



# SAKE

## How to Enjoy SAKE!

Types of Sake

How to Taste Sake

How to Enjoy  
Sake at Different  
Temperatures

Sake Manners

What's on the Label?

Useful Sake  
Terminology  
at Restaurants



# Is sake complicated? No. Sake is an interesting drink!

Sake is Japan's national drink. Made all across the country, there are said to be about 20,000 brand names. Many diverse cultures originated in ancient times because of the climate and natural features of each region of Japan, which has four distinct seasons. These cultures also deeply influenced sake. For that reason, each brand of sake has its own personality and own best way to be enjoyed. Sake has developed with Japan's culture. That's why Sake is an interesting drink!

There are so many kinds of sake!  
Why are they different?

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How should I taste sake?

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What is the best temperature?

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What's on the label?

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Is there a correct way to drink sake?

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Is there a special vocabulary for sake?

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Q. How do I choose my first glass?

A. First, learn some sake basics.

What types are there?

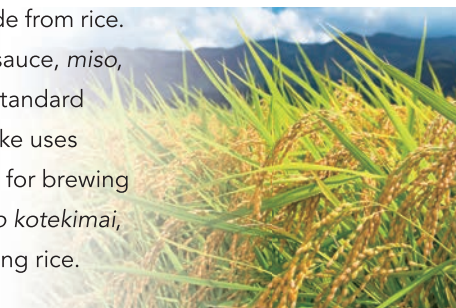
This is my recommendation.

What is sake made from?



Sake is a fermented alcoholic beverage made from rice.

Sake is a fermented alcoholic beverage made from rice. Sake is a fermented food product like soy sauce, *miso*, and *katsuo-bushi* (dried bonito), which are standard seasoning for Japanese foods. Premium sake uses special rice called sake rice, which is suited for brewing premium sake. The grains of this rice, *shuzo kotekimai*, are a bit larger than table rice and processing rice. Sake rice is also called *sakamai*. (→p.24)



*Jizake* means local sake, which acknowledges the region where it was made.

Sake, which is indigenous to each region of Japan is called *jizake*. There are big temperature differences between the north and south of Japan, and the appeal of *jizake* is in its individuality that originates from the climate of each region and the local food culture that it compliments. (→p.14)



Sake is classified into *tokutei-meisho-shu* (specially designated sake) and *futsu-shu* (table sake).

For sake, there is a classification called 'specially designated' sake. These designations indicate rice polishing ratio and other factors. On the other hand, sake that does not fall into the specially designated sake is categorized as *futsu-shu* or table sake. Some *futsu-shu* contains ingredients that are not used in specially designated sakes. (→p.28)



It's also fun to choose a drinking cup for sake.

It's so tough to choose which cup to drink with!

I've heard that your impression of the sake's flavor can change, depending on the shape or material of the glass.

The aromas stand out more if you drink from a wine glass.



Depending on the restaurant, you may be allowed to choose your own *choko* (sake cup). In other cases, the restaurant may provide the best drinking glass for you, to match with the sake you've chosen.

**Tokkuri**

A sake decanter with a tapered neck and rounded body is called a *tokkuri*. Sake is transferred from the bottle, and the *tokkuri* is used at the table.



**Masu**

The *masu*, used as a vessel for sake, was originally a traditional Japanese tool for measuring liquid or grain. Made of Japanese cedar, it infuses the sake with a light aroma of the wood.



**Choko**

**Kiki-choko**

*Choko* used in Japanese sake competitions are made of white ceramic and have a blue bullseye pattern on the inside. Check the color of the sake with the white part, and its cloudiness with the blue part of the pattern.



**Katakuchi**  
(Lipped Bowl)



**Wine Glass**

The shape of a wine glass holds aromas inside the glass, so it makes it easy to appreciate the delicate aromas of sake.



**Kiriko** (Faceted Glass)

The basic vessels for sake are the *tokkuri* (decanter) and *choko* (cup). Made from a wide variety of materials, including ceramics, glass, tin, wood, and lacquerware, each material imparts a different impression of the sake's flavor. Many of these vessels showcase the best of Japan's traditional handicrafts.

Sake tasting focuses on three characteristics.

The both of sake have the same clear color, but the flavors are different.

Check the aromas first.

It smells fruity!



Some restaurants offer tasting sets for trying and comparing several kinds of sake.

## Aroma

*Ginjo-shu* (premium sake) has an aroma known as *ginjo-ka*. This aroma is fruity, with hints of apple, banana, and melon. Matured sake (*koshu*) also has a rich and mellow aroma, and is often described as resembling dried fruit or spices. For all sake, the aroma is judged on fullness and balance.

## Color

Many people think that sake is clear and colorless, but some sake have a little hue to it, and differences in production methods influence the final color and clarity. The sake's clarity generally depends on the method by which the *moromi* (fermenting mash) is pressed and filtered. Moreover, if the finished sake is stored for a long period of time, the color will become gold or amber.

