

Moving On in March

3月は移動の季節

In Japan, March is a season of farewells before new beginnings. As April is the start of the fiscal year in Japan, March is by default the administrative end of the year, and as such tends to be a time of graduation from schools, jobs and other projects. While it is always sad to say farewell to the people and places we knew, sometimes there is a beauty in endings, too.

Cultures and languages from all over the world have unique words and outlooks that tell of a common human experience. These words distill unique and specific emotions into a single word, making them almost impossible to translate, but once explained can be understood by almost anyone from any culture. Examples of these words range from more simple concepts and feelings such as the German word *Waldeinsamkeit*, “the feeling of being alone in a forest”, to feelings so personal yet so universal that although they cannot quite be described in words, everyone can recognize the feeling. For example, the Welsh word *Hiraeth*, meaning “the feeling of wishing to return to a home, place, person or time that you cannot return to, or a similar feeling of wanting a home that has never existed”. Japanese also has many of these untranslatable words and phrases of feeling, and at this time of year one particular one comes to mind –

物の哀れ, *mono no aware*.

Mono no aware is a phrase that means the gentle, bittersweet sadness that one feels when realizing that something cannot last forever, and the deeper sadness that one feels when realizing that that is just the way of life. Literally translated, it means something similar to “the sadness of things”, and this subject and feeling has been a popular theme in Japanese literature and art for many years, inspiring numerous poems, movies and other works about a variety of subjects that evoke this feeling.

From changing seasons and the blooming and wilting of flowers, to the departure of sons and daughters from the family home, this feeling can be found almost anywhere you look. Perhaps most notably, Japan’s famous 花見 (*hanami*), cherry blossom viewing embodies this sense of *mono no aware*. Cherry blossoms are quite delicate flowers. They bloom for only a very short amount time and are delicate enough that even a slight breeze will blow the flowers off the trees. So



although they are beautiful to look at, they also inspire that sadness of knowing that they do not last very long.

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Events at TIRC and in Tokachi and Obihiro

Please be aware that these events may be cancelled to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

To find out if these events are still running, please contact the respective organizers.

When	What	Where/Contact
3/10 (Wed) 19:00-21:00	International Mini-Volleyball Night 国際ミニバレー・ナイト Meet new friends from around the world while enjoying a fun and easy sport. Fee: Free of charge (no registration required) Organized by Tokachi International Association	Tokachi International Relations Center 森の交流館・十勝 0155-34-0122 tirc@city.obihiko.hokkaido.jp
3/13 (Sat) 10:30-12:00	Kids Playground (Ireland) キッズ・プレイグラウンド(アイルランド) Come with your children to learn and play while meeting local families. The theme for March theme will be "Ireland: St. Patrick's Day". Our guest this time will be Gavin, a CIR of Obihiro city from Ireland, who will interact with the children through song, dance and arts and crafts. TIRC Multi-purpose Hall. Fee: Free of charge (registration is required). Limit to the first 30 participants. To register please contact TIRC from Feb 26 (Fri) to Mar 12 (Fri), 2021. For children 0-6 years old and their parents/guardians. Organized by the City of Obihiro	
3/20 (Sat) 18:30-20:00	International Talk (America) インターナショナル・トーク(アメリカ) Learn more about the countries of the world. This month's theme is "America". This time our guest is Chris, Obihiro's new American CIR. He will introduce his country and share facts and interesting information about American culture, lifestyle and more. Participants can interact with the guest through a presentation, quiz and Q&A session. Fee: Free of charge (no registration required), For junior high school students and older. Organized by the City of Obihiro	
1/30-3/21 (Sat-Sun) Sat 10:00- Sun 11:30	Shikaribetsuko Kotan 然別湖コタン This year, the phantom village of snow and ice that only appears during winter has arisen on the surface of Shikaribetsu Lake once more! Join us for the 40th anniversary of the Shikaribetsuko kotan. *The activities available may change depending on the circumstances regarding COVID-19 and restrictions on a national and prefectural level.	Shikaribetsu Lake 然別湖コタン実行委員会 0156-69-8181 www.kotan.jp
3/6 (Sat) 10:00-11:00	Make Your Own Bird Call エコパ探検隊「バードコールを作ろう」 Make your very own bird whistle with simple materials! Masks required. 400 Yen participation fee, participates grade 3 and under must be accompanied by an adult. Max 10 participants	Tokachi Ecology Park Visitor's Center 十勝エコロジーパーク財団 0155-32-6780 www.tokachi-ecopark.jp

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While mono no aware may not be a bad feeling necessarily, sometimes it can be hard to cope with, especially when it is something as significant and personal as a colleague or friend leaving. However another Japanese concept can help with this, the idea of 詫び寂び, *wabi-sabi*. Another untranslatable word, *wabi-sabi* is a way of thought that originally comes from Zen Buddhism. It is the idea of accepting that imperfection and intransience is natural, and because of these “faults” things become more beautiful.

Wabi-sabi has inspired a large variety of art, such as 生け花 (*ikebana*), the traditional Japanese art of flower arranging, and the creation of zen gardens. Perhaps the most practical example of *wabi-sabi* is that of 金継ぎ (*kintsugi*), the repair of damaged bowls, cups

and statues with gold lacquer. This creates a piece that, rather than hide the damage it has suffered or treat it as less than a whole and complete item, celebrates the change it has gone through and highlights the repairs to the bowl or cup, giving it a new and unique form.

