



Liquor Burn's Guide to Sake 日本酒



Sake is a Japanese beverage made from fermented rice. In Western countries it is often referred to as "rice wine," but the brewing process is closer to beer. It resembles white wine in appearance, ranging from transparent to slightly yellow. It has a mild taste with little acidity, bitterness, or astringency. The best sake has a wonderfully fruity aroma. Sake is the perfect match for Japanese cuisine.

The word "sake" in Japanese is a generic word for alcoholic beverage. Japanese people refer to sake as nihon-shu 日本酒 (knee-hone-shoe) or sei-shu 清酒 (say-shoe). Nihon-shu means "Japanese liquor" and sei-shu means "refined clear liquor." If you talk to Japanese people about "sake" they will often be confused because they are not sure what drink you are trying to talk about!

★★ Pro Tip: You can identify a bottle of sake by looking for the kanji characters for sei-shu 清酒. All bottles of sake are required to be labeled with these characters! A few bottles use the characters for nihon-shu 日本酒.

"Umami" - The Flavor of Japan

Sake, along with other products such as soy sauce and miso, have a unique flavor. Careful tasting reveals a pleasant taste that cannot be characterized as sweet, acid, bitter, or astringent. This is *umami*, sometimes translated as "savoriness" or "deliciousness." It is caused by the high level of amino acids and peptides produced during fermentation. These levels are much lower in beer or wine.



Sake 101: How it's Made

Here is a quick and simple rundown on how this fine Japanese beverage is created.

Important Ingredients

1. **Water!** The water is extremely important. Good water makes good sake. Hard water typically produces a dry sake. Soft water will typically yields sweeter sake.
2. **Rice!** Rice is the main ingredient. Only polished white rice is used because the outer layers contain large amounts of fats, minerals, and proteins that spoil the flavor of sake. The more polished the rice, the higher quality the sake. Polishing makes the grains smaller. As a result more rice is needed to make the same quantity of sake. This makes it more expensive.
3. **Koji!** Koji is a beneficial micro-organism native to Japan. It is necessary for making alcoholic beverages from rice. It is also used to make soy sauce and miso. Just like malt for beer, koji produces an enzyme that converts starch into fermentable sugar. Koji and yeast must work together in order for alcohol fermentation to take place.



The Brewing Process

Step 1: Newly polished rice is washed clean and steeped in water.

Step 2: The rice is steamed. It is then cooled.

Step 3: Water, koji, and yeast are mixed together fermented for about 7 days. Additional steamed rice, fermented rice, and water are added over the next 4 days. This staggered approach allows time for the yeast to work at an even pace.

Step 4: The mixture is now known as the main mash, or moromi. It is fermented for about 2 to 3 weeks at 15~20° C. High grade sake is fermented more slowly by using lower temperatures.

Step 5: After fermentation the moromi is filtered through a fine mesh to separate the liquids from the solids. In some sake a small amount of distilled alcohol, called jozo-alcohol, is added before filtration in order to extract flavors and aromas that would otherwise remain behind in the solids.



Step 6: The remaining fine rice particles are removed and the sake is carbon filtered and pasteurized.

Step 7: The sake is allowed to rest and mature. It is brewed at 17%~20% ABV, but is diluted with water to about 15%. This is because 20% is too high for drinking with meals.

Maturation

New sake is generally not liked due to its rough taste. Mature sake is mild, smooth, and rich. Nine to twelve months are needed for maturity.

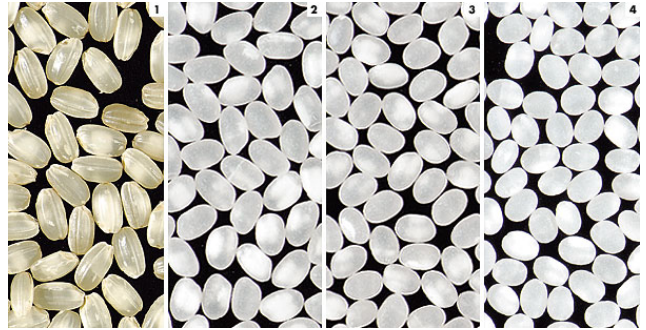
Sake Categories

There are two basic categories of sake: ordinary sake, or futsu-shu 普通酒, and special designation premium sake, or tokutei meisho-shu 特定名称酒. This premium sake is distinguished by the degree to which the rice has been polished and the use (or lack of use) of jozo-alcohol and other common ingredients. Most sake is ordinary sake. Only 30% of annual production is premium sake. We only sell premium sake because of its high quality, superior taste, and unique flavors. You will rarely find it outside of Japan.

