

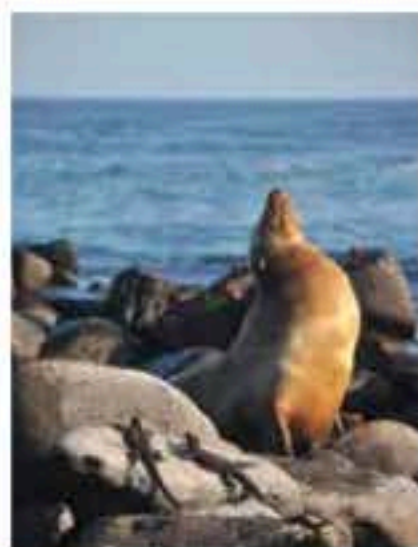


G HOTEL WINS AS ASIA'S TOP DESIGN HOTEL

The ultra chic **G HOTEL** on Penang's bustling Persiaran Gurney has been awarded 'Asia's Top 20 Design Hotels' in the 'Top of Asia 2012 Awards' run by NOW Travel Asia magazine. The hotel received this accolade for its outstanding contribution to the hospitality industry and for excellent services.

Votes for this award were taken from readers and subscribers of the magazine in an online poll. G Hotel exudes modern sophistication and provides a calming retreat from the city sprawl around it. With first-class facilities and trend-setting restaurants, the hotel is an urban oasis for business and leisure travellers alike.

www.ghotel.com.my



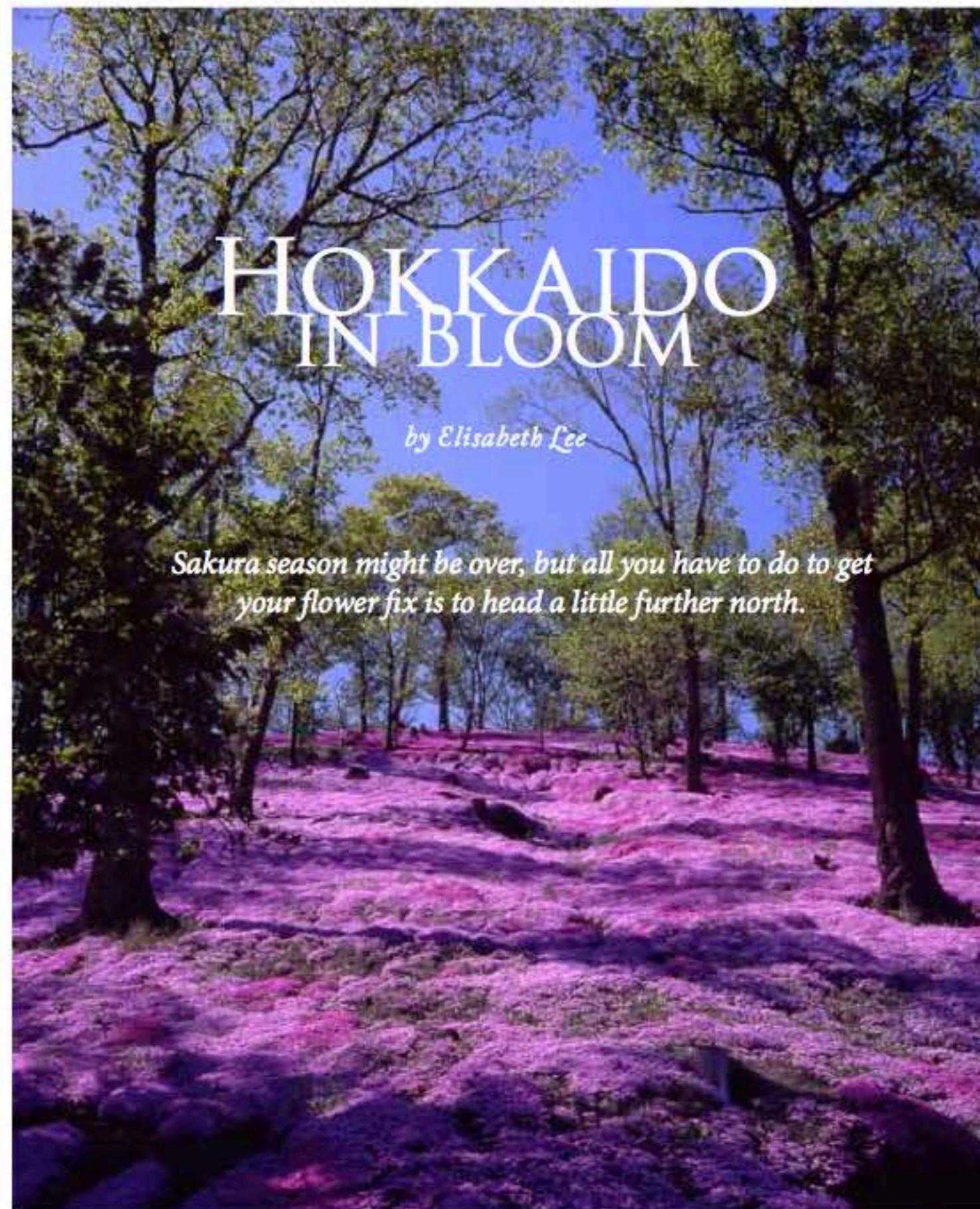
SILVERSEA GOES GALAPAGOS

Guests visiting the Galápagos Islands will soon get a chance to enjoy multiple-day side trips to other South American treasure spots, thanks to an initiative offered by Silversea Expeditions—the cruise company running ocean trips for adventure-seeking travellers.

These land excursions will be available to passengers on board the Silver Galápagos—the luxury expedition ship set to debut in September. The side trips will be available before and after the ship sets sail for the Galápagos.

