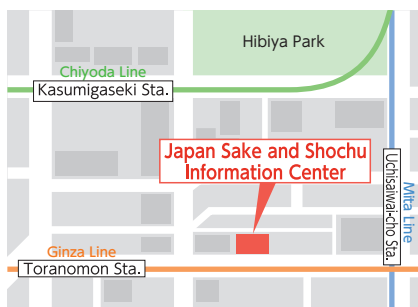




## Japan Sake and Shochu Information Center

The Japan Sake and Shochu Information Center allows people from around the world to see and experience Japanese sake, honkaku shochu, and awamori firsthand as a way to learn about their appeal.



〈Address〉

Nihon Shuzo Toranomon Building 1st Floor, 1-6-15

Nishi Shimbashi, Minato-ku, Tokyo 105-0003

Tel: (03) 3519-2091 · Fax: (03) 3519-2094

Email: jss-info@japansake.or.jp

- Hours: 10:00 - 18:00
- Days closed: Saturday, Sunday, public holidays, year-end and New Year holidays
- For visiting groups of ten or more, please contact the Center in advance.

The Japan Sake and Shochu Makers Association was established in 1953 pursuant to the Japanese Act on Securing of Liquor Tax and on Liquor Business Associations. It aims to secure government revenue from liquor taxation and ensure safe and secure liquor business transactions.

Nearly every maker of Japanese alcoholic drinks (total 1,708 members: 1,422 sake, 273 honkaku shochu, 13 mirin) is a voluntary member (as of March 2019).

As the only official industry organization for Japan's national alcoholic drinks — sake, honkaku shochu, and awamori — we aim to promote sake, honkaku shochu, and awamori both domestically and in overseas markets.

