Sake Brewery
Tour in Niigata
featuring a lecture by John Gauntner
5 days – February 17 through 21, 2014

Highlights

Sake
Learn about sake from the world's leading expert, John Gauntner, in an intimate class setting. Maximum group size is limited to twelve people. Explore the area and visit four breweries during the brewing season. The brewers and rice growers will share their philosophies and approaches with the group during the tours and at the meals. Taste just pressed sake for the season right at the source and with meals.

Food
Start with a welcome dinner, and taste the hospitality of traditional elite Niigata society, with exquisite local cuisine, sake and Geisha dance performance. Discover how well sake pairs with French cuisine created by one of the best chefs in Niigata. See local salmon preparation and a different approach to tea in traditional machiya shops in Murakami. Savor simple onigiri rice balls made with highly praised Niigata rice at an old farmhouse.

Sado Island
Visit the rugged, remote island of Sado off of Sea of Japan coast. Feel the distinctly different cultural heritage and taste sake style that breaks away from the mainland. Sip sake inside the shaft of the Sado goldmine. Visit the old port town of Shukunegi. Pick up sticks and try your hand at Kodo drumming. On the last night on the island, soak in open-air onsen hot springs by the sea.

Special support by Japan Sake and Shochu Makers Association

Sake Brewery Tours and the Japan Sake and Shochu Makers Association invite you to a special journey in 2014. The Japan Sake and Shochu Makers Association offers generous support to sake fans to experience Japan with Sake Brewery Tours. This is a one-time opportunity you cannot miss!

Cost:

Tour Cost: 270,000 JPY per person/double occupancy.
With 50,000 JPY support from Japan Sake and Shochu Makers Association, your cost is only 220,000 JPY.

Price includes:

• Sake lecture by sake expert, John Gauntner and a tour with him for one brewery visit.
• Four special tours and tastings at sake breweries.
• Accommodations for 4 nights based on double occupancy: 3 nights at Hotel Okura Niigata and 1 night at ryokan Japanese style inn with hot springs.
• 4 breakfasts, 4 lunches and 3 dinners. Dinners include selected sake from the breweries we visit.
• Activities and entertainments: private Geisha performance, Kodo drum experience, and admission to Sado gold mine.
• All transportation during the tour starting February 17th through 21st. Travel to Niigata on February 17th and continuing to your next destination from Niigata Station on February 21st are not included.
• A qualified tour leader who is an Advanced Sake Professional and a certified English Bilingual Interpretive Guide provides translation and informative commentary throughout the trip.

Itinerary

February 17, 2014 (Monday) Shibata and Niigata, Niigata
Travel from Tokyo to Niigata by JR Shinkansen in the morning. Our first visit of the journey is Shibata to visit ichishima Brewery where you will see the glimpse of the history of the Ichishima family who was one of the five largest land-owners in the country during the Edo period. After a warm welcome from the president of the company with a masterful Japanese tea ceremony, enjoy lunch at the brewery’s guesthouse overlooking the peaceful snow-covered Japanese gardens. After the tour of the brewery and tasting, explore the museum where you see old brewing tools and family antiques from centuries ago. Tonight’s welcome dinner gives you a taste of the old elite society of Niigata with exquisite local cuisine, sake, and Geisha dance performance.

Hotel: Hotel Okura  Meals: Lunch; banquet-style dinner with sake and Geisha performance
February 18, 2014 (Tuesday) Niigata, Niigata
Today is dedicated to discovering many aspects of sake. The day begins with a lecture by John Gauntner. Then, visit Imayo Tsukasa Brewery right in the center of Niigata that once flourished as a center for sake and soy sauce breweries and fermented food makers. Imayo Tsukasa is one of a few breweries who only make junmai. Learn their philosophy and tradition. For lunch, enjoy simple onigiri rice balls made with highly praised Niigata rice at an old farmhouse. In the afternoon, a sake rice grower and organic farmer who supplies rice to Imayo Tsukawa will take you through the snow-covered Fukushima-gata slough where he grows rice from spring to autumn. During the snow season, the vast plains become the home of migrating swans. Tonight's dinner is a pairing of French cuisine and sake.

