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NARA Visitor Center & Inn
 Address : 3 Ikeno-cho, Nara
 Phone : 0742-81-7461 (8:00 - 21:00)
<https://www.sarusawa.nara.jp/>

Published by Nara Prefecture Printed in March 2018

NARA SAKE GUIDE BOOK

神 酒 礼 賛
 In Praise of Nara Sake



奈良はここで

見るところ

奈良県観光キャンペーン

Welcome to Nara, the birthplace of *umazake*

Nara is regarded as the birthplace of Japanese refined sake. Sake produced in Nara is created from natural water and fine rice - in abundant supply from the local environment - combined with traditional brewing techniques inherited from the pioneering master brewers. The rich, deep flavours and fragrances of *umazake* are truly memorable and delicious.

はじまりの奈良へ、水と米が育む「うま酒」

清酒発祥の地といわれる奈良。奈良が生み出す日本酒は、その豊かな自然が育む水と米、そして先人から受け継いだ技と想いから醸し出され、深い味わいとふくよかな香りを堪能できます。



Freshly made sake originates from Mt. Miwa

In Japanese classical poetry the expression *umazake* or 'delicious sake' always refers to Mt. Miwa, a sacred mountain where the deities of Ohmiwa Jinja Shrine reside. The guardian deity of sake brewers is also enshrined here. In November, brewers from all over Japan gather at the shrine to receive *sugidama*, a ball of fresh cedar branches

from Mt. Miwa. The *sugidama* are hung in front of shops and breweries as a sign that the season's fresh sake is available.

The essence of sake is within the *shubo*

In the Muromachi period (1336-1573), unfiltered cloudy sake was the standard sake throughout Japan before improved techniques in the brewing process led to a more refined, clear filtered



sake called *nihonshu*. Historical records note that Shoryakuji Temple established the foundation for modern sake brewing using an innovative method called *bodaimoto*. There is a stone monument that testifies Shoryakuji Temple as the origin of Japanese refined sake alongside the river at the temple entrance. Every January, *shubo* (yeast starter) is made at the Bodaimoto Sake Festival,

新酒づくりは三輪山から

日本最古の神社に数えられる大神神社の佇む地、三輪にかかる枕詞は「うま酒」。酒造りの神様として信仰があつく、11月の酒まつりには、全国から酒造家が集まります。そこで配られる、三輪の神杉で作られた杉玉は、新酒ができたしるしとして軒先につるされます。また、古来からの白濁の酒が、日本酒と呼ばれる透き通った清酒になったのは室町時代。山里で僧坊酒を作っていた正暦寺が革新的な酒造法で近代醸造法の基礎を築いたと伝わります。

held in the temple precinct. Thanks to the recent sake boom in Japan, the number of visitors to the festival has been increasing annually. Brewers in Nara participate in cultivating the *shubo*, and on return to their breweries make their own sake using the *shubo* received from Shoryakuji Temple. Each master brewer's final sake, although made with the same source *shubo*, varies greatly in taste.

- 01 Mt. Miwa is a sacred mountain where the *kami* of Ohmiwa Jinja Shrine reside.
- 02 The Sake Festival at Ohmiwa Jinja Shrine, where prayers are given for safety and success in brewing sake.
- 03 *Sugidama*, balls made from cedar branches, are delivered to sake breweries across Japan.
- 04 Shoryakuji Temple is the birthplace of modern Japanese sake brewing, where traditional filtering techniques were established, and are still in use today.
- 05 *Shubo* is made at the Bodaimoto Sake Festival at Shoryakuji Temple and received by master brewers in Nara to make their own sake.
- 06 Each brewery creates different varieties of sake from the same original *shubo*.



Brewing premium sake is challenging work

The taste of sake can change in a second

Rice rapidly absorbs water, so master brewers time the stages of production to the second. The sake brewing process requires constant attention and high levels of concentration. Using traditional methods ensures that sake from Nara retains the *umami* of the original, high quality rice.

日本酒造りは真剣勝負。秒単位で味が変わることも

米の浸漬は吸水速度が速いため、秒単位で吸水時間を調整していきます。深い注意力と集中力を必要とする職人技があって、米本来の旨味を堪能できる奈良酒が生み出されていくのです。



The traditional skills of master craftsmen ensure the fine taste of sake from Nara

The brewing of sake is an exacting process where a split second can change the taste of the final product. Timing is of utmost importance and some stages of the process such as soaking the rice, or checking fermentation, rely on intuition along with the full faculties of sight, sound and smell. The coldest months of the winter season are the best time for making sake as the conditions for fermenting



02



03

are easier to control. It's an arduous and anxious time for the sake brewery and the busiest time of year for the brewers. At Imanishi Brewery, founded 350 years ago, the 14th generation chief brewer,

Imanishi Masayuki, is a young and energetic man who is making some of the most interesting sakes in Japan; a dedication to local craft and the sacred area of Mt. Miwa.