### Japan Sake and Shochu Makers Association Website

<https://www.honkakushochu-awamori.jp/>



English Site



Korean Site



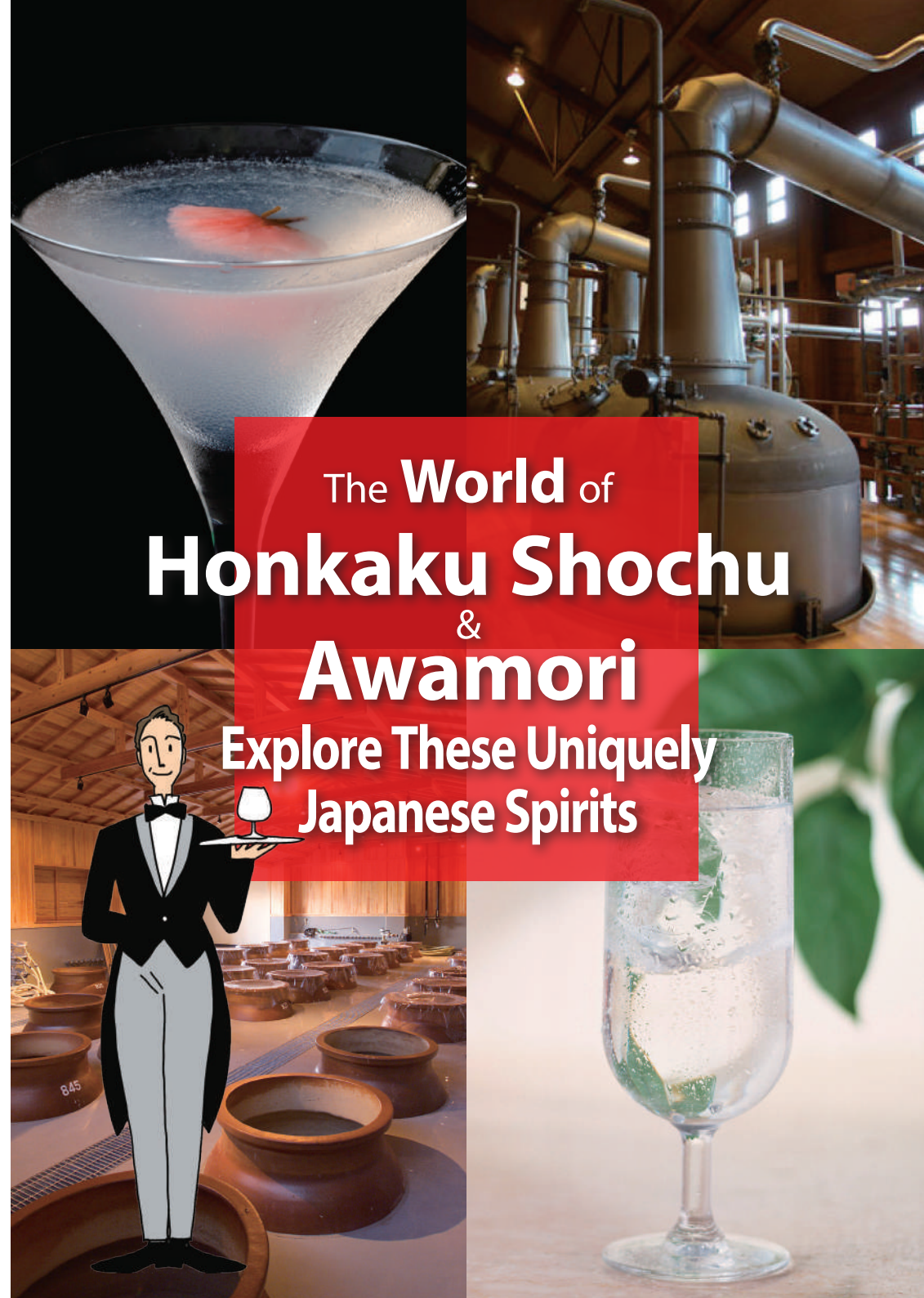
Chinese Site

## November 1st is Honkaku Shochu and Awamori Day!

- ◎The drinking age in Japan is 20 years old. ◎Drink responsibly.
- ◎Don't drink and drive. ◎Please recycle empty drink containers.
- ◎Women should not drink during pregnancy or breastfeeding due to the risks of harmful effects on unborn children and babies.



無断転載を禁止します。 202304



# The World of Honkaku Shochu & Awamori Explore These Uniquely Japanese Spirits

# What Are Honkaku Shochu and Awamori?



You may have heard of sake, but did you know that there are other popular alcoholic drinks from Japan, called honkaku shochu and awamori? These drinks are distilled, like whisky or brandy, but they each have their own distinctive character, different from other distilled alcoholic drinks from around the world — and in fact, they could even be said to offer a wider

variety of ways to enjoy them than whisky or brandy. This pamphlet serves as your guide to honkaku shochu and awamori, two uniquely Japanese distilled alcoholic drinks. Welcome to the World of Honkaku Shochu and Awamori!



## Delicious Distilled Spirits from Japan!



Q What makes these drinks different from whisky or brandy?

→Page 26

The biggest difference is how they are fermented in order to produce the alcohol. Honkaku shochu and awamori are produced with a microorganism called koji-kin, which is a type of mold indigenous to Japan. See page 26 to learn more about the mysterious workings of koji.



Q How should I drink honkaku shochu and awamori?

→Page 18

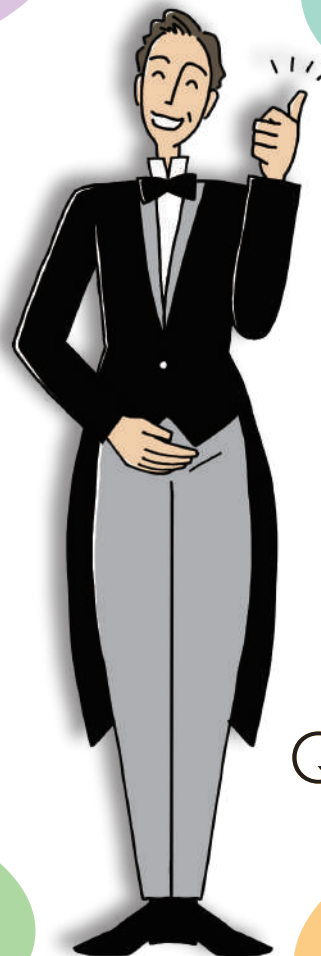
In addition to being delicious straight, on the rocks, or mixed with still or soda water, these versatile drinks are also great mixed with hot water, or mixed with soft drinks or fruit juice as cocktails. And of course, they make excellent meal pairings when served with food. See page 18 to learn more about the possibilities.