The World of Premium Sake

There are two qualities that categorize premium sake: **Ginjo** 吟醸 and **Junmai** 純米.

Ginjo means that the rice was highly polished. To classify as Ginjo sake at least 40% of the outer layer of the rice grain must be removed. Slow, low temperature fermentation is also necessary. Ginjo sake has a fruity fragrance called Ginjo-ka, with a light, non-acidic taste. It has a smooth texture and good aftertaste.



Junmai means the sake was made using *only* rice, koji, and water. *No other common ingredients are allowed, such as jozo-alcohol.* Junmai sake highlights the flavor of the rice and koji more than other varieties. Typically high in acidity and umami, with relatively little sweetness. There is no special polishing requirement. This truly is pure authentic sake.

Now, here are the types of Premium Sake:

Ginjo-shu 吟醸酒

Is as described above. The word *shu* (sounds like 'shoe') means "sake." So the name simply means "Ginjo Sake."

Dai-ginjo-shu 大吟醸酒

The word *dai* (sounds like 'die') means "big" or "great." Dai-ginjo-shu requires at least 50% of the outer layer removed, so the rice is even more polished than standard ginjo-shu. It has an even more refined taste and stronger ginjo-ka (fruity fragrance). Some Dai-ginjo-shu remove as much as 70% of the outer layer!

Junmai-shu 純米酒

Is as described above. The word *shu* (sounds like 'shoe') means "sake." So the name simply means "Junmai Sake."

Junmai Ginjo-shu 純米吟醸酒

You guessed it, it combines the qualities of both! The acidity and umami are toned down and there is a clear ginjo-ka (fruity fragrance).

Junmai Dai-ginjo-shu 純米大吟醸酒

*** *The highest grade of sake!* A good blend of refined taste with acidity and umami. This is truly the best of the best. A treasure to take home with you from Japan.

Honjozo 本醸造

This is the last type of premium sake. The emphasis is on flavor with little ginjo-ka or aging induced aroma. It has a reasonable level of acidity and umami. It helps to bring out the taste of food!

Even More Delicious Fun in the World of Sake

Sake can be processed in different ways after being brewed. This handling determines the special type of sake it can become. Let's learn about these delicious varieties!

Namazake 生酒

This type of sake has not been pasteurized. It requires refrigeration and has a shorter shelf life. The word "nama" means raw, as in uncooked. It has the flavor of freshly brewed sake. Must be kept refrigerated.

Genshu 原酒

This is undiluted sake with a strong taste. It is bottled at the original ABV of about 17%~20%.

Muroka 無濾過

This is unfiltered, but clear, sake. This sake has a stronger flavor than regular sake. It has not been carbon filtered but it has been separated from the fine rice particles, so it's clear and not cloudy. Carbon filtering removes bad flavors and aromas, but it also removes some good flavors and aromas.

Nigorizake 濁り酒

This sake is cloudy. The sake is passed through a loose mesh during filtration, so it contains yeast and fine rice particles. It is shaken before being served in order to mix the contents. It is thick and rich with a pronounced taste of rice.

Koshu 古酒

This is "aged sake." Most sake does not age well, but this special type can age for decades. The color turns yellow and it has a honey-ish flavor. It is aged for at least 3 years. The color varies from yellow to amber. It has a caramel aroma similar to sherry and madeira, as well as nuts and spices. It has a long finish.

Taruzake 樽酒

This is sake aged in wooden barrels or bottled in wooden casks. Because the wood imparts a strong flavor premium sake is not used. The containers are made of Japanese cedar, giving it a pleasant cedar aroma.

Shiboritate 絞り立て

This is "freshly pressed" sake. It has been bottled without the traditional 9 to 12 month maturation time. It is a more acidic, "greener" sake. It also referred to as "new brew sake" or shin-shu 新酒.

Fukurozuri 袋吊り

During separation the fermented mixture is hung from the ceiling using mesh bags. This allows the liquid to drip naturally. No external pressure or pressing is used. This is sometimes called "drip sake" or shizukuzake.

Sparkling Sake スパークリング清酒

This is the newest craze in the world of sake. It is carbonated like champagne or sparkling wine. The taste is generally sweet with an ABV of 6%~8%, like beer. It is very popular at bars and restaurants in Japan.