04

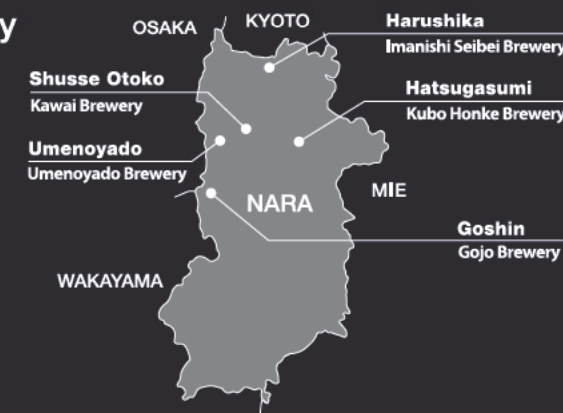
伝統と職人技が守り抜いてきた奈良酒の味

日本酒の聖地、大神神社が佇む三輪で唯一の蔵元・今西酒造。酒造りに最適な厳寒の時期には早朝から熱気があがっています。秒単位で味が左右されてしまうので浸水時間を計りながら、米の具合を数人の目で確認していきます。

- 01 Water sourced from Mt. Miwa, steamed rice and *koji* (sake mould) are added to the *shubo* three times, as a three-step fermentation process.
- 02 Rice is thoroughly washed and soaked in pure water.
- 03 Polishing rice enables brewers to use the pure center of each grain.
- 04 *Moromi* (fermented mash) is placed into sacks for weighing.

Visit a traditional sake brewery

Each region within Nara has developed distinctive ways of brewing sake in multiple varieties, influenced by the local resources, climate and environment. By enjoying a visit to a traditional sake brewery you can learn more about sake production, taste their produce, and feel closer to the nature, traditions and culture of Nara.



In praise of Nara sake — 神酒礼賛 —

There are many great brewers and varieties of sake in Nara. Each of us has our own personal preferences and favourites, so I recommend exploring the full range of sake from each region. Taking time for fresh taste sensations leads to exciting new discoveries, experiences and stories.



Andrew Thomas

Andrew was born in Manchester, England and has lived in Japan for over 20 years. He founded award-winning studio creativehybrid in 2002, working as a director / producer for commercial film productions. Attracted by the beautiful nature and historic charm of the region, he moved to Nara in 2012, and has been actively involved in creative and business development for publishing projects and events to promote Nara produce, culture and tourism. He enjoys photography, writing and travel around the region, as well as tasting premium Nara *umazake*.

アンドリュー・トーマス

英国マンチェスター生まれ。日本在住20年余り。2002年にクリエイティブ・ハイブリッドを設立し、広告及びクリエイティブ産業の分野において、映像・写真制作、出版等を手がけ、数々の賞を受賞。2012年には、奈良の豊かな自然や美しい町並みに一目惚れし、奈良へ移住。奈良県のホームページ制作に携わるなど、奈良を舞台に精力的に活動を行う。また、各地の酒蔵を訪ねるなど、奈良酒のもつ多彩な魅力に惚れ込む。

En route to sake appreciation

I have lived in Nara with my wife and young family since the summer of 2012. The history, culture and environment of Nara have inspired much of my work over recent years. I enjoy hiking ancient trails in the mountains, through shaded valleys, alongside streams and rivers. At any time of the year, the fresh air and atmosphere of the forests, and sounds of running water rejuvenate and inspire me.

Through living and working in Nara I've developed a growing interest in the regional produce, cuisine and sake, and have been learning how to cultivate rice in neighboring fields. At harvest time we offer freshly cut rice as a blessing to the *kami* of our local shrine, and enjoy making *mochi* and drinking sake during the local *matsuri*. By connecting with the soil and traditional ways of growing rice, I became interested in the local

sake of Nara and sample recommended varieties at home. After drinking and discussing about sake with friends and colleagues, I became increasingly curious about the ways in which sake is produced. I learnt that many of the varieties of *junmai* premium sake made in Nara use traditional techniques, the essential processes to create *umazake*.