Q Where in Japan are they produced?

→Page 08

Awamori is made only in Okinawa, while honkaku shochu is produced throughout Japan, though mainly on the island of Kyushu in southern Japan. Different ingredients are used in different regions, creating alcoholic drinks with different uniquely regional characteristics. See page 8 for more details.



Q Do honkaku shochu and awamori really help dissolve blood clots?

→Page 22

Compared to other alcoholic drinks, honkaku shochu and awamori are relatively low-calorie, and contain no sugar or purines. Research done by specialists suggests that these drinks can also help dissolve blood clots. For more details, see page 22.



Q How are honkaku shochu and awamori made?

→Page 12

The production process can broadly be divided into three steps: creating a fermentation with both yeast and koji, distilling with a pot still, then storing and maturing. For a closer look at the specifics of each of these steps, see page 12.



Q Is it true that these drinks have international certifications?

→Page 14

Much like for Scotch or Champagne, the World Trade Organization recognizes a number of internationally protected geographical indication (GI) certifications for honkaku shochu and awamori from certain parts of Japan. To learn more about these, see page 14.



# Honkaku Shochu and Awamori: Born of Japan's Spectacular Landscapes

## Pure Water and Natural Abundance

Japan enjoys an abundance of the gifts of nature, including temperate climates and pure water.

## The Traditional Culture of the Ryukyu Kingdom

Centuries ago, during the days of the Ryukyu Kingdom, awamori's production was strictly controlled, because it was served to important foreign guests.

## SECTION 1: WORLD-CLASS, DISTINCTIVELY JAPANESE DISTILLED SPIRITS

The Landscapes and Culture of Japan  
the Roots of the World-Class Spirits  
Honkaku Shochu and Awamori.

## Incredibly Diverse Geography

Japan is known worldwide for its many volcanoes, and in fact, some 70% of the country is mountainous.

## Cultural Exchange with Mainland China

Though it is an island nation, Japan has received a great deal from the mainland. Over time, the distilled spirits introduced from the mainland have evolved into something uniquely Japanese.

Honkaku shochu and awamori, two traditional distilled spirits from Japan, have five centuries of history.

Awamori is made in Okinawa, at the far southern tip of Japan, while honkaku shochu is produced throughout Japan, though mainly on the island of Kyushu in southern Japan.

Japan is a relatively long, narrow country, stretching from north to south, with significant climate variation and unique cultural differences in each region. Honkaku shochu and awamori are often made with ingredients unique to these landscapes, for drinks that embody a rich sense of the history and natural features of the regions where they were made.



# Ingredients That Provide the Local Flavor of Each Region

Sweet  
Potato

芋

米 Rice

麦 Barley

The Abundant Crops of Japan  
Provide Distinctive Local Flavors  
from Every Region.

The ingredients used to make honkaku shochu vary by region.

Each region grows grains and other crops suited to the local soil, and these become the ingredients for honkaku shochu produced there. As a result, different kinds of honkaku shochu have different flavors and aromas based on where they were produced, making it a drink with plenty of variety to enjoy.

Awamori is made with jasmine rice.

Brown Sugar

黒糖

蕎麦 Buckwheat

## Main Regions Where Honkaku Shochu and Awamori Are Produced

Honkaku shochu is produced mainly in the southern part of the island of Kyushu, but honkaku shochu made from sake lees or rice is also produced throughout Japan. Today, there are over 600 honkaku shochu makers in Japan. On the other hand, Awamori is produced exclusively in Okinawa.



# Traditional Techniques for Rich Flavor and Aroma



## 《Koji》

Koji breaks down the starches in the ingredients into sugar (glucose).

# 麹



## 《Fermentation》

The sugar produced by the koji is then fermented with yeast.

# 発酵

Honkaku shochu and awamori are born of Japan's climate and culture.

The most distinctive features of the shochu production process are fermentation with koji, and the use of pot distillation.

Koji-kin is a type of mold indigenous to Japan. Using this microorganism for fermentation brings out the flavor and aroma of the ingredients.

Honkaku shochu and awamori are distilled once, using pot stills, allowing the finished spirit to retain the flavor and aroma of the ingredients. As a result, these drinks have distinctive flavors that reflect where they were made.

