of national disillusionment is tangible. This intimate encounter with the Japanese at their least inhibited reveals how they are coping with the transition from modernity to post-modernity and asks whether hope is to be found, or whether it is as elusive and fleeting as the cherry blossom.

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