The increasing interest in premium sake

Over the past decade, global interest and overseas sales of Japanese sake have grown significantly. The development of educational sake-related media in languages other than Japanese has contributed to this trend, as well as the championing of sake from qualified experts and enthusiasts. Through books and articles, specialist websites and online stores, the global community of sake lovers have spread the word as



advocates for their recommended brands, and through this passion have raised the international profile of Japanese sake. Though Nara is nearby the major industry hubs centered in Fushimi (Kyoto) and Nada (Hyogo), the majority of breweries in the region are smaller-scale and often family-run businesses. The dedication and diligence to maintain their craft, and the emerging creativity of a new generation of master brewers at several local breweries, is resulting in an

increased appreciation of Nara's *umazake* across the rest of the country. You can now find varieties of sake from Nara on sale at restaurants, specialist sake shops and bars in Tokyo and other major cities across Japan, and even internationally, though it's best appreciated when drinking locally.

Favourite varieties of Nara sake

One of my earliest memories of encountering Nara sake was at a friendly and popular bar situated in a narrow alleyway in the heart of Naramachi where I had my first ever glass of *Kaze no Mori*. As well as finding the effervescent flavour and brightness of the sake immediately appealing, I was impressed by the stylish and distinctive illustration and the subtle tones of colour and quality of inks used in print for the bottle label. I credit this brand of *umazake* as sparking my interest in and appreciation of *nihonshu* from Nara.

I began to further appreciate and support the production of local *junmai* sake - the 'pure rice' method, made without the additional of distilled alcohol - especially where the taste is more hand-made and personally crafted. Another outstanding brand is *Hanatomoe*, both in terms of its bold label design and its variable and robust flavours. The brewery is located alongside the riverbank at Yoshino, and uses a combination of very traditional techniques with some unorthodox approaches to making their highly distinctive sake. Each time I've tasted the varieties of *Hanatomoe* I am surprised by the potent character that leaps out, which also make it great to accompany a wide range of cuisine. In learning more about sake - from my tasting experiences and general research - it's been inspiring to realize the important role sake has played in the continuity of Nara's cultural traditions. To discover the deeper connections between sake and the history of the Nara region, I recommend *Bodaimoto Mimurosugi*, in some ways the most representative variety of Nara sake. The label

features an illustration of two praying monks, depicting the respect for and connection with Shoryakuji Temple. Another fine tasting sake I admire is *Suiryu*, produced in the picturesque village of Ouda. With a distinctive thin paper label that winds around the bottle - as if the tail of a dragon has coiled itself around to protect the precious sake - their brands are made using time-consuming *kimoto* techniques, as well as aged varieties that are great warmed as *atsukan* to drink in chilly weather.

Many ways to enjoy sake

Visiting a sake brewery is certainly the best way to learn how sake is produced, and you can also sample freshly made produce. When I visited a modern brewery for the first time it reminded me of being inside the engine room of a ship, where large tanks dominate the space connected by a network of pipes, tubes and cables. You can sense the intensive work and activities of the brewing season, when maximum attention is paid to the team effort involved in making premium quality sake.

Another benefit of visiting a rural sake brewery is that you will encounter some of the treasures of Japanese culture and history along the way. Many breweries are located in the peaceful and atmospheric merchant quarters of well-preserved towns and villages. Spending time

to explore 'deep Nara' is truly rewarding, and provides a window into the heart of Japanese culture. A walk along the Yamanobe-no-michi trail, leads you through an inspiring rural landscape that nurtured the emergence of sake brewing, towards sacred Mt. Miwa and Ohmiwa Jinja Shrine, the most venerable shrine for the Japanese sake industry. If you have time I highly recommend to walk to the peak of *Miwa-san*, to fully appreciate the sacred nature of the mountain and for views across the ancient lands. You can rejuvenate by drinking pure spring water at source, and of course sampling local varieties of Nara sake. Sake culture strongly relates to food and cuisine, and in particular the *otsumami* side dishes that usually accompany. *Narazuke* (pickled vegetables and fruits) is another speciality of the region. There are many fine ways to enjoy food with Nara sake, though personally I like smoky, strongly-flavoured and creamy cheeses with savoury crackers.