These spirits are then stored and matured after distillation, to produce even deeper, more complex flavors.

The Flavor and Aroma of Honkaku Shochu and Awamori

Come from Traditional Production Methods,

Carefully Preserved for Centuries.



# 蒸留

## 《Distillation》

The type and extent of distillation will affect the resulting flavor.



## 《Maturation》

The distilled, undiluted spirit is then stored to bring out a mellow flavor and aroma.

# 熟成



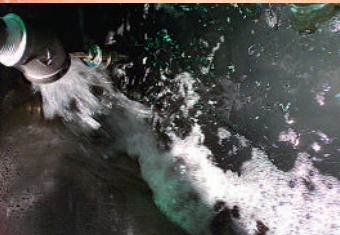
# A Closer Look at the Production Process



Trimming



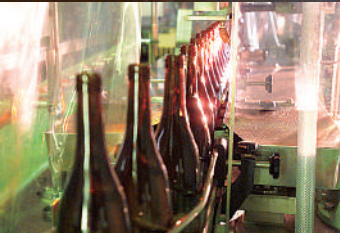
Moromi



Undiluted Spirit



Maturing



Bottling

**Koji Ingredients**  
Rice, Barley, Sweet Potatoes, etc.

Steaming

Mixing In Koji-kin

Koji

Water & Yeast

**Fermentation Starter**  
Yeast and water are added to the koji, and the yeast is allowed to propagate. For awamori, the fermentation process is only once. Awamori uses only koji for the ingredient.

**Main Ingredients**  
Sweet potatoes, rice, barley, buckwheat, or sugar cane are added to the fermentation mash to provide flavor and aroma.

Steaming

Grinding

Water

**Main Fermentation**  
The main ingredients and water are added to the starter culture, and the mixture is allowed to ferment for 10 to 15 days.

**Pot Distillation**

Undiluted Spirit

Filtering

Maturing

Blending

Dilution with Water

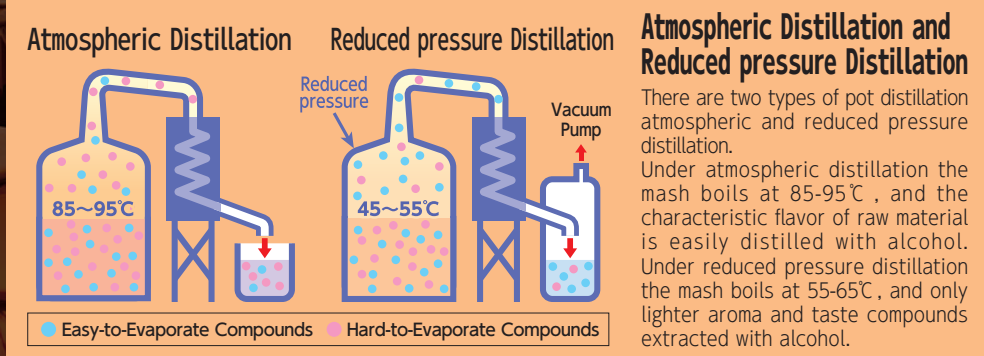
Filtering

Bottling

Awamori Shipped Out to the Market

Honkaku Shochu Shipped Out to the Market

Bringing About Rich Flavor through Pot Distillation.



Both honkaku shochu and awamori are distilled with pot stills, but their fermentation methods differ somewhat.

Honkaku shochu is fermented in two stages:

after a starter culture is prepared through koji fermentation, the other ingredients, such as rice, barley, or sweet potatoes, are added for the Koji and yeast fermentation.

On the other hand, awamori is made with rice koji as its main ingredient, which is all fermented at once in a single batch.

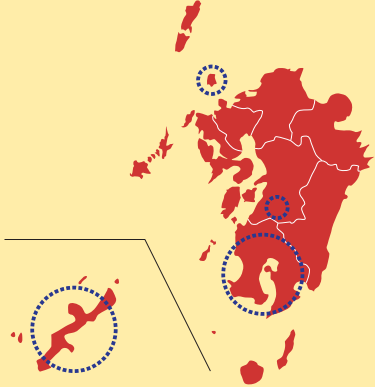


# Geographical Indications

## GIs for Alcoholic Drinks

GIs for alcoholic drinks indicate that they were produced in a specific region, and that they meet certain standards of quality.

