

# THE COUNTRY OF BEST WINTER OF JAPAN



Just like the wineries in France, there are several regions for Japanese sake, and among them, Niigata is one of the top sake manufacturing regions in the country. Winter is the perfect time for the best taste of newly brewed sake, and Niigata offers this pastime with the finest of Japanese cuisine, nature activities and relaxation.

Niigata stretches along the northwestern coast of Honshu island and the east side of the Japan Alps mountain range. The mountainous geography is the home of multiple hot springs and ski runs in winter, the rich farmland produces top quality rice and vegetables, and the coastline along the Sea of Japan provides ample seafood for local cuisine. Niigata's varieties of food and nature enrich the life in Japan, and this prefecture is the perfect playground for Japan culture lovers who would like to enjoy food, nature and culture at the same time.

## NIIGATA'S SAKE

Along with local, plentiful fresh and high quality food resources, Sake makes Niigata so special for Japanese food gourmands. Scattering hot springs in the region also add to the local life, relaxation and luxury to enjoy the supreme cuisine. The tradition of

superior sake brewing has been inherited by younger generations, and the craftsmanship has been very committed to quality control and culinary culture. Since 2004, Niigata's Sake Brewery Association has held Niigata Sake-no-Jin, translated as Home of Niigata sake, where gourmards and sommeliers alike are introduced to their epic sake when it comes out fresh from the barrel. Since the ideal temperature for brewing is below 58 degrees F, and with its exquisite texture and flavor, Niigata is the place to go for sake during the coldest time of the year.

Among many labels of Japanese sake, Niigata's sake is the highly regarded for its clean, smooth and gracious flavor, which is produced by the region's pure water and high quality Japanese rice. In addition, the region has a fortunate climate for sake brewing because of the heavy winter snow that purifies the air keeping sake as pure as possible, the superior quality of rice, and the local pure water. The heavy snow keeps the temperature low day and night, and the stable low temperature is advantageous for slow yet steady brewing of the ingredients. All these combined, Niigata's sake is processed with the highest quality of each ingredient.

The local sake brewers introduce their new sake of the year at the Sake-no-Jin event, which reflects their

commitment and devotion to the industry, and this year, the 7th event features not only over 500 labels of Niigata's sake, but also the regions' fresh seafood dishes that are specifically prepared and cooked to match the local sake. The two day event occupies the modern convention center Toki Messe on March 13 and 14, 2010, and they always have a full-house each year with some 70,000 visitors. These unique sake-related functions and exhibitions also showcase sake seminars and sake tastings of each brewer's fresh sake from this year's barrel. With the excellent local food, the event has Niigata's luxury in winter – great drinking and eating. It would not be surprising why Niigata's sake has been highly regarded all over Japan, and recently more and more outside of Japan as popularity of Japanese sake increases, once attending the event. For more information about the Sake-no-Jin event, go to [www.niigata-sake.or.jp](http://www.niigata-sake.or.jp) (Japanese only).



## EXPERIENCE THE TOP SAKE BREWERY

With the local commitment and devotion to the tradition of the sake brewing industry, Niigata's breweries are open for public viewing and some even offer brewery tours to foreign visitors. Such tours have been becoming popular among tourists who are looking for sake-oriented destinations, and the following are the leading sake tours available in Niigata:

Ichishima Brewery has over 200 years of family busi-

ness in Shibata, a 20 minute train ride from the prefecture's capital Niigata City. This historic brewery has been influencing the local culture and development of the city over the centuries, and is now giving tours of their museum-quality, traditional Japanese sake brewery. Ichishima produces award-winning labels, and the brewery tour shows their superior sake inside out. The tour is free of charge, but requires an appointment in advance by email at [info@ichishima.jp](mailto:info@ichishima.jp).

Manotsuru label is Obata Brewery's signature brand that has won several national awards for different categories of sake. This super smooth and delicate sake is produced on Sado Island, just minutes by ferry from Niigata City. Although the island is not remote and is always connected to Niigata's food and culture, there are some unique cultural traditions and local products. Obata Brewery takes advantage of the sake brewery tradition and technique and succeeded in superior sake line-ups. Along with the island's beautiful scenery, the brewery tour shows

the excellence of today's sake brewery scene and tasting. Visit at [www.obata-shuzo.com](http://www.obata-shuzo.com) for more information and tour reservations.



Tamagawa Brewery's tradition is rooted in the early 17th century, when the local village chief began sake brewing. The original house is still preserved to show the 17th century traditional life in this region, and they have a snow-covered brewing shop, yukikura. The shop is naturally refrigerated with snow that covers the structure, and this preserves the su-

perior level of sake flavor and quality almost year round. Tamagawa Brewery is the only one showing yuki-kura to visitors, not to mention their 300 year old brewery and tasting up to 10 kinds of sake on site for free. The brewery also produces unique sake-based products such as sake cakes, sake-marinated food and cosmetics' products made of kasu, the residue that is produced during the brewing process. For more information, go to [www.yukikura.com](http://www.yukikura.com) (Japanese only).

— Nari Akashi : Public Relations Manager at the New York Office of JNTO



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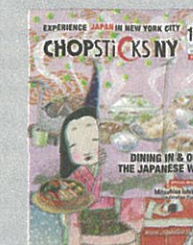
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