酒蔵を訪ねて、奈良の魅力に触れる体験を奈良には多くの酒蔵があり、各地の蔵を訪ねてみると、それぞれの環境や風土に合った奈良酒を知ることができます。また、伝統的な町並みや雄大な自然の中に佇む酒蔵も多く、ぶらり町歩きを楽しみながら酒蔵を訪ねてみてはいかがでしょうか。きっと、どこかほっとできたり、ワクワクするような新たな発見があるでしょう。



A selection of recommended Nara sake *Kaze no Mori*, *Hanatomoe*, *Mimurosugi*, *Suiryu*.

Learn more about Nara sake

Our 5 recommended brewery tours



1 Imanishi Seibei Brewery [今西清兵衛酒造]

Established in 1884, this brewery is located on a large plot in historic Naramachi. Their main brand *Harushika* - one of Nara's best-known sakes - is exported to over 10 countries worldwide. Visit the adjacent house, garden and cafe, which offers sweets and light lunch sets. At the spacious brewery shop, you can taste five different varieties of sake for ¥500, with a souvenir glass to keep.

24-1 Fukuchiincho, Nara
tel: 0742-23-2255
mail: info@harushika.com
http://www.harushika.com

- **Tour includes:** Tastings, souvenir and gift shopping
Brewery tour only available during weekends in February by reservation
- **Open:** 9:00 - 17:00 (Tastings to 16:30)
- **Closed:** New Year & summer holidays, during special events



2 Umenoyado Brewery [梅乃宿酒造]

Umenoyado is a 120-year-old brewery located in a quaint neighborhood of Katsuragi City. They specialise in handcrafted varieties of sake, *umeshu* and other liquors, and aim to share the pleasures of sake globally while staying true to their heritage and innovative methods. Tours are available on weekday afternoons for a maximum of twenty people per group. Reservations should be made at least five days in advance.

27 Higashimuro, Katsuragi
tel: 0120-713-550
mail: info@umenoyado.com
http://umenoyado.com

- **Tour includes:** Tastings, souvenir and gift shopping
- **Open:** 8:30 - 17:30
(Brewery tour 10:00 - 11:30, 13:30 - 16:00)
- **Closed:** Every Sunday, plus Saturdays in July & August, public holidays, New Year holidays
- **Admission:** ¥ 500 (souvenir included)
- **Reservation:** By phone or email



3 Gojo Brewery [五條酒造]

Gojo Brewery was established at the base of Mt. Kongo in 1924. At this pleasant location, fresh water that cascades down from the mountains is blended with natural spring water from a local well to make richly mellowed sake using traditional brewing methods. Their main brand is *Goshin*, named from combining the *go* of Gojo City, and the character *shin* meaning god.

1-1-31 Imai, Gojo tel: 0747-22-2079
mail: info@sake-goshin.com
http://sake-goshin.com/en/index.html

- **Tour includes:** Tastings and gift shopping
- **Open:** 10:00 - 16:00
- **Closed:** Saturdays, Sundays, New Year holidays
- **Admission:** Free
- **Reservation:** By phone



4 Kubo Honke Brewery [久保本家酒造]

A 300-year-old brewery in the picturesque village of Ouda located alongside a tranquil river. Their varieties of sake include *Hatsugasumi*, *Suiryu* and *Kimoto no Dobu*, and are made with a commitment to using traditional techniques. At the Sakagura Cafe you can enjoy a fine lunch and sake in the splendid surroundings of a beautifully maintained period building.

1834 Oudaideshin, Uda tel: 0745-83-0036
mail: info@kubohonke.com

- **Visit includes:** Cafe and gift shopping
- **Open:** Cafe 11:00 - 16:00 (Fri, Sat, Sun)
(Lunch between 12:00 - 14:00)
Shop 9:00 - 17:00 (No holiday)



5 Kawai Brewery [河合酒造]

This photogenic house and brewery was established in the traditional merchant town of Imaicho during the Edo period (1603-1867). The grounds are grand, reflecting the success of the family business. In most merchant houses, the upper floor is a loft for storage or apprentice's quarters, but here there are spacious sitting rooms. With a prior arrangement, you can view the in-house exhibition including sake brewing equipment. The friendly staff are happy to guide you through free tasting of several varieties of sake.

1-7-8 Imaicho, Kashihara tel: 0744-22-2154

- **Tour includes:** House tour (Important Cultural Property), sake brewing equipment exhibition, tastings and gift shopping
- **Open:** 9:00 - 17:00
- **Closed:** Irregularly
- **Admission:** ¥ 300 (Children under 6 free)
- **Reservation:** By phone



Reservation is also available at NARA Visitor Center & Inn, 3 Ikeno-cho, Nara tel: 0742-81-7461 (8:00 - 21:00)