In Japan, GIs for alcoholic drinks are established through a petition filed by the production region, which is then ratified by the National Tax Agency.



球磨焼酎

### Kuma Shochu

Rice shochu made in the Kuma region of Kumamoto, particularly the city of Hitooshi.

This shochu is known for the mellow sweetness of the rice and a fresh flavor. Varieties made with atmospheric distillation enjoy the distinctive aroma of the rice, while varieties made with vacuum distillation have a fruity aroma.



壱岐焼酎

### Iki Shochu

Barley shochu made on Iki Island, Nagasaki.

Enjoy the combination of the refreshing aroma that comes from the barley and the rich sweetness of the rice koji, followed by a crisp finish.



SATSUMA  
SHOCHU

### Satsuma Shochu

Sweet potato shochu made in Kagoshima, using sweet potatoes and water from Kagoshima.

Its distinctively complex, full-bodied aroma harmonizes with a rich flavor and a hint of sweetness, and a natural smoothness even before maturing.



琉球泡盛

### Ryukyu Awamori

A type of honkaku shochu made in Okinawa, using only black koji.

The rice koji used as the main ingredient contains just the right amount of oil for a full-bodied flavor. Ryukyu Awamori aged for three years or more called kusu has a particularly rich, deep aroma.

Geographical indications (GIs) are used for foods and other products to indicate that they were produced in a specific region, and that they meet certain standards of quality.

These GIs are protected, and only products that meet these requirements can use these names, such as Scotch whisky, or Champagne wine.

Honkaku shochu and awamori both have their own GIs: Kuma Shochu, Iki Shochu, Satsuma Shochu, and Ryukyu Awamori. Further honkaku shochu GIs are expected to develop in the future, as well.

Symbols Indicating High-Quality, Trustworthy Products Made in Japan

## Information Shown on Labels



Product Category

Brand Name

"Honkaku Shochu"  
or "Awamori"

Name and  
Address of Producer

Ingredients

Volume

Alcohol Content

(Label shown is an example.)

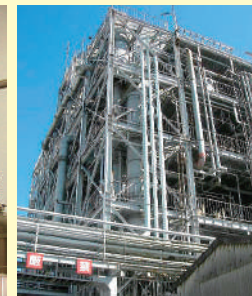
## Pot Distillation and Continuous Distillation

With pot distillation, the spirit is retaining the rich aroma of the ingredients.

On the other hand, continuous distillation, as the name suggests, involves continuously repeated distillation. This is used to efficiently produce high concentrations of alcohol, without the flavor and aroma of the ingredients.



Pot Distillation



Continuous Distillation



# Alcoholic Drinks to Enjoy in Everyday Life

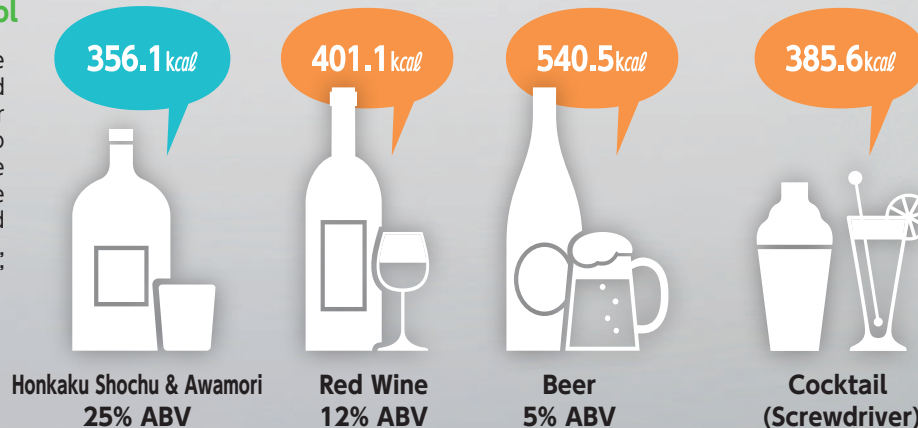
With their rich flavor and aroma, honkaku shochu and awamori can be enjoyed straight, mixed with hot water, on the rocks, in cocktails, and more, for a variety of options to choose from. They also pair well with all sorts of food, making them great alongside meals. And they're both low-calorie, with no sugars or purines.



