

Experience the Art of Sake Making at These Breweries in Japan

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“Good water makes all the difference,” my guide explains as we tour a sake brewery that uses spring water from a source tapped 656 feet below the ground. At Nakano Sake Brewery in the castle town of Kitsuki, they take that water and combine it with mold and rice, waiting 40 days for it to ferment and brew. Classical music is piped through to the tank room to create the perfect environment — and it certainly works. This 6th generation brewery has won multiple awards for its sake. Their Chie Bijin brew won the highest praise in 2018 at the Kura Master Sake Contest held in Paris.

You can taste samples of the sake and tour the facility in the northeastern part of Oita Prefecture, on the Kunisaki Peninsula, and judge for yourself. However, even though this business has been open for over 140 years, in terms of sake that’s a very young operation.

In fact, the drink has been brewed and enjoyed in Japan as far back as 2,500 years ago. Although sake is known as ‘rice wine,’ the fermentation of the rice and the production are more akin to beer brewing than winemaking. To taste the same high standard of sake enjoyed by ancient Japanese connoisseurs, seek out one of these traditional sake breweries in Japan.

Traditional Sake Breweries in Japan

Sudo Honke

2125, Obara, Kasama-shi, Ibaraki
309-1701, Japan

Located in Ibaraki Prefecture, Sudo Honke is an incredible brewery — not only because it’s the oldest one in Japan — but because it’s also one of the oldest companies in the world.

Founded by samurai warriors, this brewery offers modern-day visitors one-hour tours where you can learn all about the sake-making process and sample three different kinds of sake. Be sure to pre-book your tour to enjoy this award-winning beverage.



Hiraizumi Hompo

Nakamachi-59 Hirasawa, Nikaho, Akita

018-0402, Japan

Founded in 1487, the current head of the company is a 26th-generation sake expert. With a history like that, it's no surprise that Hiraizumi Hompo produces sake that is revered across Japan and favored for its high acidity.

Kenbishi Sake Brewing Co Ltd

3 12-5 Mikagehonmachi, Higashinada-ku, Kobe-shi, Hyogo

658-0046, Japan

Founded in 1505, Kenbishi sake is known for its pure mineral spring water. The brewery says that its long history is best explained by its special place in the lives of its customers for over 500 years. In both good times and bad, their sake has been enjoyed, toasted and gifted across the nation. The company's history is particularly special as it is understood to be the first sake company to be branded. Their sake has a high mineral content delivering a traditional "masculine" taste profile.

Yamaji Shuzo

990, Kinomotocho Kinomoto, Nagahama-shi, Shiga,

529-0425, Japan

Enjoy the Kuwazake at this ancient sake brewery located in Nagahama City, which is flavored with mulberry leaves and is particularly popular. The company, which was founded in 1532, is also known for its commitment to using organic fertilizer and reducing chemicals in its agriculture process.

Tomita Shuzo

1107 Kinomotocho, Kinomoto, Nagahama-shi, Shiga

529-0425, Japan

One of the oldest sake breweries in the Shiga prefecture, Tomita Shuzo opened in 1534 and is a microbrewery that was originally located at the foothills of the Shizugatake Mountains by Lake Biwa. A small team works to create Junmai sake using a technique perfected over centuries.

Shusen Kurano

368-1 Kawanakajima Imai, Nagano

381-2226, Japan

This sake brewery has been making Kawanakajima since 1540, but its process steeped in tradition hasn't stopped the company from moving into the modern era. In fact, their master brewer or Toji, Mariko Chino, is one of the few women at the top of this industry. The

original building is now used for tours as a larger facility and warehouse were constructed in the 1990s.

Yoshinogawa Shuzo

4-8-12 Settaya, Nagaoka-shi, Niigata,
940-1105, Japan

Dating back to 1548, this brewery now houses a museum inside its original brewing building, which you'll need to book in advance to visit. Located in the famed sake-producing area of Niigata, it's the oldest brewery in the region. This company grows its own rice, called kurabito saibamai, to control the quality and uses mineral-rich soft spring water.



Konishi Shuzo

2 -13 Higashiarioka, Itami-shi, Hyogo
664-0845, Japan

Konishi Shuzo is one of the oldest sake companies in Japan to be owned by a single family and has been in operation since 1550. They make sake all year round, which is still fairly unusual in what is known as a seasonal business, and release their sake under the brand name Konishi.

Ueda Shuzo

866-1 Ichibucho, Ikoma-shi, Nara
630-0222, Japan

Ueda Shuzo has been making Seicho and Kicho in Nara since 1558. In production since the Muromachi period, they use Ikoma water and high-quality domestic rice to produce their traditional product. However, they are moving with the times and investing in research and training for their brewers to keep up with the latest in sake craftsmanship.

Matsui Sake Brewery

1-6 Yoshidakawaracho, Sakyo-ku, Kyoto-shi, Kyoto,
606-8305, Japan

Matsui Sake Brewery holds the distinction of being one of the oldest sake breweries in Kyoto and was founded in 1726. It has a storied history including a disaster in 1864 when the brewery burned down during the great fire of Genji. With advance booking, you can visit the brewery for a tour, which includes an opportunity to taste the sake.