Silver Galápagos will feature 50 ocean-view suites (many with private balconies), gourmet cuisine, and a personalised butler service. Silversea's new land adventures will include deluxe accommodation, all transportation, transfers, guided sightseeing and some meals.

www.silversea.com



HOKKAIDO IN BLOOM

by Elisabeth Lee

Sakura season might be over, but all you have to do to get your flower fix is to head a little further north.

PINK MOSS

JAPAN'S NORTHERNMOST ISLAND is a wild land of extremes – in the dark depths of winter, temperatures plunge to -20C and the rivers and lakes are covered in a thick layer of ice. The snows melt in March, and by the time summer rolls around, the lakes are warm enough for swimming, and the days are long and hot.

They say flowers are a mirror to the seasons, and in Hokkaido, that has never been truer. From the pale pinks of spring to the deep reds of autumn, the buds and blooms follow the changing weather step for step. Head for Hokkaido this summer and take in the magnificence of its summer flower displays.

PINK MOSS, APRIL

Just as the last sakura blossoms float to the ground, pink

moss (also known as shibazakura, or phlox) bursts into flower, carpeting the hills in stunning shades of pink. Takinoue, in northern Hokkaido, is one of the best places to catch this surreal spring explosion. Tucked away in the foothills of the Taisetsuzan National Park, this tiny town hosts the annual Shibazakura Festival, which features everything pink moss related – including tours, photo ops, flavoured ice creams, handicrafts and more.

WHERE TO STAY:

Just a short drive from Takinoue is the Sounkaku Grand Hotel, which features a stunning outdoor onsen (Japanese hot spring baths) overlooking the snow-capped peaks of the Taisetsuzan National Park.

» www.sounkaku.co.jp/en/index.html



TULIPS, MAY

Cancel that trip to Holland and head for Hokkaido instead. Trade your edam for edamame and your tulips for ... more tulips. The annual Kamiyubetsu Tulip Park, featuring more than 120 varieties of the perennial, is guaranteed to sate your tulip cravings – it even features a full-size replica windmill and a giant Dutch clog for a truly memorable photo op. To fully enjoy the spectacle of millions of tulips all in bloom, go on a helicopter tour of the gorgeous 7-hectare park.

WHERE TO STAY:

Just down the coast from Kamiyubetsu lies cobalt-blue Lake Saroma, and on its shores, the luxury Tsuruga Resort. Catch the breathtaking sunset over the lake while tucking into freshly-caught scallops – just the reward for a hard day of sightseeing.

» www.tsuruga-g.com/saroma/

RUGOSA ROSE, JUNE

This delicate bloomer can be a bit tricky to spot – each flower only lasts a day – though June is usually a good



FROM TOP: RUGOSA ROSE, TULIPS, SUNFLOWERS
OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM TOP: LAVENDER, GLASSWORT

month for catching a display. Also known as hamanasu, or shore eggplant, the rugosa rose grows profusely along the sand dunes of northern Hokkaido. While the blooms aren't the showiest, the rugosa rose is distinguished by its heady, intoxicating scent. The best viewing spot is at the Hamanasu no Oka Park in Ishikari City. Take a walk along the shoreline to the iconic red-and-white lighthouse on the point – and don't forget to stop and smell the roses along the way.

WHERE TO STAY:

Just outside Ishikari City lies the historic Ginrinsou - one of Hokkaido's most prestigious ryokans. From award-winning French cuisine to an outdoor onsen with jaw-dropping views of the Ishikari bay, it's a ryokan experience you won't want to miss.

» www.ginrinsou.com/



Photos: JNTO Photo Library



LAVENDER, JULY

Farm Tomita, in the Furano valley, has been farming lavender the traditional way for more than half a century. Every July, it transforms into the epicentre of lavender culture, when hundreds of different types all burst into bloom. Take in the luscious scent of the purple flowers while walking the grounds of this working family farm, and watch as the lavender is turned into essential oils, soaps, potpourri and more. Don't miss the deliciously cool lavender soft cream, made from pure lavender essence and the finest Hokkaido milk – it's the perfect antidote to the summer heat.

WHERE TO STAY:

The New Furano Prince Hotel in the heart of Furano has great restaurants, an elegant outdoor onsen and even two 36-hole golf courses for those who prefer a little link action with their lavender.

» www.princehotels.com/en/newfurano/

SUNFLOWERS, AUGUST

Himawari-no-Sato, in Hokuryu, is home to the most famous of Hokkaido flowers, the sunflower. Head there in August and wander among over a million of the huge blooms, all nodding their bright heads in the soft summer breeze. With a yellow carpet of flowers set against the electric blue of a clear summer sky, Himawari-no-Sato is truly an unforgettable sight. One of the best ways to savour the sights is to rent a bicycle from the village and spend the day exploring the sunflower fields at your leisure.

WHERE TO STAY:

Hokuryu is an easy drive from Sapporo, the capital of

Hokkaido, making it a great choice for a day trip out of the city. Stay at the historic yet well-appointed Sapporo Grand Hotel, and while you're there, pop down to Sapporo Kani-Honke to feast on the island's famous sweet crabs.

» www.grand1934.com/english/

GLASSWORT, SEPTEMBER

Glasswort, also known as samphire, is a scrubby, short marine plant that, for most of the year, isn't much to look at. But as summer turns into fall, the non-descript plant turns a fiery red, covering the saline shores of Lake Notoro in a carpet of scarlet. Just like the fall foliage further south, the autumn glasswort colours are a vivid testament to the turning of the seasons, and a fitting end to a spectacular summer.

WHERE TO STAY:

Kagariya is a boutique ryokan nestled on the shores of Lake Notoro with a collection of small but luxurious rooms. Don't miss the seasonal seafood specials fresh from the Sea of Okhotsk.

» <http://kagariya.cc/>

