

How to Choose a Sake

The least you need to know...



John Gauntner's quick-start guide to sake: A lightning-fast, extremely simplified, easy-to-remember guide to enjoying sake today.

By: John Gauntner www.sake-world.com



Wanna learn more about sake?

This ebook is just an overview. It is not even the tip of the iceberg! To learn more about sake, what it is, what makes a good one different from a bad one, check out the following “sake education” products.

› The Sake Notebook

In just 30 minutes, you can fill in the gaps of your knowledge and become an informed sake shopper, and confidently stroll through a retailer or meander through a menu, knowing just what to select to maximize your satisfaction. *And*, you'll be able to talk about it. *Guaranteed.* The Sake Notebook also includes a list of 250 sake brands to choose from, as well as special access to a password protected part of the Sake World website that tells you more about what brands you should look for, and who is who in the sake world, than is found anywhere else in the English-speaking world. *Guaranteed.*

› The Sake Production Slideshow

A 15-minute, gorgeously presented slideshow of the sake production process, indicating every step from rice production and milling to rice cleaning and steaming to koji propagation to yeast starter to mash to bottling -- all done in traditional old breweries in Japan. An indispensable help to those seeking to understand sake production visually. Created by John Gauntner.

› Japanese for Sake Lovers

Learn to correctly pronounce sake-related terminology, including the grades, and names of all the major brands available near you. Includes a bonus section on how to order sake in a sake pub – in Japanese! Learn just what you need in minutes!

› Sake Brewing – A Detailed Description of the Entire Process

An explanation of the brewing process – and all the attention to minute detail that goes into it – from start to finish. Each step of the process is explained thoroughly, complete with **photos** and **video clips** to augment the verbiage.

› Tokyo Sake Pub Guide

Available directly from John Gauntner at a sale price of \$15.00, shipping included. Introduces 40 sake pubs of ambiance, feel and focus. If you ever visit Tokyo, this is all you need. Written by myself (the English bits) and Akihiro Yorimitsu (the Japanese parts).

› Sake's Hidden Stories: The Personalities, Philosophies, and Tricks-of-the-Trade Behind the Brew

In this 150-plus page ebook, you will get a view into the sake industry that goes much further and deeper than the information we most commonly encounter. You'll meet more than a dozen brewers themselves, and see what makes them tick. Learn more here.

See other products and new products here as they come out. And sign up for the free Sake World newsletter here.

Sake: The Least You Need to Know

How to Enjoy it *Now...*



Rice: The Stuff of Which Sake is Made

- How do I choose a sake?
- By price - since sake is fairly priced 90% of the time.
- Drink something with the word "Ginjo" on the bottle and you will always be in the safe zone.
- Drink it slightly chilled.
- Drink it young.

How much should I pay?

...to get the most “Zen for my Yen?”



Drip Pressing Sake

- In Japan? Read on.
- -Good sake ain't cheap, unfortunately. You will need to start at about ¥1000 a l'il bottle in Japan.
- -But the good news is that it is not that expensive either. Up to about ¥6000 for a 720ml bottle will see you a return on your investment, but in truth, after about ¥3500 the added value factor begins to wane. After ¥6000 a bottle, the law of diminishing returns kicks in with a mighty vengeance. No need to go beyond that.

How much should I pay?

...to get the most “Bang for my Buck?”



Inside a traditional sake brewery.

- In the US? Essentially, prices about double. Almost, anyway. (The same is true for most countries, by the way, not just the U.S.)
- Good sake ain't cheap, unfortunately. You will need to start at about \$20 a l'il bottle in the US.
- But the good news is that it is not that expensive either. Up to about \$120 or a 720ml bottle will see you a return on your investment, but in truth, after about \$70 the added value factor begins to wane. After \$120 a bottle, the law of diminishing returns kicks in with a mighty vengeance. No need to go beyond that.

What should I look for in a sake?

What is the difference between a good one and a bad one?



Sake lined up at an official tasting waiting to be assessed.

- The truth? It is all a matter of whether or not *you* like it. It is all about preference; it is all hedonistic. Sure, there are greater and lesser levels of quality, but different sake suit different palates, and fit different situations. So first and foremost, ask yourself if *you* like it. This is deceptively important, and just as deceptively simple!
- Balance. That, and a lack of off-flavors and roughness. In other words, a fruity, very aromatic sake is great if the flavors support that and present a thread of consistency to that aroma. A simple, settle sake with little fruitiness or aromas is fine too as long as the flavors are in tune with that. If you have lots of aromas but they are incongruous with the flavor, or vice versa, the sake is out of balance and will wear on you in time. The same can be said of roughness and off-flavors: they will make a sake cloying and hard to drink.

What should I be drinking?

Any particular types or grades?



Sake in a “masu,” a traditional implement for sake drinking, albeit less appropriate for today's premium “ginjo.”

- As mentioned earlier, drink “Ginjo” In short, if you choose to remember one word, drink sake with the word "ginjo" on the bottle somewhere. It might be ginjo, junmai ginjo, daiginjo, or junmai daiginjo, but if the word ginjo is embedded in there, it is super premium sake, in the top 7% of all produced.
- Note, two other types called junmai-shu and honjozo are premium too, and you can enjoy those perfectly well, but should you prefer the minimalist strategy, just look for ginjo.
- To learn more about these, get The Sake Notebook, or study the Types of Sake section at www.sake-world.com.