## Taste

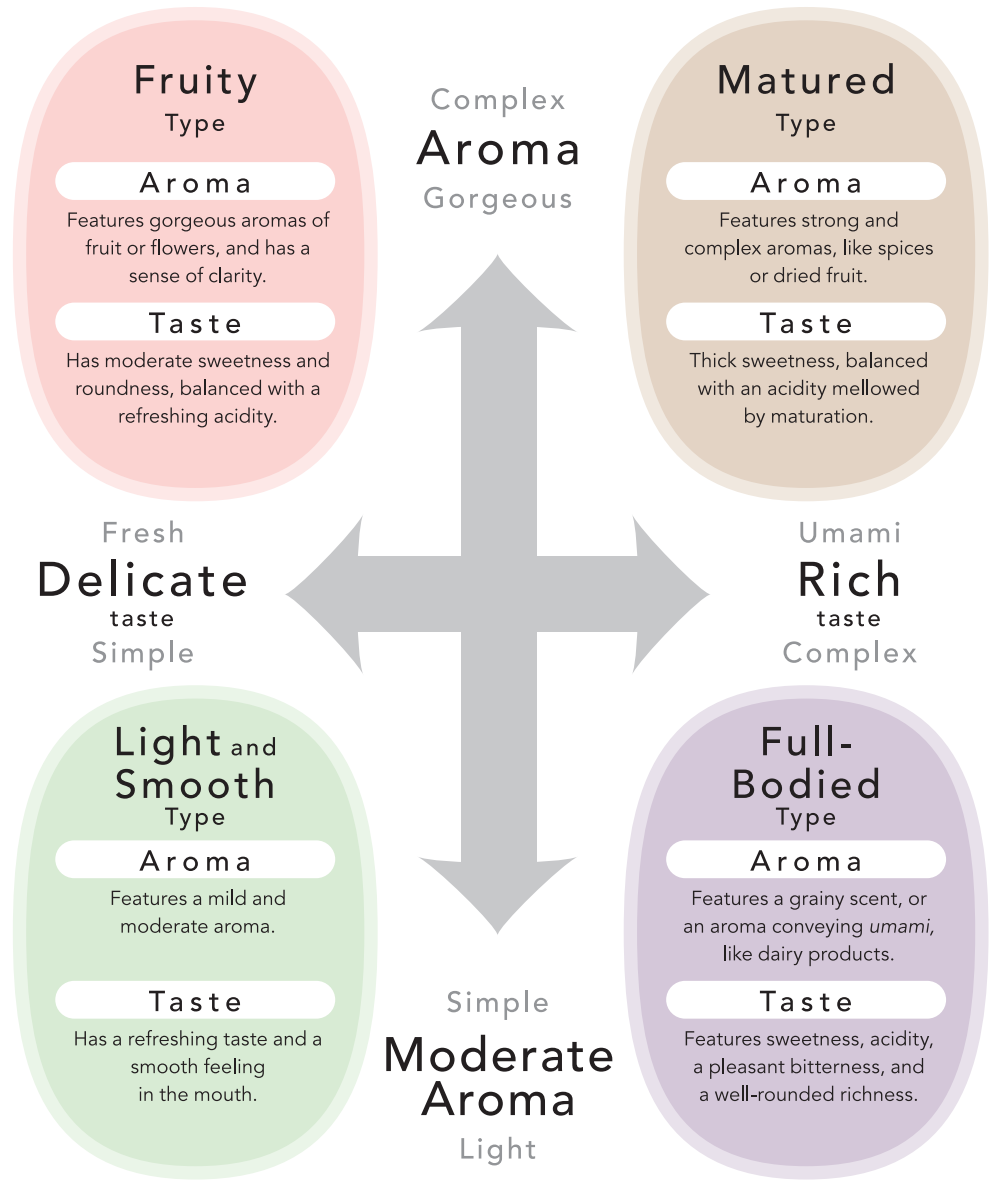
Sake's taste depend on the degree of sweetness or dryness, richness or lightness, and the amount of body the sake has. When the sake has a high sugar content, it tends to taste sweet, but acidity can mask sweetness, so even if two sakes have the same sugar content, the one with stronger acidity may not taste as sweet. Sensations of sweet/dry, rich/light, and body will differ depending on the balance of alcohol, sugar, acidity, and amino acids.



The character of a sake can be classified into four types.