## SECTION 2: ENJOYING HONKAKU SHOCHU & AWAMORI

### Calorie Comparison of Different Drinks, per 50 g of Alcohol

Honkaku shochu and awamori have higher alcohol contents compared to brewed alcoholic drinks like beer and wine. Though it's common to think that this must mean they are higher-calorie, in fact the opposite is the case. Honkaku shochu and awamori also have zero sugar, making them a good option if you're watching your weight.



\*Values calculated based on the 2010 Standard Tables of Food Composition in Japan; calorie content may vary by brand or by recipe.  
\*Because alcohol content varies by type of alcoholic drink, the total amount consumed will vary when consuming 50 g of alcohol. For honkaku shochu, this amount is approximately 244 g.



# So Many Ways to Enjoy These Spirits

Honkaku shochu and awamori offer a variety of delicious options. There's no one "correct" way to drink these spirits – experiment and find your favorite!



## Mixed with Hot Water

Mix about six parts 25% ABV honkaku shochu or awamori with four parts hot water. Hot water brings out the sweet and savory notes of these spirits.



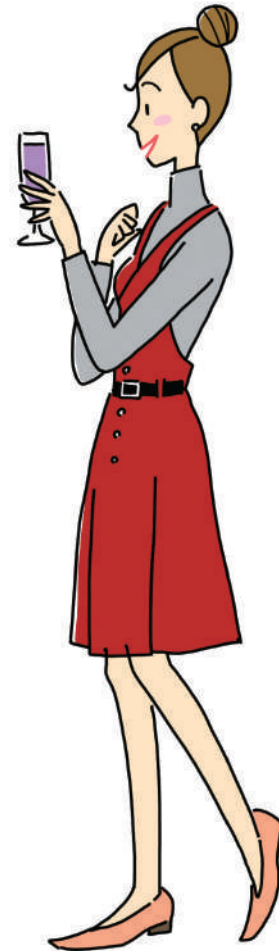
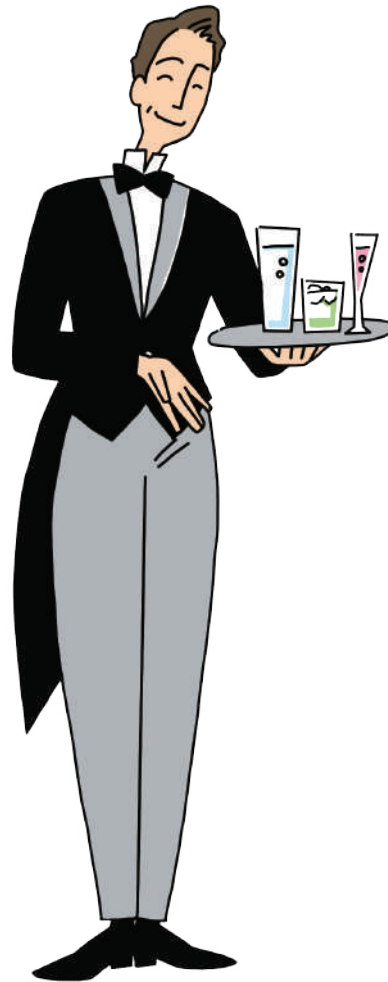
## Mixed with Cold Water

Adding cold water is perhaps the most popular way to enjoy honkaku shochu and awamori: it makes these spirits milder and smoother, while still retaining their signature flavor and aroma.



## Straight

Pour directly into a small cup or glass, and savor your honkaku shochu or awamori at full strength.



## On the Rocks

Pour into a glass over ice. As the ice melts, the flavor of these spirits gradually changes.



## Mixed with Soda Water

Mix honkaku shochu or awamori with soda water to underscore their aroma, for a refreshing drink.



## Mixed with Juice and in Cocktails

Mix with fresh fruit juice, or use these spirits in cocktails for a delicious twist on familiar recipes.



# Delicious Pairings with Various Dishes

Alcohol can be served before meals as an aperitif, alongside meals, or after meals as a digestif. Honkaku shochu and awamori are versatile enough to be enjoyed before, during, or after meals, and they pair well with all types of dishes.