Hotel: Hotel Okura Meals: Breakfast; lunch; French and sake pairing dinner

February 19, 2014 (Wednesday) Murakami, Niigata
Travel to northern Niigata prefecture, Murakami, for culinary culture found only in this town. Murakami was known as a salmon center in the 11th century, and even today you will find rows of dried salmon hanging from the eaves of traditional machiya houses and shops. In Murakami, your sake discovery is going to be about how the foods and traditions of the area had impacted the taste of sake. After a brief visit to Taiyo Brewery, sip locally-grown tea by the irori fireplace in an old machiya-style tea shop. We will sample several salmon dishes at lunch. In the afternoon, we drive from this coastal city deep into the snow country to visit the home village of the toji, master brewer, of Taiyo Brewery. Try yukimi-sake while viewing snow, and home made doburoku sake in a rural setting. At night, relax or explore on your own the small entertainment district of narrow alleys filled with restaurants.

Hotel: Hotel Okura Meals: Breakfast; lunch

February 20, 2014 (Thursday) Sado Island, Niigata
Next, you will travel by ferry and spend two days on the rugged, remote island of Sado off the Sea of Japan coast. The island was once a place of exile for court nobles and emperors as early as 8th century. Then, later in the 18th century, a goldrush brought workers and new riches. Due to its history and isolation, Sado has very distinct cultural heritage and a sake style different from other parts of Niigata. Upon arrival, one of the rice growers of Obata Brewery will take you through his fields to share his secret recipe for growing healthy sake rice. Learn how eco-friendly farming is applied on the island to save colony of the elegant Crested Ibis from the brink of extinction. Before visiting Obata Brewery, we visit one of the historic gold mines. Sake is matured deep in the shafts and you'll get to taste sake right there. Finally, visit Obata Brewery to sum up their philosophy and approach to sake brewing. In the evening, simply relax at open air hot springs by the sea and enjoy sumptuous local catch from the sea with sake.

Hotel: Yawata-kan (Japanese style inn) Meals: Breakfast; lunch; dinner with sake

February 21, 2014 (Friday) Sado Island, Niigata
We start the day by visiting the western tip of the s-shaped island. In the old town of Shukunegi narrow streets are lined with historic 17th century houses with black walls and roofs dotted with lines of rocks. Then, a car will take you to the Taiko Center for a total Kodo drum workout. Not only will you feel the deep striking sound of the drums in your body, but you get to drum along with a Kodo drum master. We will return to Niigata by ferry in mid afternoon. From JR Niigata Station, continue your own onward travel or return to Tokyo with the group.

Meal: Breakfast; lunch

Note:
290,000 JPY per person for single occupancy. With 50,000 JPY support from Japan Sake and Shochu Makers Association, your cost is only 220,000 JPY. The tour price is based on a group of 8 and may change for a smaller group size.

Domestic Transportation After Your Arrival in Japan:
Your tour begins and ends at JR Niigata Station. To access JR Niigata, you can take JR Shinkansen. Getting to JR Niigata and traveling from there are not included in the tour cost. For your convenience, we will of course coordinate your domestic transportation from Tokyo or other cities. Please see Optional Tours for Niigata for transportation and additional accommodation packages. For those planning to use JR Pass for more extended travel, please contact us for details.

Optional Tour for Niigata
We hope to make it easy for you to travel with us to Niigata. With the optional tour, you do not have to worry
about any arrangements other than your international flights! You can simply enjoy stress-free vacation without complicated travel planning or worried about getting to places. You may choose one or more components listed in the package to design your own travel itinerary.

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**About John Gaunter**

John Gauntner, known as the “Sake Guy” in Japan, is the world’s leading sake expert. He has published five books and written hundreds of articles on sake. He teaches a series of intensive educational sake courses in Japan and in the US. He is also the only non-Japanese to function as an advisor and consultant for the Japanese government on sake promotion and the worldwide sake market. Learn more at [http://www.sake-world.com](http://www.sake-world.com)

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**About Tour Leader: Etsuko Nakamura**

Etsuko Nakamura is a Sake Advanced specialist and a certified English Bilingual Interpretive Guide [Registration Number: EN02400]. She shares her passion for sake and food on her blog – Tokyofoodcast.com and has toured more than 100 sake breweries around Japan. She creates and leads customized tours for special interest groups.

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Sake World Sake Brewery Tour is offered by Michi Travel Japan.

Please visit [http://saketours.com](http://saketours.com) for more information or contact us at info@saketours.com for registration.