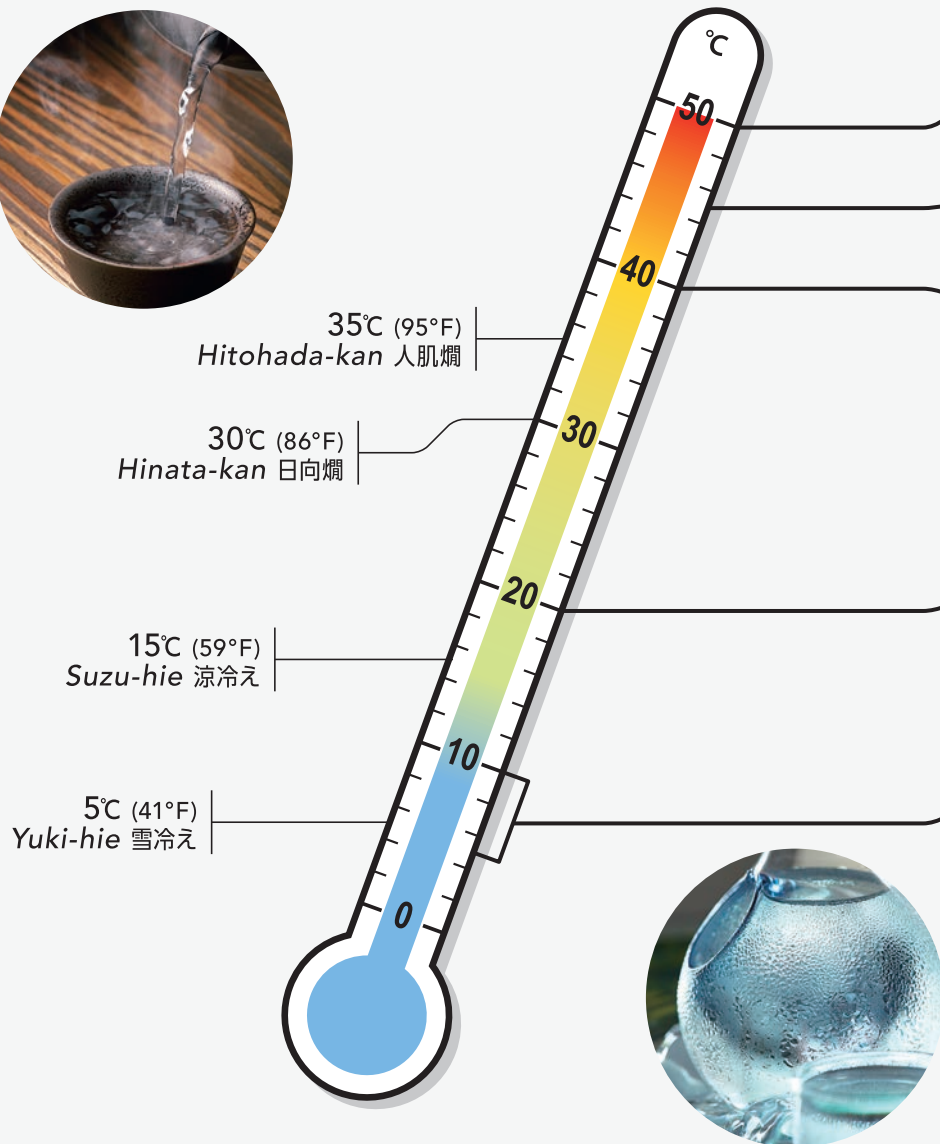


The unique character of each sake's aroma is the result of different production methods and ingredients. These characters can be classified into four types, based on these aromas and flavors.



► Food pairings for each type. (→ p.20)

Sake is a drink that can be enjoyed at many temperatures. Each temperature has a different name.



Sake can be enjoyed at a wide range of temperatures. Each temperature has a different name, and you can enjoy unique aspects of the same sake when you try it at different temperatures. Get your fill of sake's profound flavors by trying it at a variety of temperatures.

**50°C (122°F)**  
**Atsu-kan**  
あつ爛

Vapor rises from the *tokkuri*. The *tokkuri* and *choko* are hot to the touch. The sake's aromas are sharpened and it tastes dry, with a clean finish.

**45°C (113°F)**  
**Jo-kan**  
上爛

Some heat can be felt when holding the *tokkuri* or *choko*. Vapor rises when the sake is poured. The sake's aromas are concentrated, and the flavor feels soft and crisp.

**40°C (104°F)**  
**Nuru-kan**  
ぬる爛

The sake feels more warm than hot when drinking. It seems close to body temperature. The sake's aromas become a bit richer, and the flavor feels full.

**20°C (68°F)**  
**Shitsu-on**  
室温

When the *tokkuri* is held, it may feel slightly cool to the touch. The aroma and flavor will give an impression of softness.

**10°C (50°F) ~  
5°C (41°F)**  
**Reishu** 冷酒

The general term for sake chilled to between 10°C and 5°C is *reishu*. Generally, chilling sake to lower temperatures masks subtle flavors.