## Drinks to Enjoy with Meals

In Japan, a country known for its diverse food culture, honkaku shochu and awamori are beloved as delicious drinks to enjoy alongside meals.

### Japanese Cuisine



### Meat Dishes

## Crisp, Clean Flavor That Doesn't Overshadow Food

In addition to pairing well with traditional Japanese cuisine such as tempura or sushi, honkaku shochu and awamori are delicious alongside other countries' cuisines, including Italian, French, and Chinese food. These spirits go especially well with rich, flavorful dishes, to serve as a refreshing palate cleanser.



### Western Cuisine



## Selecting a Honkaku Shochu or Awamori to Serve with Food

When choosing a honkaku shochu or awamori to serve with food, keep in mind that they bring out the flavors of dishes, and that they serve as a palate cleanser to allow the flavors of foods to shine through.

Food and drinks can come together to become more than the sum of their parts — finding just the right honkaku shochu or awamori for each dish is part of the fun.

### Chinese Cuisine



# The Hidden Benefits of Honkaku Shochu and Awamori

## Honkaku Shochu and Awamori Help Dissolve Blood Clots?

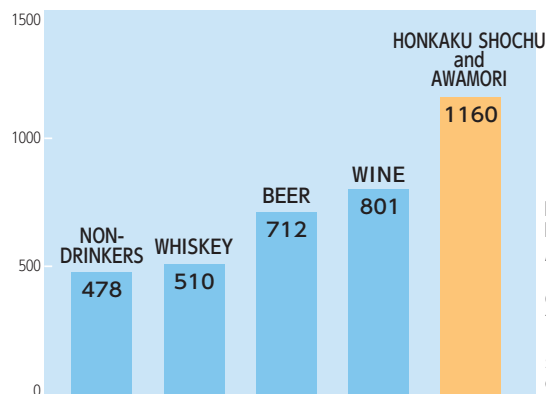
In 1988, Professor Emeritus Hiroyuki Sumi, of Kurashiki University of Science and the Arts, published a paper and clinical data suggesting that honkaku shochu and awamori can help dissolve blood clots.

*"According to the paper, drinking honkaku shochu or awamori leads to greater activation of enzymes that dissolve blood clots, compared to drinking other alcoholic drinks. The research began in 1982, and clinical data was collected from subjects over the course of about five years."*

*"At the time, most research on alcoholic drinks regarded negative aspects, such as alcoholism or alcohol poisoning. When this research came out, showing a benefit to drinking alcohol, it attracted a great deal of attention."*

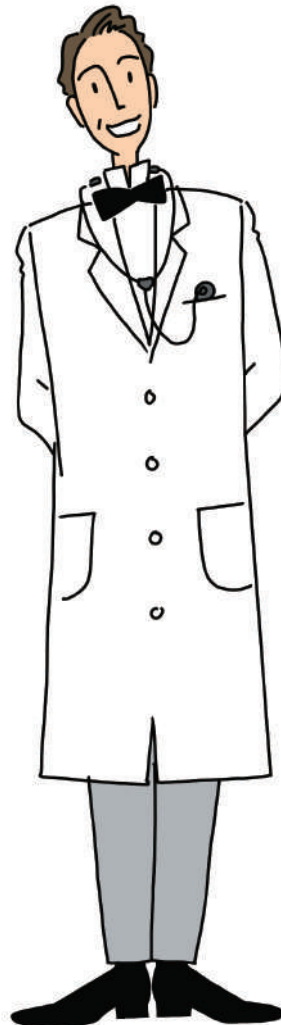
*"Later research found that the aroma compounds in honkaku shochu and awamori can stimulate the activation of enzymes that dissolve blood clots. This research also found that there are about a hundred aroma compounds in honkaku shochu and awamori, and that they each stimulate the secretion of enzymes."*

Professor Sumi's research was covered extensively by the Japanese media, and had a major effect on the modern popularization of honkaku shochu and awamori.



