

# The Dozo Chronicles

5-6 April 2003, Saitama, Japan

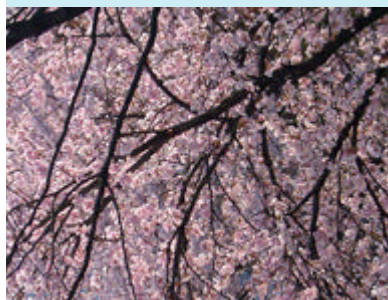


On Sunday afternoon I took the train into Tokyo and met Shimada-san — one of the people I'm working with — at Shinjuku Station. Shinjuku district is well known for its entertainment and vibrant night life (on the previous evening Shimada-san, Usuda-san (another work colleague), and I enjoyed a jazz concert featuring Tokyo's finest). From Shinjuku Station we took two more trains to the area of town where she lives with her parents.

On the way to her house we walked by the site of the 1964 Summer Olympics, now used as a public sports facility and park. It was full of cherry trees...hundreds of them...and thousands of people out enjoying the blossoms. Everywhere we went there were groups of people, families and friends, sitting on mats spread out underneath the trees, eating, drinking, talking, singing, and drinking liberal quantities of saki.

Going out in groups to view and enjoy the cherry blossoms is an annual affair that Japanese families look forward to with passion. It's the end of winter, the beginning of spring...and summer is just around the corner.

Following the formalities of meeting Shimada-san's parents, I enjoyed an amazing, home-cooked Japanese meal. Lots of fish (raw and cooked), pickled vegetables, and various types of tofu, all washed down with warm saki.



I don't know what the population of the Tokyo metropolitan area is, but it's massive. And it seems as if the majority of the population is moving around by subway or train at any given moment. The train and subway system is like a spider's web. The stations are unbelievably crowded, with multiple train lines converging. Making a transfer is no easy task. It's a bit intimidating in the stations, especially on my own... there's not much in the way of English signage.

Out viewing the multi-coloured cherry blossoms somewhere in Tokyo...on a very wet, windy and very cold (4 C) Saturday afternoon. In spite of the inclement weather there were hundreds of people strolling about enjoying the "spring".



I'm staying and spend most of my time in Saitama — a suburb forty minutes from Tokyo by train. Saitama is a "new city" which the "Tokyoites" tend to scorn. Full of glass and steel buildings, newly paved streets, new chain restaurants, and for some odd reason, home to a museum dedicated to John Lennon. The office building I work in is pictured behind the two "salary men" ...in standard issue dark suits. Saitama was also one of the venues for last year's World Cup.