### How is sake heated?

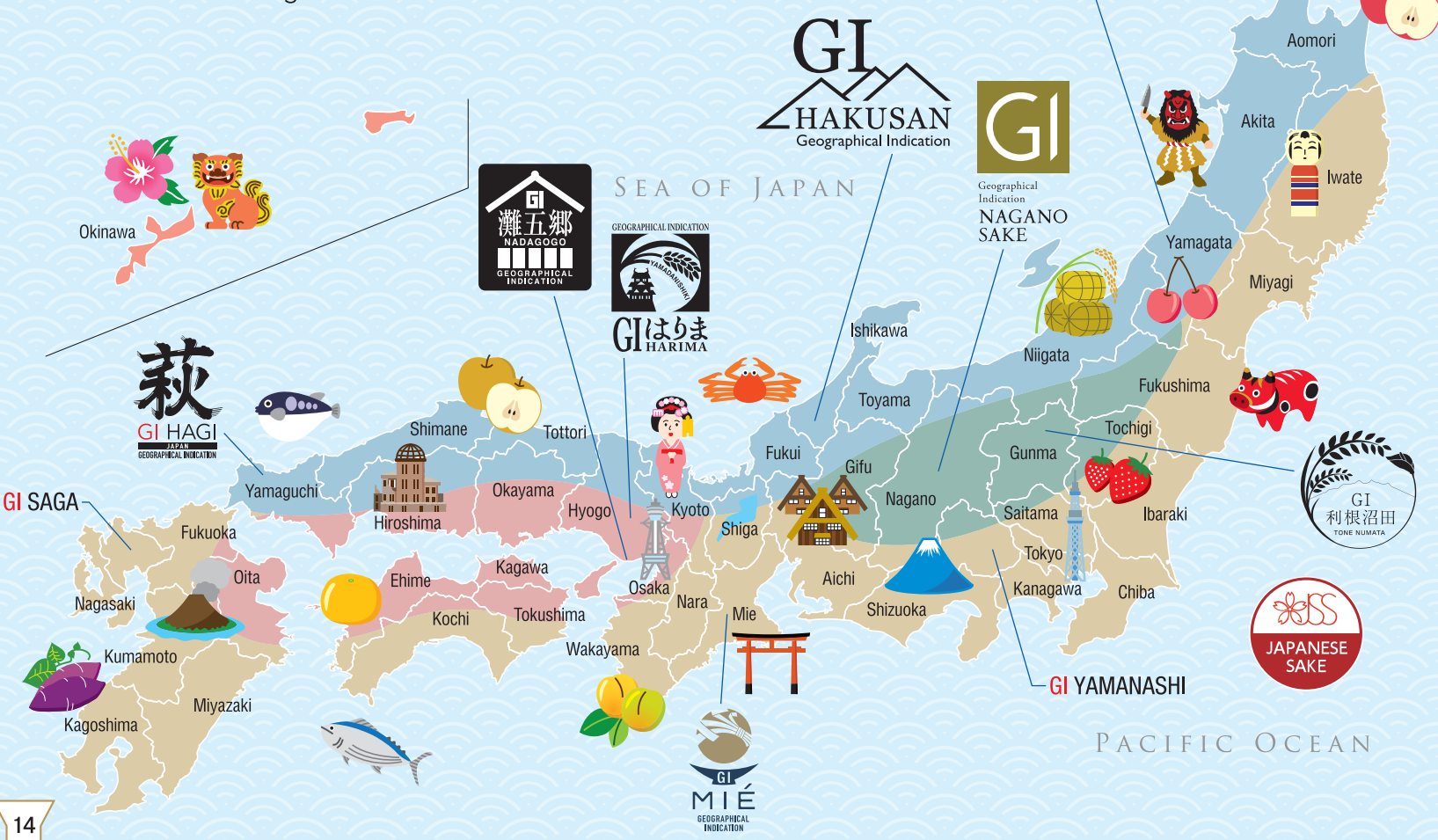
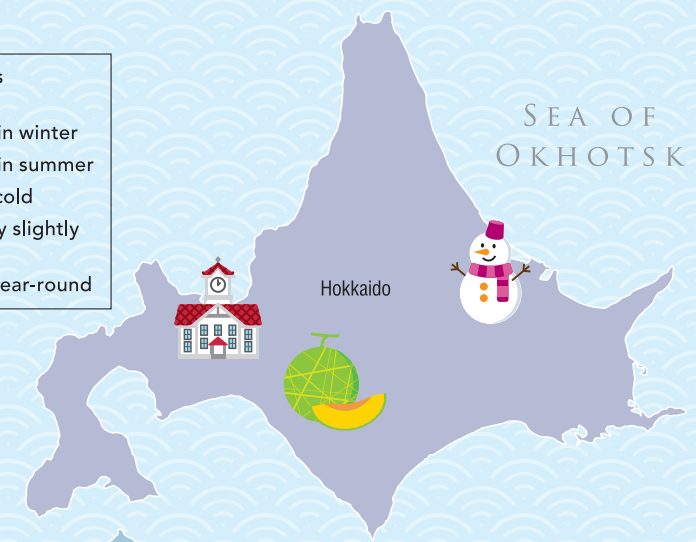
To warm up sake, place the *tokkuri* containing sake in a pot of hot water. The *tokkuri* gradually heats up and the heat is transmitted to the sake. It is heated to a temperature before alcohol begins to evaporate, so that the aromas do not dissipate.



# All across Japan, sake is made to fit the local climate and food culture.

Japan's territory stretches from north to south and in winter, there can be a 50°C difference in temperatures at locations on either end of the country. Rice is cultivated across the country, and the topography is blessed with varied mountain and coastal landscapes. Sake is made to fit the food and culture of each region.

- Winter temperatures fall below 0°C
- Heavy precipitation in winter
- Heavy precipitation in summer
- Winters are slightly cold
- Climate changes only slightly throughout the year
- High temperatures year-round



### Top 3 Prefectures for Sake Ranking

**[Production]**

- No.1 ..... Hyogo
- No.2 ..... Kyoto
- No.3 ..... Niigata

From the National Tax Agency Statistical Report (fiscal year 2019)

**[Number of Breweries]**

- No.1 ..... Niigata (98)
- No.2 ..... Hyogo (90)
- No.3 ..... Nagano (85)

From the National Tax Agency Sake Production Outlook (fiscal year 2019 survey)

**[Consumption Per Person]**

- No.1 ..... Niigata (9.6 l)
- No.2 ..... Akita (8.0 l)
- No.3 ..... Yamagata (7.0 l)

From the National Tax Agency Japan "Sake no Shiori" (March 2019) statistical information



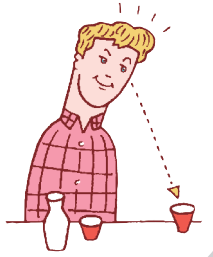
There is etiquette for enjoying sake.

Kampai!  
乾杯!



Japan is a country that highly values courtesy and hospitality. The etiquette for sake drinking is also based on this set of values. However, these manners are by no means formal. Take them as hints for drinking sake in a more appropriate way.

When offering sake to someone, offer it when their cup is less than one-third full. Do not offer when your companion is in the middle of drinking, or when there is enough sake in their cup.

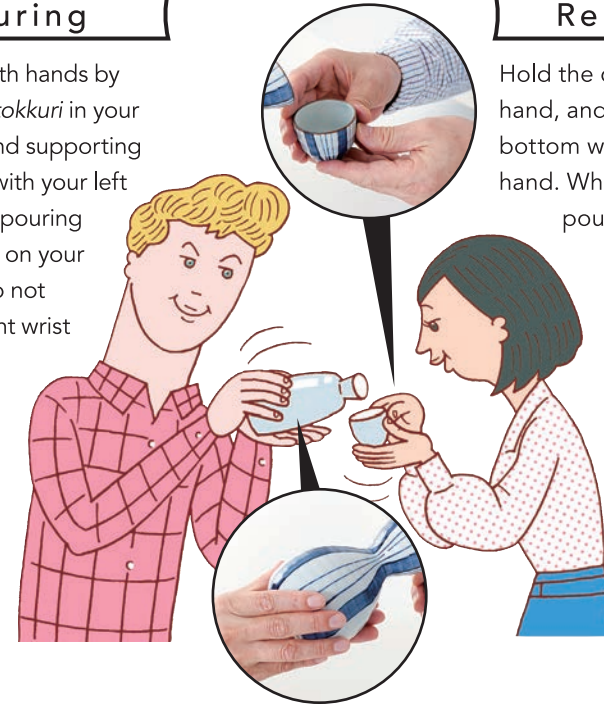


When someone offers you sake, take a small sip of the sake remaining in your cup before holding it out to the person pouring (you do not need to finish all of the sake in the cup).



