Admire the Cherry Blossoms in Full Bloom in the Expansive Park Where Kanazawa Castle Stands

Kanazawa City, Ishikawa Prefecture is a historic castle town and representative city in the Hokuriku region that faces the Sea of Japan. In the spring, the cherry blossoms along the stone walls of Kanazawa Castle are beautiful, and when illuminated at night, they create a fantastic scene. This article introduces the history of Kanazawa Castle and offers some tips on how to enjoy the cherry blossoms.

(Text: TANAKA Nozomi)

Kanazawa Castle Park is in the center of Kanazawa City, Ishikawa Prefecture. This historic park, which was built on the ruins of Kanazawa Castle, opened to the public in 1996. The huge 28.5-hectare site is dotted with the restored buildings, stone walls, and gardens of Kanazawa Castle. It is also a famous cherry blossom viewing spot, easily accessible from JR Kanazawa Station. Many people visit during the blooming period from early to mid-April each year.

Kanazawa Castle was first used in earnest in 1583 by MAEDA Toshiie[1], a feudal lord of the time. MAEDA Toshiie was the first lord of the Kaga domain, which covered a large area that straddles present-day

Photo: PIXTA

Full bloom cherry blossoms in front of the Ishikawa-mon Gate at the Kanazawa Castle Park

Photo: Kanazawa Castle & Kenroku-en Garden Management Center

The illuminated inner moat of Kanazawa Castle Park, with its fantastic rows of *Somei Yoshino* cherry trees in full bloom

Shidare-zakura in full bloom at Gyokusen-in-maru Garden

Photo: PIXTA

Ishikawa and Toyama prefectures. Kanazawa Castle flourished as the MAEDA clan's residence for about 300 years.

Today, Kanazawa Castle Park is planted with 400 cherry trees of about 13 varieties, including *Somei Yoshino*.[2] Every year, the park is opened free of charge with extended opening hours for about a week after blossoming is announced, so visitors can also enjoy the cherry blossoms after sundown when they are lit up.

One park official describes the best way to visit the park during the cherry blossom season.

"Many of the castle's buildings were lost in natural disasters or fires and have since been restored, but the original Ishikawa-mon Gate, built in 1788 and now designated an Important Cultural Property, stands now just as it did then. During the cherry blossom season, visitors can view Ishikawa-bashi Bridge, which crosses the moat and leads to Ishikawa-mon Gate, along with the cherry blossoms, the gate itself, and the *yagura*, turrets[3] above it — all in one extremely beautiful scene of harmonious balance. The *uchibori* (inner moat) is lined with *Somei Yoshino* cherry trees. The reflection of the cherry blossoms on the surface of the water is also very beautiful. Especially at night, when the blossoms are lit up, it is especially fantastic. I highly recommend it."

Photo: Kanazawa Castle & Kenroku-en Garden Management Center

Illuminated cherry blossoms and Ishikawa-mon Gate, as seen from Ishikawa-bashi Bridge, and the turret above it

At right, Gyokusen-an Rest House

Photo: Kanazawa Castle & Kenroku-en Garden Management Center

Also in the park is the Gyokusen-in-maru Garden,[4] the traditional garden of the MAEDA clan. This garden, beloved by successive lords of the clan, was recreated in 2015. The Gyokusen-an Rest House in the garden is also recommended for visitors to take a break with a view of the garden where the *shidare-zakura*[5] bloom in mid-April.

Next to Kanazawa Castle Park is Kenrokuen,[6] one of Japan's most famous gardens, which is also known as a great place to see cherry blossoms. Visiting this famous castle and garden as a pair during the cherry blossom season promises an extra-special experience. It would certainly be wonderful to enjoy cherry blossoms while reflecting on the several-hundred year history of the place.

1. (Born in 1537, died in 1599). Founder of the Kaga domain. There are various theories about his year of birth.
2. A cultivated variety of cherry tree born in the late 18th century.
3. A tall building constructed on top of a castle gate or wall, used for reconnaissance and firing at enemies.
4. A garden created in 1634 that was worked on by successive lords of the Kaga domain, and existed in the Gyokusen-in-maru area of Kanazawa Castle until the 19th century.
5. General term for a deciduous, tall cherry tree of the rose family that has soft branches that droop toward the ground.
6. A garden built by successive lords of the Kaga domain, located in the center of Kanazawa City. Inside, they created a large pond and built hills to create a garden in the *kaiyu* style (a garden with circulating paths), that can be toured while stopping at one of the teahouses that dot its landscape. See "Kenrokuen: The 'Outstanding Garden' of the Kaga Domain," in the May 2021 issue of *HIGHLIGHTING Japan*.