Ultimately, what we can take away from these kinds of ideas is that while many things, including connections to other people, may come to an end, these endings make that connection even more special. And endings may not always be the end! Just like *kintsugi*, you can make something new and exciting by rearranging and acknowledging the changes in things.

While we may have to say a fond farewell this month to some of our colleagues, we hope that you can find some comfort in these ideas to help make any partings you have to make this month just that little bit easier.

Culture Corner: Plum Blossoms カルチャーコーナー：梅の花

If you were to take a trip to the main island of Japan, *Honshu*, this month, you might find yourself greeted by the sight of trees bearing beautiful blossoms in many different shades of pink. While it would be easy to mistake these trees for Japan's famous 桜 (*sakura*) cherry blossom trees, these trees are in fact a different kind of blossom tree, the plum blossom.

Cherry blossom trees tend to bloom around April and possess an ephemeral beauty, the blooms lasting only a week to 10 days. In contrast, Plum blossoms bloom much earlier, around mid-February to early March, and last for a much longer period of time, often sticking around for 2-3 weeks or even longer. Due to how early in the year they tend to bloom, Plum blossoms are often associated with the beginning of Spring, and for a long time were actually more culturally significant in Japan than the cherry blossom. It's only in more recent years that the cherry blossom has overtaken the plum blossom in terms of popularity.

So do plum blossoms bloom here in Hokkaido as well?

The good news is that they do, but unfortunately, those of us here in Hokkaido still have a while to wait, as the plum blossom blooms later here due to the lower temperatures and later spring. However, precisely because of this, something unusual tends to happen in Hokkaido: the plum blossom and the cherry blossom bloom at the same time!

Identifying which one is which can be difficult, particularly if they're both blooming at the same time. The easiest way is to look at the petals of the flowers. Plum blossoms tend to have round petals, whereas cherry blossoms tend to have more pointed petals that split at the tip. Plum blossom trees also tend to have darker bark than cherry blossom trees. In many places around Hokkaido, the cherry blossom trees tend to outnumber the plum blossom, but if you keep an eye out you can still find the plum blossom among the cherry blossom trees!

This year the plum and cherry blossoms are expected to bloom around the beginning of May, so while it's a little while away yet, keep an eye out for both of these beautiful sights, unique to Japan!

Movies at Cinema Taiyo, in Obihiro

(Nishi 3, Minami 11)
Tel: (0155) 20-1525

Due to COVID-19, release dates for new films may be postponed.
Please contact Cinema Taiyo directly for more details.

Times and movies are subject to change! (for space reasons not all movies are listed)
To confirm, call or check online at: http://www.taiyogroup.jp/cinema/theater/_obihiro/movie.shtml

Title	Language	Dates
Liar x Liar (<i>Raiā x Raiā</i>)	JP Dub	Until 18 th
The Sun Stands Still (<i>Taiyō wa Ugokanai</i>)	JP Sub	From 5 th
Raya and the Last Dragon (<i>Rāya to Ryū no Ōkoku</i>)	JP Dub	From 5 th
Monster Hunter (<i>Monsutā Hantā</i>)	JP Sub/Dub	From 26 th
Kiba: The Fangs of Fiction (<i>Damashie no Kiba</i>)	JP Dub	From 26 th

Events Continued

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When	What	Where/Contact
Until 3/27 19:00-21:00	Uralaa Park Therapeutic Forest Experience uralaa park (森林浴体験) Enjoy an indoor experience of Tokachi's greenery, Yakushima's cedar trees, Iriomotesima's mangroves, and the digital sounds and scents of the forest. No special tools are required, just come in, sit down in the wheelchair, and enjoy the relaxing experience of the forest wind in a digital forest-bathing space known as <i>uralaa</i> . Fee: Free Reservation Required	Uralaa park urahoro フォレストデジタル株式会社 support@forestdigital.org https://uralaa.com/park
Until 3/31	Winterfest In Ecology Park ウィンターフェスinエコパオープン Enjoy a range of winter activities including cross country skiing, snow tubing, and snow raft tours.	Tokachi Ecology Park Visitor Center 十勝エコロジーパーク財団 0155-32-6780 www.tokachi-ecopark.jp

Obihiro Pioneer can be found at the following locations: Obihiro City Hall, Tokachi International Relations Center, Obihiro University International Center, Obihiro Tourism and Convention Center inside the Obihiro JR Station, Obihiro Public Library, Tokachi Plaza, Cinema Taiyo, Joy English Academy and online at www.city.obihiro.hokkaido.jp (click on "Information for Foreigners")

"Obihiro Pioneer" is a newsletter published monthly by the Obihiro City Tourism and Goodwill Exchange Section for residents of the Tokachi District and related parties. The contents of this newsletter do not necessarily represent the official views or opinions of the Tourism and Goodwill Exchange Section or the City of Obihiro. Questions? Tel (0155) 65-4133 or send e-mail to the Editing Team at international@city.obihiro.hokkaido.jp.