### Pouring

Pour with both hands by holding the *tokkuri* in your right hand and supporting the bottom with your left hand. When pouring for someone on your right side, do not turn your right wrist over to pour. Your right hand will be facing down and that is considered poor manners.



### Receiving

Hold the cup lightly in one hand, and support the bottom with the other hand. When the sake is poured, take a small sip before putting the cup on the table. If your companion's cup is empty, offer to pour sake for them in return.

Pouring and receiving sake while spending time with someone is a great way to enjoy delicious sake together, and these become important moments for developing friendship.



**No Good** Don't shake the *tokkuri*.

It is poor etiquette to shake the *tokkuri* to check whether there is any sake left. If the sake has been warmed, shaking the *tokkuri* will cool it down.



**No Good** Don't peek into the *tokkuri*.

It is poor etiquette to try to look into the *tokkuri* to check whether there is any sake left. It does not look good to onlookers.



**No Good** Don't drink straight from the *tokkuri*.

A *tokkuri* is for pouring sake into smaller vessels. Even if you are the only one drinking sake, do not drink from the *tokkuri* directly as you would from a beer bottle.



**No Good** Do not blend the contents of several *tokkuri*.

Do not combine the sake into one *tokkuri* even if there are several *tokkuri* with only small amounts remaining. This affects the temperature and flavor of the sake.



## Ask for water when you drink sake.

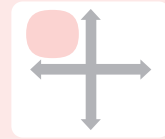
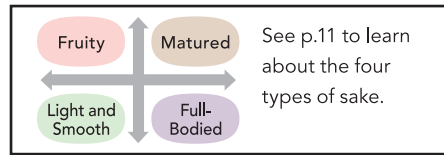
Ask for water along with your sake, as you would when having a chaser along with drinks with a high alcohol content or a strong flavor. The water drunk alongside sake is called *yawaragi-mizu*. 'Yawaragi' is Japanese for a calm state of things. By drinking water at intervals, the next sip of sake is even more delicious. It's also very useful to avoid getting sick from drinking.



和らぎ  
水

Yawaragi-  
mizu

# Sake and Food Pairings



## Food Pairings for Fruity Sake

White fish carpaccio

Vegetable tempura

Cuisine that brings out the flavors of ingredients like vegetables and seafood is suited to this kind of sake.

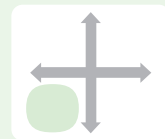


## Food Pairings for Matured Sake

Cheese

Eel broiled in soy-based sauce

This type of sake goes well with food that uses *umami*-rich ingredients high in protein.

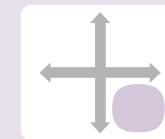


## Food Pairings for Light and Smooth Sake

Dashi-maki tamago  
(seasoned Japanese omelette)

Sashimi (raw fish)

This type of sake pairs well with light food that has a clean aftertaste.



## Food Pairings for Full-Bodied Sake

Braised diced pork rib

Yakitori  
(glazed with sauce)

This type of sake pairs well with food that emphasizes the *umami* of chicken, pork, milk, or other ingredients.

# Sake is indispensable to Japanese *Shinto* rituals.

In ancient times, sake was a sacred offering dedicated to the gods. The word that Japanese people call out when they exchange drinks, *Kampai!*, is charged with a prayer for people to make their hearts as one in front of the gods. Even now, sake is indispensable for occasions when people's hearts and minds gather into one, such as banquets, festivals, and *Shinto* rituals.

## Kagami-biraki (Cask-breaking)



This is the *Shinto* event of unsealing the lid on a sake barrel for offering. Some theories state that warriors departing for the front would raise morale with *kagami-biraki*.

## Purification before a festival



People who take part in rituals, such as bearers of portable shrines, purify their bodies by drinking the sake offering before a sacred festival.

## At *Shinto* weddings



As a sign of their vows, the newly wedded couple exchanges three cups of sake called *omiki*.

## To celebrate the new year



As a custom to celebrate the new year and pray for peace, people *kampai* with *toso*, a medicinal alcoholic drink made of natural herbs steeped in sake or mirin.

# The Ingredients and Production Methods that Determine Sake's Flavor.

Saccharification and fermentation happen at the same time.



## Ingredients Full of Natural Materials and Wisdom, the Pride of Japan

### Water



"Where there is good water, there is good sake."

Sake consists of 80% water. The mineral content of the water influences the growth of the *koji* mold and yeast, so the flavor of the sake will change depending on the water used. Since water quality also affects the feeling in the mouth, good water is essential.

### Rice



Sake rice is a little different from table rice

Sake rice is rice that is especially suitable for making sake. Each grain has a milky white *shimpaku* in its core. The degree of how much the surface of the rice is polished away has an important effect on the character of the sake.

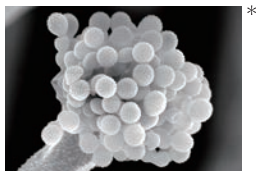
### Brewing Alcohol



Aromatic and clean-tasting

*Moromi* is the fermenting mash that becomes the undiluted sake and determines the character of the sake. Brewing alcohol is sometimes added to this *moromi*. It brings out aromas in the sake and sharpens the flavor.

