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!

There are so many kinds of sake! Why are they different? → P4

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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!
Q. How do I choose my first glass?
A. First, learn some sake basics.

Sake is an alcoholic beverage made from fermented rice.

Sake is a fermented alcoholic beverage made from rice. Sake is a fermented food product like soy sauce, miso, and katsuobushi (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.
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.

- **Fruity Type**
  - **Aroma**: Features gorgeous aromas of fruit or flowers, and has a sense of clarity.
  - **Taste**: Has moderate sweetness and roundness, balanced with a refreshing acidity.

- **Complex Aroma Gorgeous**
  - **Aroma**: Features strong and complex aromas, like spices or dried fruit.
  - **Taste**: Thick sweetness, balanced with an acidity mellowed by maturation.

- **Matured Type**
  - **Aroma**: Features a grainy scent, or an aroma conveying umami, like dairy products.
  - **Taste**: Features sweetness, acidity, a pleasant bitterness, and a well-rounded richness.

- **Simple Moderate Aroma Light**
  - **Aroma**: Features a mild and moderate aroma.
  - **Taste**: Has a refreshing taste and a smooth feeling in the mouth.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Temperature</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50°C (122°F)</td>
<td><em>Atsu-kan</em></td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45°C (113°F)</td>
<td><em>Jo-kan</em></td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40°C (104°F)</td>
<td><em>Nuru-kan</em></td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20°C (68°F)</td>
<td><em>Shitsu-on</em></td>
<td>When the tokkuri is held, it may feel slightly cool to the touch. The aroma and flavor will give an impression of softness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10°C (50°F)</td>
<td><em>Reishu</em></td>
<td>The general term for sake chilled to between 10°C and 5°C is <em>reishu</em>. Generally, chilling sake to lower temperatures masks subtle flavors.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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.

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 2015)*

**[Number of Breweries]**
- No.1  Niigata (97)
- No.2  Nagano (87)
- No.3  Hyogo (87)

*From the National Tax Agency Sake Production Outlook (fiscal year 2015 survey)*

**[Consumption Per Person]**
- No.1  Niigata (12.4 ℓ)
- No.2  Akita (9.3 ℓ)
- No.3  Yamagata (8.0 ℓ)

*From the National Tax Agency Japan “Sake no Shion” (March 2015) statistical information*
There is etiquette for enjoying sake.

Kampai！ 乾杯！

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.

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.
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.
Sake and washoku (Japanese food) pair wonderfully together, but we have some recommended cuisines for each of the four types of sake. Of course, sake can also be enjoyed with food from many other countries as well.

**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.

**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 shirmpaku 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 mesh 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.

**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.

- **Product name**
  This is expressed as nihonshu or saishu 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.

- **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 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)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredients</th>
<th>Rice, rice koji</th>
<th>Rice, rice koji, brewing alcohol</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0% or less</td>
<td>Junmai Daiginjo-shu</td>
<td>Daiginjo-shu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50% or less</td>
<td>Ginjo production methods, characteristic aroma and taste, and exceptional color and clarity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60% or less</td>
<td>Junmai Ginjo-shu</td>
<td>Ginjo-shu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60% or less</td>
<td>Ginjo production methods, characteristic aroma and taste, and exceptional color and clarity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70% or less</td>
<td>Tokubetsu Junmai-shu</td>
<td>Tokubetsu Honjozo-shu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70% or less</td>
<td>Characteristic aroma and taste, and exceptional color and clarity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over 70%</td>
<td>Junmai-shu</td>
<td>Honjozo-shu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Characteristic aroma and taste, and exceptional color and clarity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reference: 1993 Japan National Tax Agency Announcement No.8 Sake Production Quality Indication Standards Overview

**Rules Established for Specially Designated Sake**

When classifying specially designated sake, the first remarkable point or 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.

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). Ichigo 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 [Kijisshu]
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 bacteria 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 sake]
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 unpasturized 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 kassotai seishu (active sake), and still contains living yeast and enzymes.

Now Sake [Shinshu]
The official sake brewing year runs from July 1 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 don’t 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)

[Guinomi]
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.

[Katakuchu]
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 okastei 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 yowasagi-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
1-13 Nishi Shinbashi, 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

October 1st is Sake Day!

KAMPAI!

日本酒で乾杯!

• 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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