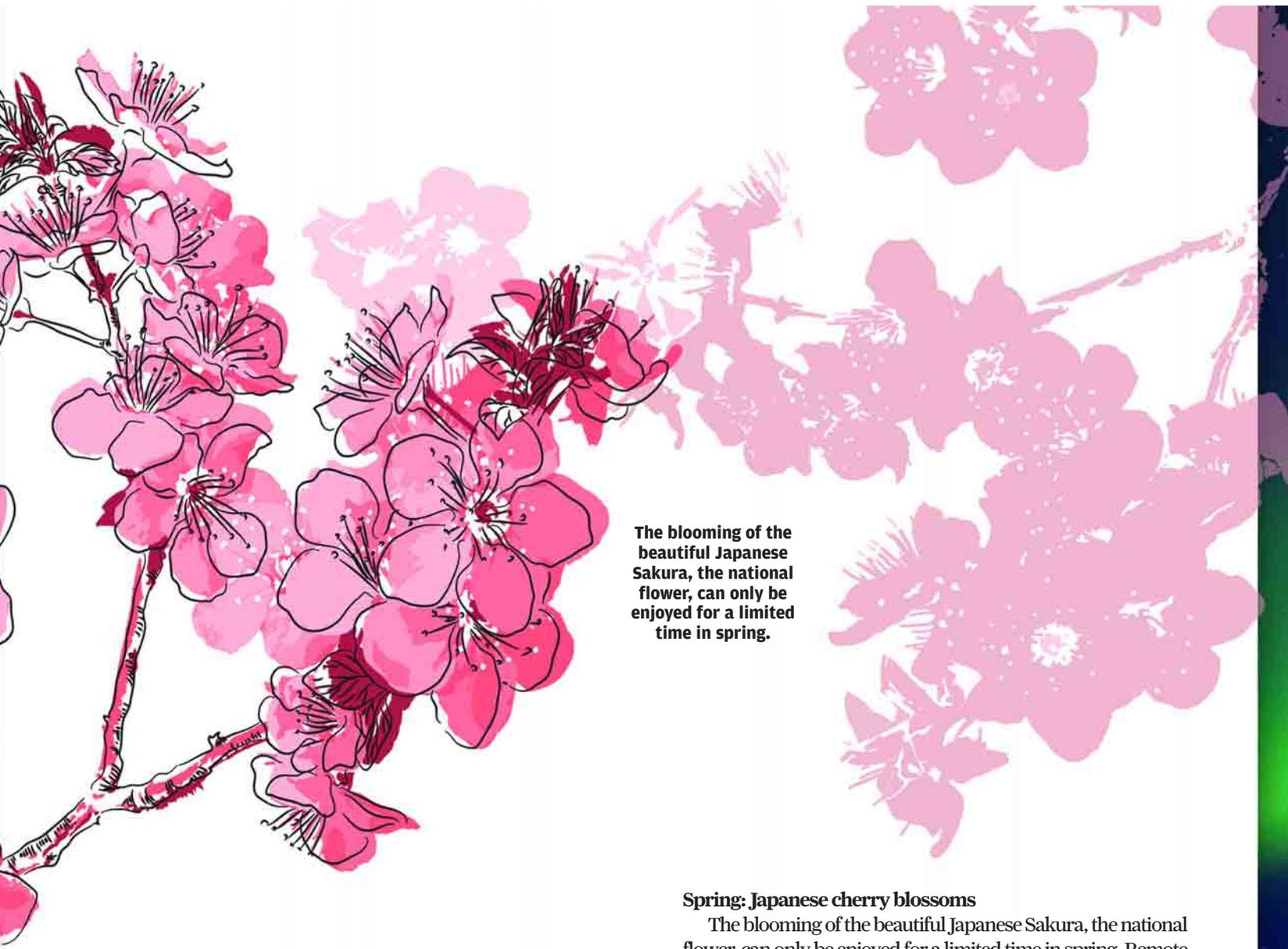




Colourful adventures

Your luxury travel bucket list may be all set but some magical places can only be seen for a limited time, writes **Alex Lester**

The Northern Lights, or Aurora Borealis, is a phenomenon that is best experienced in the winter. Photos: Thinkstock



The blooming of the beautiful Japanese Sakura, the national flower, can only be enjoyed for a limited time in spring.

Exhilaration lies on every corner of the earth, although there are some destinations that can only be seen at a certain time of year. Whether it is watching powerful bulls charge down the streets of Spain, viewing magnificent waterfalls cascade in South America, seeing the vibrant colours of blooming flowers in Japan or indulging in winter activities and experiencing the Northern Lights at the top of the world, there is somewhere to go in every season.

Winter: Northern Lights and winter activities in Greenland

The Northern Lights, or Aurora Borealis, is a phenomenon that is best experienced in the winter, and as far north as possible. Greenland offers an exclusive destination from which to embark on this once-in-a-lifetime voyage that can only be enjoyed in a limited timeframe. The dazzling display of lights is famed in folklore across the world, and presents a visual delight that must be seen to be believed.