### Koji Mold and Yeast



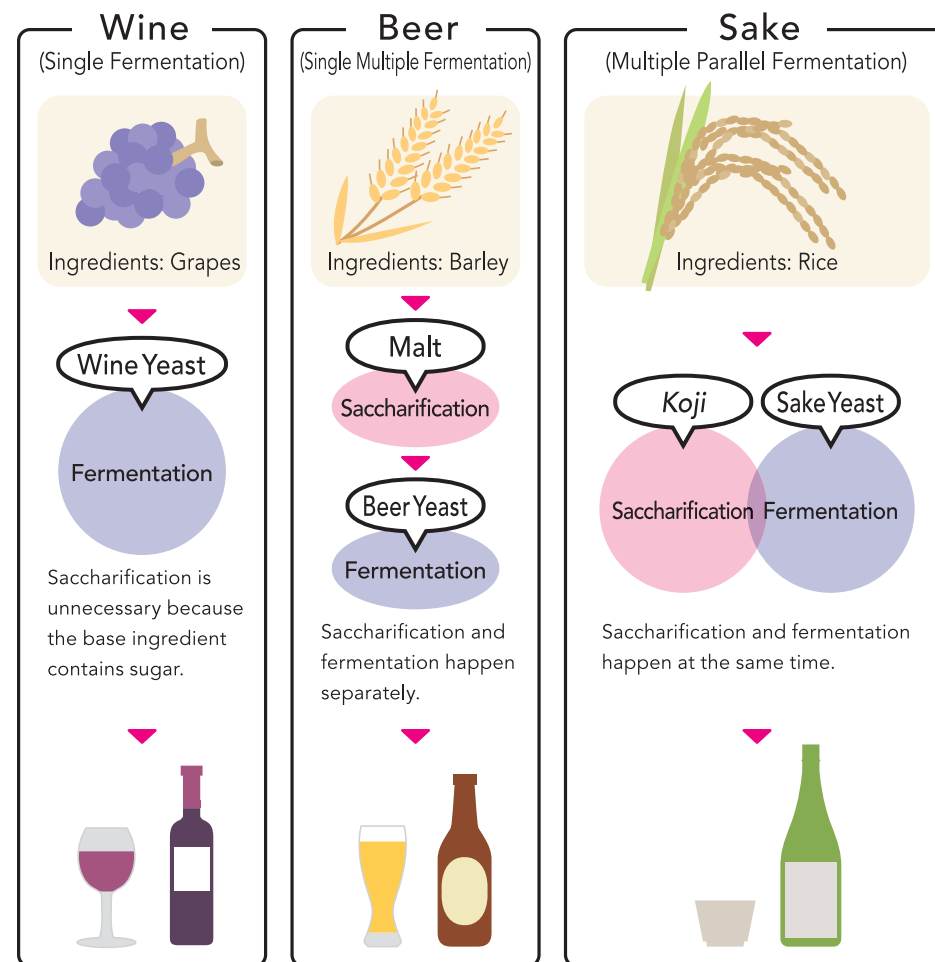
Microorganisms control the quality of the sake

The *koji* mold, which is the basis for the *koji*, converts the rice's starches into sugar (glucose). The yeast, which ferments the glucose into alcohol and carbon dioxide. Both are cornerstones of sake that influence the flavor and aroma of the final product.

\*Image provided by the National Research Institute of Brewing

## Production Methods The finest quality aromas and flavors come from multiple parallel fermentation

Sake is in the same category of fermented liquor as wine and beer. Fermented beverages are alcoholic drinks made when yeast ferments alcohol from the agricultural crops used. That fermentation process differs for each type of drink, and a unique characteristic of sake is that it uses a sophisticated production method called multiple parallel fermentation.



# Here is the information you'll find on a label.

## Front Label

### Alcohol content

The number of milliliters of alcohol per 100ml of sake.

### Ingredients

In addition to rice and rice *koji*, brewer's alcohol is generally used to bring out aromas in the sake.

### Rice Polishing Ratio

### Product name

This is expressed as *nihonshu* or *seishu* in Japanese.

### Date of Manufacture

This shows when the sake was bottled in the container. There is no consume-by date, because the quality of properly stored sake does not change for a few years.

アルコール分  
15.0度以上  
16.0度未満

原材料名  
米(国産)  
米こうじ(国産米)  
醸造アルコール

精米歩合60%

日本酒  
内容量：720ml

製造年月  
2020.04

製造者：日本酒造組合中央会  
東京都港区西新橋 ○丁目△-□

吟醸酒  
山田錦  
100%  
國酒

### Specially Designation

For sake with designated naming, the classification will be listed. (→ p28)

### Rice varietal

The rice varietal name and usage ratio is listed. (→p24)

### Sake name

The unique brand name of the sake.

### Manufacturer's name and address

## Back label

### Rice varietal

The rice varietal used is also listed on the back label.

### Yeast

The name of the yeast used for this sake is listed.

### Acidity

An index showing the amount of total acidity in the sake. When the acidity level is high, the sake will tend to be rich and tart, and when it is low, it will tend to be light and sweet.

### Sweetness/Dryness

The sake is classified into one of several categories, indicating the tendency of its flavor: sweet, medium sweet, medium dry, or dry.

