

## 1. The Tochigi cherry blossom festival and cherry blossom viewing spots

It is the cherry blossom season again this year. Here is information on cherry blossom festivals and viewing spots in various parts of the city.

Ohira-san Cherry Blossom Festival is held from March 21 to April 13. Ohira-san has been selected as one of the top 100 cherry blossom viewing spots in Japan. The scenic road leading from the foot of Ohira-san features a spectacular row of cherry trees called the "Cherry Blossom Tunnel". The mountain is lined with around 4,000 cherry trees in full bloom.

The Ohira Cherry Blossom Festival is held from March 28 to April 6, when the cherry trees along Sakura-dori in front of Ohira Athletic Park are illuminated from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. The Fujioka Cherry Blossom Festival is held from March 28 to 30 at Fujioka Watarase Athletic Park, where the rows of cherry trees are illuminated with reed lights. The 30th will feature stalls and various events.

The Tsuga-no-sato Hanasai Festival is held from 5 to 13 April in Tsuga-no-sato. The 180-year-old "Oriental Cherry" and other cherry trees of different flowering seasons will blossom one after another, allowing visitors to enjoy them for a long time. Various events are scheduled on Saturdays and Sundays during the festival.

The Nishikata Kanasaki Cherry Blossom Festival will be held from March 30 to April 6, with illuminated cherry trees, stalls and various events. This year marks the 100th anniversary of the planting of the 200 or so cherry trees that line the banks of the Omoigawa River.

The Ibuki no Sato Cherry Blossom Festival is held in Miya-machi on 29 and 30 March. There are about 500 cherry trees spread out along the river near the Miya Bridge over the Naganogawa River, 1.5 kilometres long.

On 30 March, the Iwafune Cherry Blossom Festival is held at the Iwafune Sports Park. The cherry trees in the park were planted over 20 years ago and have grown into large, mature trees. There are also various events and stalls.

Please take this opportunity to tour the city!

## 2. Opening of the new Tsuga General Branch Office

The new Tsuga General Branch opened on February 25.

It is located in Harajuku, Tsuga-machi, on the site of the former Bunka Kaikan.

The Tsuga General Branch Office was developed as a complex facility with the functions of a general branch office, community center, and library, and as a model for the reorganization of public facilities.

The first floor houses the general branch office and the library. The library has a collection of over 20,000 books and space for study and children's activities, and can be used as a place of learning for local residents.

The second floor is a community center room. There are large, medium, and small meeting rooms, a kitchen, and a multipurpose room for dance practice. The multipurpose room can accommodate up to 300 people. It will replace the former Tsuga Community Center, which will also be used as an emergency shelter in the event of a disaster.

The Tsuga Community Center also houses a uniform bank, where unwanted uniforms and other items are collected and given to the next user who needs them.

## 3. Introduction of Extended Office Hours

Tochigi City will extend the opening hours of frequently used offices to improve convenience for all citizens.

The City Hall Main Building will be open every Wednesday for the Residential Affairs Division, the Health Insurance and Pension Division, and the Taxation Division.

At the Ohira, Fujioka, Tsuga, Nishikata, and Iwafune General Branch Offices, the Community Development Promotion Division is open on the second Wednesday of each month.

The hours are extended from 5:15 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. at both the City Hall main building and each general branch office.

The office is open throughout the year except during the holidays.

In particular, at the Ohira General Branch, an English interpreter is available at the counter every Wednesday from 3:00 p.m. to 5:15 p.m. On the second Wednesday of the month, the service is extended until 7:00 p.m. Please take advantage of this service.

## 4. Notice of National Pension Insurance Premiums

The National Pension Insurance premiums change every fiscal year. For fiscal 2025, the monthly premium will be 17,510 yen.

Those who pay in cash will receive a payment slip from the Japan Pension Service at the beginning of April. Monthly contributions should be paid by the end of the following month.

The public pension system is a system in which monthly contributions allow you to receive money as you grow older, as well as in the event of unpredictable events such as disability or death.

All residents of Japan between the ages of 20 and 59, regardless of nationality, are required to participate in the public pension system. Those who are not enrolled in the Employees' Pension System, for example, must join the National Pension System.

If your income is too low to pay the contributions, you can apply for an exemption.

In addition, if you are a student and have difficulty paying the premiums due to low income or other reasons, you can apply for the "Special Exception for Student Payments".

When applying for permanent residence, the payment status of the National Pension Plan is strictly examined, so those who wish to reside permanently in Japan must pay the National Pension Plan premiums.