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AWA SPARKLING SAKE

INTERNATIONAL DEBUT AT TOKYO OLYMPICS

By Atsuko Kanai, Mutual Trading Co., Inc.

Champagnes and sparkling wines have long been used to celebrate milestones from Formula 1 championship wins to weddings. Now, sake has its own sparkling version.

In Japan, sparkling sake is also called *awasake*, with “awa” literally meaning “bubbles.” Sparkling sake is a relatively new category, about a decade old, with over 100 products in the market. A fun, casual drink, sparkling sake is light and refreshing, sweet and tart, and has low alcohol content, hovering between 5% and 10%. It is ideal for new drinkers and those who find sake too harsh. The whimsical brand names accompanied by clever bottle label designs are capturing an energetic and younger consumer, making it a hot product. Containing the same ingredients and produced much like conventional sake, the obvious difference is the bubbles. This sparkling quality is created in one of three ways:

- 1) Injection method: Carbon dioxide is injected into an already brewed sake.
- 2) Tank fermentation: The sake is brewed naturally in tightly sealed tanks, trapping all of the gasses, and then it is bottled.
- 3) Champagne method or bottle fermentation: This two-step fermentation method starts in the tank. Then the still immature sake and the lees, or the residual yeast left over from the production process, are put into individual bottles where the secondary fermentation continues, trapping the newly produced gasses.

The Japan Awasake Association, created in 2016, is seeking to take the drink to new heights. With their eyes set on the Summer Olympics in Tokyo, the association of 21 breweries aims to popularize awasake at official events, a bold effort to elevate this new category

to the ranks of long-established champagnes and sparkling wines. There’s an important distinction that sets sparkling sake apart from other sparkling drinks: the use of *koji*, Japan’s national mold. Only through the power of *koji* can rice starch molecules naturally convert into glucose, removing the need to add sugar to fuel the fermentation process and to adjust the flavor of the finished product. By contrast, sugar fortifications are common practice with Western sparkling drinks, a step called dosage.

Comparing overall flavors, champagnes and sparkling wines have acidic and lively effervescent qualities. Conversely, sparkling sakes have a softer fizz and a noticeably savory, or *umami*, taste that is layered with gentle sweetness created naturally by the workings of that magical mold called *koji*.

The Tokyo Olympics are set for the world to witness top-class athletic competitions. At receptions nearby, Japan’s sparkling sake will make its debut with international audiences. Let’s all cheer for AWASAKE TEAM JAPAN to win more fans! *tj*

Awasake is a registered name by Japan Awasake Association



JAPAN AWASAKE ASSOCIATION official certification seals are awarded to products passing their strict, six-tiered inspection. See <https://awasake.or.jp/en/>



HAKKAISAN CLEAR SPARKLING AWA

Hakkaisan Brewery, Niigata
Gold Medal Winner at the 2018 TEXSOM
International Wine Awards

The melted snow from the Hakkaisan Mountains delivers super-soft waters that create the brewery’s signature clean finish. This sparkling sake has low acidity, and a natural sweetness with a rounded umami base. Pairing recommendations include: raw bar foods, such as raw oysters, crab, and shellfish; soft cheeses such as triple crème, Brie, and Camembert; and such desserts as fruit tarts and sorbets. Elegantly sealed bottles with real cork and metal cages help this sparkling awa open with a festive POP!



NANBU BIJIN AWA SPARKLING SAKE

Nanbu Bijin Sake Brewery, Iwate
Top Winner at the 2017 and 2018 Sake
Competition in the Sparkling Sake Division

Nanbu Bijin Brewery, known as Southern Beauty, is home to fine quality sake from which this premium junmai ginjo-grade sparkling sake is brewed. It has gentle bubbles, a ginjo-fruity aroma, and a luscious umami flavor. Pairing recommendations include: charcuterie selections such as caviar and cured meats; salty cheeses such as Parmigiano-Reggiano; crispy bacon; and seafood and shellfish plates, especially oysters. This is the world’s first kosher and vegan-certified sparkling sake.