原材料 山田錦 精米歩合 60%

使用酵母 協会000号

成分	日本酒度	+5
	酸度	1.6
	アミノ酸度	1.6

甘辛  
甘口 やや甘口 やや辛口 辛口

おすすめの飲み方  
冷やして 室温 める爛 熱爛  
△ ○ ◎ ○

### Rice Polishing Ratio

The rice polishing ratio is listed for sakes with specially designated sake classifications. (→p29)

### Sake Meter Value

An index showing the specific 'gravity' of the sake. The standard is 0, and if the value is a high positive number (+), the sake will tend to be dry. If it is a low negative number (-), it will tend to be sweet.

### Amino Acid content

An index of the amino acids in the sake. Higher numbers tend to indicate sakes with more *umami*.

### Recommended Drinking Styles

Indicates the estimated temperatures to bring out the best of that sake's flavor.

# Sake is a beverage brewed from polished rice.

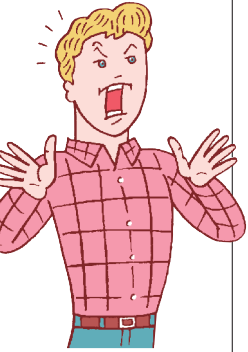
## Tokutei Meisho-shu (Specially Designated Sake)

Ingredients	Rice, rice koji	Rice, rice koji, brewing alcohol
0 50% or less	<b>Junmai Daiginjo-shu</b> Ginjo production methods, characteristic aroma and taste, and exceptional color and clarity	<b>Daiginjo-shu</b>
0 60% or less	<b>Junmai Ginjo-shu</b> Ginjo production methods, characteristic aroma and taste, and exceptional color and clarity	<b>Ginjo-shu</b>
60% or less, or made with special production methods	<b>Tokubetsu Junmai-shu</b> Characteristic aroma and taste, and exceptional color and clarity	<b>Tokubetsu Honjozo-shu</b>
0 70% or less	<b>Junmai-shu</b> Characteristic aroma and taste, and exceptional color and clarity	<b>Honjozo-shu</b> Characteristic aroma and taste, and exceptional color and clarity
0 over 70%		

rice polishing ratio

Reference: 1989 Japan National Tax Agency Announcement No.8 Sake Production Quality Indication Standards Overview

The rice polishing ratio is broken down into so many classes!



I want to drink them all!



## Rules Established for Specially Designated Sake

When classifying specially designated sake, the first remarkable point of attention has to do with the rice polishing ratio. This refers to the proportion of the original rice weight left over after the process of milling away the outer surface of the original rice. For example, when it says rice polishing ratio 60% or less, that means that 40% of the outer surface of the unpolished rice has been milled away.



### 【 Rice Koji 】

Specially designated sake must be made with at least 15% rice koji (the ratio for rice koji weight as a part of the total white rice weight used to make the sake).

### 【 Alcohol 】

The weight of the brewer's alcohol added must not exceed 10% of the weight of the white rice used in making the sake. The brewer's alcohol is a distilled alcohol of agricultural origin.

### 【 Junmai-shu 】

It is possible to label a sake *junmai-shu* as long as it is sake made with rice and rice koji only.

### Futsu-shu

Sake that falls outside the specially designated sake categories is typically called *futsu-shu*. This includes sake made with a rice polishing ratio over 70%, made with ingredients other than the ones approved for specially designated sake, and sake containing more than 10% brewer's alcohol.



All sake produced to be exported is given this mark by the Japan Sake and Shochu Makers Association. Sake with this mark authenticates sake produced in Japan and in accordance with Japanese liquor tax law, and although it does not place restrictions on the origin of the sake's ingredients, it does specify that the sake is made in Japan.

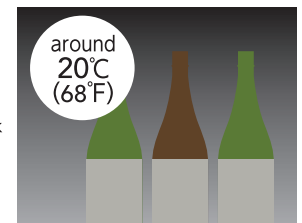
### Rice polishing refers to milling the rice's outer surface

"Rice polishing" refers to the process of shaving off the outer surface of the rice grains to remove proteins, fats, and minerals that cause undesirable flavors in the sake. Sake rice is especially suited to the process, because of its low protein content and its large *shimpaku* (opaque section in the center of the rice).



### Proper storage methods for Sake

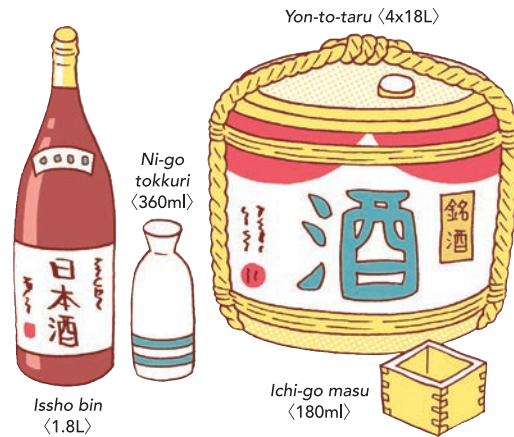
Since sake's color and aroma can change due to temperature and exposure to UV rays, it is best to store it standing upright, in a cool, dark place around 20°C (68°F), and out of sunlight. For *ginjo-shu* with refined aromas and fresh-tasting *namazake*, refrigeration is recommended. After opening, try to finish the sake within a reasonable amount of time.



# Useful Sake Terminology at Restaurants

## How much sake is in there?

The volume of containers used for sake are based on units of measurement that were determined in the early *Edo* period (early 17th century). *Ichi-go* is about 180ml, and this volume was used to determine the volume of everything from *tokkuri*, to one *Issho* bottles, to sake casks.



## Sake Types

### Free run sake 【Arabashiri】

This refers to the very first part of the sake that comes off the press when the *moromi* is pressed. It contains a little particles and relatively less amounts of alcohol. Its appeal is in the freshly fermented and pleasantly stimulating carbon dioxide.