Premium Sake List

Type	English	Japanese 日本語	Price	No.
Honjozo 本醸造	Karakuchi Kimoto (uses natural yeast) from Daishichi Brewery	大七 からくち生もと	¥ 981	2
	Kinkaku by Kinshi Masamune Brewery	キンシ正宗 金閣 720 ★ From Kyoto! ★	1,553	1
Ginjo 吟醸	Nama Genshu from Kizakura Brewery	黄桜 吟醸 生原酒 720ml ★ From Kyoto! ★	¥ 1,250	15
	‘Koto Sennen’ from Eikun Brewery	英勲 古都千年 吟醸 720ml ★ From Kyoto! ★	¥ 1,500	13
	“The Music of Gion” from Matsui Brewery	祇園ばやし 吟醸 ★ From Kyoto! ★	¥ 1,334	14
Dai-ginjo大吟醸	“11 Generations of Genbe” from Shinsei Brewery	神聖 大吟醸 11代源兵衛 ★ From Kyoto! ★	¥ 1,500	16
Junmai 純米	Kamozuru from Kamozuru Brewery	賀茂鶴 純米 300 ml	¥ 380	5
	‘Yamahai Jikomi’ from Tengumai Brewery	天狗舞 山廃仕込純米 720ml	¥ 1,400	3
	Kimoto (uses natural yeast) from Daishichi Brewery	大七 純米キモト	¥ 1,273	4
Junmai Ginjo 純米吟醸	‘Shukon’ from Tamano Hikari Brewery	玉乃光 純米吟醸 酒魂 720ml ★ From Kyoto! ★	¥ 988	9
	‘Ishikawamon’ Nama Genshu from Tedorigawa Brewery	純米吟醸 石川門 生原酒 手取川	¥ 1,700	6
	“The Story of Gion” by Tomio Brewery	ふり袖 祇園物語 純米吟醸 ★ From Kyoto! ★	1400	7
	“Gion Town Beauty” by Tomio Brewery	富翁 祇園小町 純米吟醸 ★ From Kyoto! ★	1090	8

	“Drop of Kyoto” made with Kyoto’s native rice by Kizakura Brewery	黄桜 京の滴 祝米 ★ From Kyoto! ★	900	51
Junmai Dai-Ginjo 純米大吟醸	‘Hinodezakari Momonoshizuku’ from Matsumoto Brewery	日出盛 純米大吟醸 桃の滴 ★ From Kyoto! ★	¥ 2,599	12
	‘Suiten Ippeki’ from Eikun Brewery	水天一碧 720ml ★ From Kyoto! ★	¥ 3,500	10
	‘Hyouon Gakoi’ from Shinsei Brewery	神聖 氷温囲い 純米大吟醸 ★ From Kyoto! ★	¥ 3,000	11
Sparkling スパークリング	Mio Sparkling Sake from Takara Brewery	松竹梅 白壁蔵 霽 MIO 300ml ★ From Kyoto! ★	¥ 475	52

Serving Sake

Sake is generally served chilled in the summer, hot in the winter, or room temperature. Many Western people are familiar with drinking hot sake, but in Japan hot sake is typically a winter-only drink. Premium sake is typically not served hot. This is because flavors and aromas will be lost due to the heightened presence of alcohol. This masking of flavors is the reason lower quality or old sake is typically used for making hot sake.

Hot sake is best served between 42~45° C. Above this temperature the alcohol becomes too strong. To heat sake pour it into a container and put the container in hot water, but turn off the heat source first. You can also use a microwave with a microwave-safe container such as a drink mug.

Chilled sake is served around 10° C, like white wine.



Storing your Sake - before and after opening your bottle

In general, it is best to keep sake refrigerated or stored in a cool dark place. Light and high temperatures spoil the taste of sake. Brown and green glass bottles are typically used to bottle sake because they protect it from ultraviolet light. Brown glass is best. The amino acids and vitamins that are plentiful in sake degrade on exposure to light. Green or transparent bottles packaged in boxes or wrapped in paper should be stored in the packaging.

After opening a bottle it is best to consume your sake within 2 or 3 hours for best taste. You can store an open bottle in the refrigerator, but for best taste it should be finished within 2 days. Once sake is opened it begins to oxidize (react with oxygen in the air). The best flavor is lost after 3 days in the refrigerator, but a bottle of sake can keep for many weeks and is still perfectly drinkable and delicious! Please enjoy the best taste that your sake has to offer!



祇園
リカーバーン
Liquor Burn Gion