What's the difference between “junmai” types and non-junmai types?



Official Sake Tasting Glasses Lay in Waiting on top of a Tank

- Junmai types (junmai-shu, junmai ginjo, junmai daiginjo) are made with rice alone, where as anything without that term on it has had a bit of distilled alcohol added to it for good technical reasons, which include pulling flavor and aromas out to the rice more easily, stability, and better shelf life.
- Neither type is intrinsically superior to the other! Don't believe that hype!

Just *how* should I drink it?

Hot or Cold?



Just-pressed super-premium sake rests in 18 liter bottles

- In short, drink it slightly chilled, especially ginjo. Why? The flavor and aromas are better expressed that way.
- How cold is cold? Like a white wine: not *too* cold.
- Are their exceptions? *Sure there are.* There is some premium sake enjoyable gently warmed by virtue of the flavor profile.
- Is *all* hot sake, then, bad? *Of course not.*

What kind of glass should I use?

Are special ones called for?



Various Sake-Tasting Accoutrements

- Simple wine glasses make an *excellent* choice for enjoying premium sake, especially ginjo. If you have those, use 'em.
- Note, though, that rarely does one see stemware used in Japan. Straight-sided tumbler-like glasses are more common, as they even the playing field for all sake. The extra exposed surface area lets aromas arise as well. But wine glasses are great for aromatic ginjo.
- Why the tiny cups we see so much? Those are used to accommodate the custom of pouring for each other: smaller glasses mean refilling more often.

Just what is it anyway? And does it age?



Newly brewed sake drips out of the wooden press from whence it was born.

- In short, sake is a beverage *brewed* – sorta like a beer, but different – with rice being the only fermentable raw material used.
- Drink your sake young. While there are one or two exceptions, the best sake is young, premium sake. Don't age, cellar or collect it.

What about sake and food?



Sake in glasses for assessment at a brewery.
Note chalked indications in front of each glass.

- By no means should sake be limited to Japanese food or even Asian food. While stronger flavors will surely overshadow delicate sake, there are plenty of things that go wonderfully with sake outside of Japanese food.
- Fish, vegetable and even lightly grilled meats make wonderful options.
- Unlike wine, though, one cannot pair based on region, rice variety or even grade. To pair well, you must know both the sake and the food. In other words, you need to taste it first.

About the author

John Gauntner is recognized as the world's leading non-Japanese sake expert. A longtime Japan resident, he both speaks and reads Japanese, and is well known among sake brewers and others within the sake industry as the window to making sake popular outside of Japan. He wrote the Nihonshu Column in the Japan Times (Japan's most widely read English language newspaper) for eight straight years, followed by a weekly column on sake in Japanese for the Yomiuri Shimbun, Japan's and the world's most widely distributed Japanese newspaper. John has published five books on sake, about which more information can be found elsewhere in this ebook.

Known as "The Sake Guy," John has been quoted and/or mentioned in sake related articles in countless publications including The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times, The San Francisco Chronicle, Newsweek, Forbes, Business Week, Rolling Stone, and numerous other publications. He has spoken at Harvard, Yale, and Columbia Universities, Wharton School of Business, and countless other venues across the US and Japan.

He is the only non-Japanese member of the Ginjoshu Kenkyu Kikou (Ginjo Sake Research Group), and is the only non-Japanese to have participated as an official taster in a prefectural government tasting, as well as the only non-Japanese to provide regular sake-related consulting assistance in the form of lectures to the Government of Japan. He is the only non-Japanese to sit on the panel of the Award for the Promotion of Japanese Cuisine Overseas, an award assessed by the Ministry of Forestry and Fisheries in Japan. He is also the only non-Japanese to have won the "Kikizake Meijin" (Accomplished Sake Taster) award, presented by the Junsui Nihonshu Kyoukai (Pure Sake Association) for accuracy in sake tasting skills, an award he has won three times, in March 2001, March 2003, and March 2006. John is also the only non-Japanese to ever take (and subsequently pass) the "Kikizake Seminar" (Sake Assessment Seminar) administered by the Nihon Jouzo Kyoukai, (Brewing Society of Japan).

Each summer and winter, he runs the Sake Professional Course, a week-long intensive sake study course, held in Japan in the winter and the US in the summer. Graduates of that course include the owners of all three of the sake-only retailers in the US, True Sake (San Francisco), Sake Nomi (Seattle) and Sayaka (New York City). Most of each winter he is traveling around Japan, visiting breweries regularly and constantly learning. Other efforts at educating and edifying about sake include a [free monthly newsletter](#) and a range of educational products available [here](#) in the Educational Products section. Learn more about those elsewhere in this ebook.



To learn more about sake, please visit:

Site: www.sake-world.com

Books: The Sake Handbook (Buy [here](#))

Sake: Pure and Simple (Buy [here](#))

The Sake Companion (Buy [here](#))

Tokyo Sake Pub Guide (Buy [here](#))

Nihonjin mo Shirenai Nihonshu
no Hanashi (Buy [here](#))

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