Combine a trip to Greenland with a range of winter activities that includes heli-skiing, extreme skiing and snowboarding, snowmobiling and dog sledding. Two airlines fly to Greenland, Air Greenland and Air Iceland, with services from Canada, Denmark and Iceland. You may also consider a cruise service to get to this far-flung outpost.

For best access to Northern Lights viewing, stay at the Hotel Arctic (www.hotelarctic.com) in Ilulissat with a range of rooms, suites and igloo pods that have harbour views. From the hotel, you can also visit the stunning Ilulissat Ice Fjord and sail between icebergs, some rising more than 100 metres above the surface. Packages start at US\$3,042 per person from Wexas (www.wexas.com).

Spring: Japanese cherry blossoms

The blooming of the beautiful Japanese Sakura, the national flower, can only be enjoyed for a limited time in spring. Remote Lands (www.remotelands.com) offers a seven-day luxury itinerary, taking in Osaka, Kyoto, Kobe and Hiroshima. The tour includes stays at ultraluxury hotels, including the Ritz-Carlton Osaka, Hoshinoya Kyoto, Oriental Hotel Kobe and Sekitei Hiroshima hotel.

Visitors will witness the beauty of the Sakura, with vibrant colours that illuminate the picturesque traditional surrounds of Japan. The tour, which starts at US\$1,565 per person, includes visits to some of the most iconic destinations in the country. On the list of landmarks are Osaka Castle and Kobe's Himeji Castle, Kyoto's Kiyomizu-dera Temple, and Hiroshima's Mount Misen and Peace Memorial Park.

These attractions will be a welcome whetting of the appetite for the main show – the Japanese Sakura, whose splendour is most profound in spring. The expedition features some great viewing locations for the Sakura, including The Philosopher's Path in Kyoto. An unforgettable display of colour, the prime time to see cherry blossoms is typically in April but lasts until May, although the flower can appear earlier in southern parts of Japan.

Summer: Running of the bulls in Pamplona

It's a once-in-a-lifetime event, so get ready for the famed running of the bulls in Pamplona, northern Spain, during the San Fermin Festival. The timeline visitors must adhere to is tight, because the festival runs from July 6 to 14 every year. Book early and secure a chance to feel the visceral energy of the bulls and danger faced by the runners as they run through the gauntlet. Given the danger here, visitors may want to watch in the comfort of a private balcony away from the frenzied bulls and crush of runners. Running of the Bulls Travel (runningofthebulls.travel) can provide visitors with a private space to take it all in, and will put on additional parties to keep the action going.



The famed running of the bulls in Pamplona is a once-in-a-lifetime event, held during the San Fermin festival. Photos: Thinkstock/Shutterstock

To observe the event in its full glory, the agency arranges drinks for the festival's Txupinazo Opening Ceremonies on the morning of July 6, which is followed by bullfights at the town's Plaza de Toros (bullring) in the evening. For US\$2,901, guests are lodged for three nights at the stylish Castillo de Gorraiz Golf and Spa, close to Pamplona's city centre. It would be wise to have a good night's sleep after partying on July 6, considering the next morning you will be on a private balcony at Dead Man's Corner (Estafeta Street), seeing courageous runners attempt to outwit the march of bulls. That evening, there will be a dinner with a full view of fireworks in town. Alternatively, to arrange visits independently, go to www.pamplona-balconies.com to book a balcony and discover a series of luxury accommodation offers.

Autumn: Iguazú Falls
 Located on the border between Brazil and Argentina, observe the best of the dramatic falls in March during autumn in the southern hemisphere. In the winter the falls dry up, while in summer the surrounding area is hot, muggy and crowded with tourists. This leaves autumn

Devil's Throat in Iguazú Falls in Argentina, South America. Photo: Thinkstock

as the perfect time to complete this epic journey. A Unesco World Heritage Site, the falls combine 275 streams into a confluence that is reportedly 18 metres higher than Niagara, and vastly wider. Blue Parallel (www.blueparallel.com) organises trips with three nights in Rio de Janeiro and two nights at the falls.

To begin your passage, stay at art-deco styled Belmond Copacabana Palace, a landmark in the city that overlooks Copacabana Beach, or the Fasano Rio de Janeiro, designed by Philippe Starck, featuring ocean views of Ipanema Beach. For something more intimate, you can also select a luxury penthouse apartment or villa overlooking the coast. At the falls, accommodation includes the Belmond Hotel das Cataratas, commanding vistas of Iguazú on the Brazilian side, or the Loi Suites, in a secluded yet elegant location on the Argentine side. Tours include a private scenic helicopter ride over the falls, jungle adventures, and rafting, and cost between US\$7,500 and US\$9,500 per person.

