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Tokyo in Full Bloom

Japan may be famous for its cherry blossoms, but springtime in Tokyo brings an abundance of other flowers and flower festivals. By the end of April, many of Japan's cherry blossoms have already flowered, but Tokyo's city dwellers still have plenty of blooming flowers to look forward to. The Nezu Shrine is a quiet place for 11 months out of the year, but by the first week in May, its 3,000 azalea plants burst into a palette of bright colors. The Bunkyo Azalea Festival, or Tsutsuji

Matsuri, attracts thousands of visitors during Golden Week, its busiest viewing week. The 300-year-old azalea garden is home to rare varieties, such as the black karafune flower, and is complete with a Shinto shrine, bridges running over streams, traditional Torii gates, and women dressed in their best traditional kimonos.

Across town is yet another sacred spot draped in wondrous springtime color: the

Kameido Tenjin Shrine. This shrine is home to its famous trellises boasting a sea of cascading purple wisteria vines. The wisteria were planted 300 years ago when the original temple was built. Visitors can stroll over

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May Birthdays

In astrology, those born between May 1–20 are Bulls of Taurus. Bulls are stable, reliable, and committed in both work and family. Bulls also appreciate love, beauty, and creativity. Those born between May 21–31 are Gemini's Twins. Twins have two distinct sides to their personality: sociable and ready for fun, or serious and thoughtful. When they feel as if one half is missing, they seek new friends.

Jack Paar (comedian) – May 1, 1918
Audrey Hepburn (actress) – May 4, 1929
Tammy Wynette (singer) – May 5, 1942
Don Rickles (comedian) – May 8, 1926
Irving Berlin (songwriter) – May 11, 1888
L. Frank Baum (author) – May 15, 1856
Queen Victoria (monarch) – May 24, 1819
Vincent Price (actor) – May 27, 1911
Bob Hope (comedian) – May 29, 1903

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the shrine's beautiful red bridge, spying darting koi and lounging turtles in the pond. The wisteria are so alluring that old Japanese shoguns made pilgrimages to visit the garden. Many of Japan's most celebrated artists have captured the garden's scenic serenity in color prints.

Perhaps the most celebrated of all flower festivals is the Kyu Furukawa Garden Rose Festival. The gardens, sprawled at the foot of a western-style mansion, have been designated a national place of scenic beauty. The roses hit their peak in May with a dazzling array of colors and an intoxicating bouquet of aromas. Over 90 rose varieties can be found, including Princess Michiko, a variety named for Japan's Empress, and Royal Princess, a variety named for Princess Aiko, daughter of Japan's Crown and Princess.



Inventors Month

Vinegar Month

Teacher Day May 2

Astronaut Day May 5

Cherish an Antique Day May 9

International Nurses Day May 12

Endangered Species Day May 19

World Lindy Hop Day May 26

Memorial Day (U.S.) May 29

Wild Goose Chase

May 1 is Mother Goose Day, a day honoring the mythical persona behind the popular children's nursery rhymes. Most believe that Mother Goose was a pseudonym for numerous authors, but there are theories as to who the "real" Mother Goose was. The French queen Bertrada of Laon, the mother of Charlemagne, was

known as "Goose-foot Bertha." A competing theory attributes the nickname to one Elizabeth Goose from Boston. In 1692, Elizabeth wed Isaac Goose, adding her six children to his 10. With 16 children, she became famously adept at storytelling, the lot of which was compiled by her great-grandson into

the Mother Goose volume. This legend is so pervasive that many seek out Elizabeth Goose's grave in Boston to pay their respects. Adding to the unsolved mystery of Mother Goose, Elizabeth Goose's grave is unmarked. The visitors, on their goose chase to Elizabeth's grave, are actually visiting someone named Mary Goose.

Polkmania

Put on your dancing shoes for Polka Weekend on May 26–28. The popularity of the polka is said to have originated with one woman, Anna Slezakova, who invented the dance in 1834. Slezakova created a lively dance to the folk song “Uncle Nimra Bought a White Horse.” Music teacher Josef Neruda, who witnessed Anna’s new and unique dance, transcribed the tune to paper and taught the steps to his students. By 1835, the dance had spread to Prague. By 1839, it was popular in Vienna, and in 1840, it was introduced in Paris, where it became so popular that it created a so-called “polkmania.”

