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Travel

Washington's cherry bomb

Specials bloom around Cherry Blossom Festival

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This Saturday marks the start of Washington D.C.'s Cherry Blossom Festival, the annual rite of spring in our nation's capital. If you plan to head down to catch the buds in bloom, here are a few spring specials to check out.

As 3,000 cherry trees herald spring's arrival, the vibrant Mexican restaurant Rosa Mexicano (575 Seventh St., NW, 202-783-5522, www.rosamexicano.com) has combined Mexican and Japanese cuisine and added a touch of cherry to tasty revamps such as the rollo de atún (\$7), a tuna maki with a cherry pico de gallo, and the spicy bolitas de arroz con cangrejo, which pairs crab and avocado with a tart cherry-jalapeño sauce (\$8). Mexicano's sparkling Cerezas Brillantes (\$10) — a Bing cherry-infused margarita with a Cava top-off — is certainly a brilliant way to bid winter adios.

This culinary left-turn is part of the festival's Cherry Picks program, which unites dozens of the capital's restaurants and bars.

At hot date spot, Firefly, in the Hotel Madera (1310 New Hampshire Ave., NW,

www.hotelmadera.com), there's the cherry vodka Sakura (named for the flowering cherry tree, \$12.50), the Cherry Bomb (\$9), made with cherry brandy and sparkling wine, and Smuttynose Brewery's spring seasonal Hanami Ale (\$6), which is made with cherry juice and inspired by the ancient Japanese tradition of Hanami — contemplating cherry blossoms.

Hobnob with D.C. movers and shakers at the posh Fairmont hotel's renowned Juniper restaurant (2401 M St., NW, 202-429-2400, www.fairmont.com), which adds cherry-themed specials, or enjoy the tangy Cherry Cosmopolitan (\$14) and refreshing Cherry Blossom Sangria (\$14) in the exquisite courtyard garden.

The romantic Fairmont, steps away from the boutiques and colorful dining of Georgetown, has a Cherry Blossom package that includes a welcome pack and valet parking (from \$189). A



Ah, spring! The National Mall and Washington Monument in bloom.

“The Festival's Cherry Picks program unites dozens of restaurants and bars.”

pair of Cherry Bombs and Metro passes pep up the Hotel Madera's festival package (from \$165).

Art and Soul (415 New Jersey Ave. NW, 202-393-7777, www.artandsouldc.com) pairs their East meets South country sushi (\$12) — a lightly fried Maryland crab stuffed roll — and an elegant Cherry Blossom Cocktail (\$10), a blend of rose champagne, a cherry reduction, St. Germaine and orange zest poured over shaved ice. Snack and sip in the buzzing ArtBar, which

spills into the hotel's lobby and jams weekend nights. For the morning after, their weekend brunch is a must: Southern fried chicken with sausage gravy and maple-nut waffle (\$15) is a specialty, and that Cherry Blossom Cocktail morphs into a shocking pink breakfast pick-me-up.

National Cherry Blossom Festival Washington, D.C.

Saturday through April 12
www.nationalcherryblossomfestival.org

When to go

Although it's hard to predict when the cherry blossoms will be in full bloom, the National Park Service Horticulturists say that the peak bloom date for 2009 will be April 1-4, with the blooming period stretching from Saturday until April 11.