### Long-term storage and aged sake 【Koshu】

Sake can be matured for 6 months to one year. For example *Junmai-shu*, longer-term storage smooths out the sake's flavor. Some *koshu* is aged for two, three, or even over five years.

### Undiluted sake 【Genshu】

Most sake on the market has had its alcohol content adjusted

15-16% through dilution with water, but since *genshu* is undiluted sake, its alcohol content is often quite high, at 18-20%.

### Sparkling sake 【Happo-seishu】

This is sake that contains a lot of carbon dioxide.

### Special autumn sake 【Hiya-Oroshi】

This sake has been pasteurized once and stored until fall, and is then shipped without a second pasteurization.

### Brewing in winter 【Kan-zukuri and Kan-jikomi】

By making the sake in winter, brewers are able to do a long, slow fermentation to create sake that features more refined flavors.

### Aged and specialty sake 【Kijoshu】

This sake is made with sake as a base ingredient in place of water. Dense and sweet, this sake has been prized since ancient times.

### Kimoto starter culture 【Kimoto】

This sake is made with a traditional *shubo* (*moto* or yeast starter) that cultivates lactic acid bacilli before yeast propagation.

### Unfiltered 【Muroka】

Sake is usually made by pressing the *moromi* after that, sake is filtered to stabilize the quality, but this sake skips that last step.

### Cask sake 【Taru zake】

Sake that has been kept in a cedar cask, has its own special aroma.

### 【Nama-chozo-shu】

Freshly pressed sake is stored at low temperatures, and is pasteurized only once, just before shipping. This sake retains the flavors of unpasteurized sake.

### 【Nama-zume-shu】

This sake is pasteurized, stored, and moderately matured for a stable product quality. The matured sake is then bottled without a second pasteurization.

### Un-pasteurized sake 【Namazake】

This sake is sent to market

without any pasteurization in the production process. There are many types, such as *junmai nama* and *ginjo nama*.

### Cloudy Sake【Nigorizake】

This is a white, cloudy sake made by straining the *moromi* through a coarse cloth only. Nigorizake that is shipped without pasteurization is called *kassei seishu* (active sake), and still contains living yeast and enzymes.

### New Sake【Shinshu】

The official sake brewing year runs from July to the following

June. Usually, sake that is shipped within the same brewing year would be classified as *shinshu*.

### Low-alcohol sake 【Tei-aru shu】

Generally, this is sake with an alcohol content below 12%. It has a soft feeling in the mouth and is perfect for people with a low tolerance for alcohol, or for when you want to drink but not feel the effects too strongly.

### Frozen sake【To-ketsu shu】

This sake is packaged in a special container and has been frozen into a sherbet-like texture.

## Words Related to Sake and Izakaya (Japanese Pubs)

### 【Guinom】

This is a type of sake cup. Usually larger than cups referred to as *choko*, they hold a hefty amount of sake. They are typically made of porcelain or ceramic.

### 【Katakuchi】

A bowl-shaped vessel with a mouth for pouring along the rim. A traditional Japanese vessel, it is also used in cooking. As with a *tokkuri*, sake is poured from the bottle to the *katakuchi*, and then from the *katakuchi* to the *choko*.

### 【Morikiri】

This is a drinking style in which sake is poured to purposely overflow into a dish or *masu* placed underneath the drinking vessel. After the sake in the drinking vessel is finished, pour

the overflow into the cup to drink it.

### 【O-aiso】

Asking to calculate the bill, this is also called *okaikei* and *okanjo*. Take your bill to the staff and say *oaiso* and they will calculate the total for you.

### 【O-choshi】

A vessel with a long handle. Since it is used as a vessel for pouring sake into cups just like a *tokkuri*, some people call *choshi* to mean *tokkuri*.

### 【O-hiya】

Water. The same as *yawaragi-mizu* that goes along with sake, or a chaser drunk alongside whiskey, this term refers to water given freely at Japanese restaurants.

### 【O-toshi】

A snack given before you order your meal. It is also called *saki-zuke*. The type of food given depends on the restaurant.

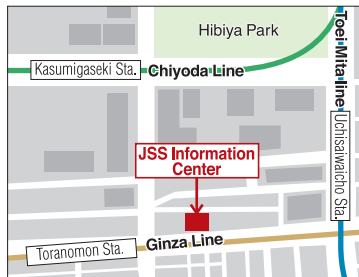




# Welcome to the Japan Sake and Shochu Information Center!

## The Information Center for Sake and Shochu from All Over Japan

The JSS Information Center is a specialized showroom featuring information on Japanese sake, *honkaku shochu*, and *awamori*. In addition to displays about history and culture, and lectures by concierges, you can also enjoy tasting recommended brands at the bar counter.



Nihon Shuzo Toranomon Building 1st Floor  
1-6-15 Nishi Shimbashi, Minato-ku, Tokyo

- Hours: 10:00 - 18:00
  - Days closed: Saturday, Sunday, public holidays, year-end and New Year holidays
  - Nearest station: Tokyo Metro, Ginza Line, Toranomon Station
- [www.japansake.or.jp/sake/know/data](http://www.japansake.or.jp/sake/know/data)



## October 1st is Sake Day!



- No drinking under 20 in Japan.
- Don't drink and drive. ● Drink responsibly.
- Women should not drink during pregnancy or breastfeeding because of the risk of birth defects and growth suppression of baby.

[Japan Sake and Shochu Makers Association website]  
<http://www.japansake.or.jp/sake/english>  
<http://www.honkakushochu-awamori.jp/english>

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