The polka sound is immediately recognizable. Accordions, fiddles, clarinets, and tubas whip

up a quick beat. The main characteristic of the polka is the half-step, or hop. In fact, the word *polka* likely comes from the Czech word *pulka*, meaning “half.” Perhaps the easiest way to understand the polka rhythm is through a children’s nursery rhyme: “Hippety hop, to the barber shop, to buy a stick of candy.” The four counts of the phrase “hippety hop” correspond to the four beats: step, half-step, step, hold.

The polka may have originated in Bohemia (present-day Czech Republic), but it has spread far and wide to the United States and beyond. The polka is one of the few dances to have maintained its popularity since the 19th century; it will likely remain popular for many years to come.

Flights of Fancy

Simple sheets of paper will be transformed into fanciful flying machines on May 26, Paper Airplane Day. Competitions abound with flyers striving to win in two categories: distance and time in air. The record distance for a paper airplane is 226 feet, 10 inches (about three-quarters of a football field). The plane was folded by John

Collins, a famed paper airplane folder, and thrown by Joe Ayoob, a former college football quarterback. The record for time in air is 29.2 seconds, thrown by Takuo Toda and recorded in Japan. Toda calls his design the Sky King Paper Airplane, and it was designed to climb high into the rafters and slowly glide downward.

By Any Other Name

May 5 is Hoagie Day, but this may mean nothing to anyone outside of Philadelphia, where this term is used for a big sandwich loaded with meat and cheese. Legend has it that the first version of this mega-sandwich appeared in Connecticut near a Navy submarine base. Italian shopkeeper Benedetto Capaldo served up loaded sandwiches he dubbed “grinders.” Once the Navy yard began ordering 500 grinders each day, his creation was renamed the “submarine sandwich.” In New York City, the sandwich is called a “hero,” which many believe evolved out of a mispronunciation of the Greek “gyro” sandwich. Where did hoagie come from? Another mispronunciation. Shop owner Al De Palma created a massive sandwich fit for a “hog.” The Philadelphia accent warped his “hoggie” into the “hoagie.”



Notable Quotable

“To dance is human, to polka is divine.”

~ K.D. Lang, singer-songwriter



As Luck Would Have It

Find a penny, pick it up, and all day you’ll have good luck. The notion that a found penny brings good luck is so popular that it enjoys its own holiday on May 23, Lucky Penny Day.

Why are pennies considered lucky, especially when many of us consider one cent to be worthless? The idea of attributing luck to metal is an ancient custom. It was believed that metal was a gift from the gods. To carry a piece of metal was to carry the gods’ blessing and receive protection from evil. For similar

reasons, charm bracelets and horseshoes are also considered lucky. Another influence stems from the belief that money brings wealth and power. A penny saved, although only a cent, marks the beginning of a lifetime of savings.

Some cultures, like those in Europe and Ireland, believe that if you find a penny you have found one piece of a leprechaun’s horde of gold. Tradition advises you to spit on the found coin and toss it into the bushes, returning it to

the little magical elves. These enchanting creatures would then return the favor by doing you good deeds.

The legend of the lucky penny has endured, but if you’re still skeptical, perhaps you’ll change your tune when you learn that one U.S. bank has hidden 100 “lucky” pennies across the country. Each one is worth \$1,000. Of course, the next time you do find a penny, you’ll likely have to be satisfied with it being worth just one cent...and a whole lot of luck.



Notable Quotable

“Pennies do not come from heaven. They have to be earned here on Earth.”

~ Margaret Thatcher, Former Prime Minister of Britain

Feeling Lucky?

There are many variations on the lucky penny superstition. Some believe that only heads-up pennies are lucky. If you find a tails-up penny, you should flip it over and leave it for another to find. Others believe that a penny or coin thrown into a fountain or tossed into a well allows you to make a wish. An old Victorian rhyme advises brides to wear “something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue, and a lucky penny in your shoe.”

Cola Cure-All

People have been drinking Coca-Cola since May 8, 1888, when the soft drink was first served by Dr. John S. Pemberton at Jacob’s Pharmacy in Atlanta, Georgia. Coca-Cola was first marketed as a medicinal cure-all beverage for ailments

such as headaches, nerve disorders, addictions, and indigestion. By 1900, sales of Coca-Cola had reached 100 million annually. Perhaps this surge in popularity had to do with Coca-Cola’s brilliant marketing strategy of issuing tickets

that could be redeemed at any location for a free glass—these tickets are considered the first coupons ever invented. Today Coca-Cola is as popular as ever. And it is still marketed as a medicinal cure for stomach blockages.