Effects of Alcohol Consumption by Type on Blood-Clot-Dissolving Enzymes

Activated plasmin was measured using synthetic substrate S-2251 (H-D-Val-Leu-Lys-pNA). Subjects drank amounts of different alcoholic drinks equivalent to 30–60 ml of pure alcohol content, and fibrinolytic activation in the bloodstream was measured one hour later. Values measured after drinking honkaku shochu and awamori showed the most activation by far. Unit used to determine blood-clot-dissolving effects in blood stream: nmol pNA/dL blood plasma



Honkaku shochu and awamori can help dissolve blood clots, which could otherwise lead to hardened arteries, heart attacks, and strokes. Professor Emeritus Hiroyuki Sumi, of Kurashiki University of Science and the Arts, published a paper and clinical data that drew nationwide attention, and which may have helped rekindle the popularity of honkaku shochu and awamori in Japan.

## Enjoying Honkaku Shochu and Awamori

Professor Emeritus Sumi also had the following comments to keep in mind for effectively enjoying honkaku shochu and awamori:

*"In addition to activating enzymes, drinking alcohol also has a relaxing effect, which is believed to help prevent blood clots. The enzymes work more effectively when the body is at rest, and less effectively when the body is stressed. In other words, the effects of the activated enzymes are easily affected by external stress."*

*"Honkaku shochu and awamori, which were most effective in stimulating enzyme secretion, are 25% ABV. The ideal amount to drink is about 120 ml per day — moderate consumption, so that you feel the effects of the alcohol only mildly, is enough. The most effective way to drink it is mixed with hot water, which makes it easier to smell the aroma compounds, and improves absorption by internal organs. If you don't like, or can't handle, alcohol, even just mixing honkaku shochu or awamori with hot water and smelling it is believed to help prevent blood clots."*

*"Whenever you drink alcohol, it can be best to have it with a meal, in order to prevent rapid increases in alcohol levels within the body."*

In addition, honkaku shochu and awamori are both low-calorie drinks that contain no sugar or purines. As Professor Emeritus Sumi has noted, there is plenty to enjoy about these drinks — in moderation, of course.

### Professor Hiroyuki Sumi

Professor Emeritus of Kurashiki University of Science and the Arts, and Doctor of Medicine. He is a graduate of the Tokushima University Graduate School of Medical Sciences, and has worked as a researcher at the Kyushu University Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry, and at the Michael Reese Hospital in Chicago as a MEXT overseas researcher. He has also served as an assistant professor of biochemistry at Miyazaki Medical University, and since 1997, he has served as a professor at, and dean of, the Faculty of Life Sciences at Kurashiki University of Science and the Arts. He is the leading authority on the functionality of fermented foods such as natto, as well as the blood-clot-dissolving effects of honkaku shochu.



# SECTION 3: HISTORY AND CULTURE OF DISTILLED SPIRITS









# Distilled Spi rits from Japan and the World

The koji and single pot distillation make Japanese spirits unique!



## European Distilled Spirits

## Asian Distilled Spirits

	<div> France, etc.</div> <div> UK, etc.</div> <div> Russia, etc.</div> <div> Korea</div> <div> China</div> <div> Japan</div>						
	<div><b>Brandy</b></div> <div><b>Whisky</b></div> <div><b>Vodka</b></div> <div><b>Soju</b> (Diluted)</div> <div><b>Baijiu</b></div> <div><b>Honkaku Shochu &amp; Awamori</b></div>						
Ingredients	Fruit	Malt	Malt, grains, potatoes	Enzyme agents, grains, starch	Cake style koji, grains	Rice koji, barley koji, grains, sweet potatoes	Ingredients
Distillation Method	Pot distillation (twice)	Pot distillation (twice)	Continuous distillation	Continuous distillation	Steaming basket distillation	Pot distillation	Distillation Method
Alcohol Content	40%	40%	40%	20%	55%	25%	Alcohol Content
Unique Traits	Aged in casks for flavor and aroma		Filtered (refined) through white birch charcoal	Made with highly distilled alcohol (95%), which is then diluted and mixed with sweeteners, etc.	Fermented without adding water; known for strong fragrance and flavor	Retains flavor and aroma of ingredients	Unique Traits

Most common ingredients, distillation methods, and alcohol contents shown for each.



There are a number of factors that make honkaku shochu and awamori unique compared to distilled spirits from the rest of the world.

One of the biggest differences is how ingredients are converted to sugar as part of the production process.

When making these drinks, it is necessary to first convert the ingredients to sugar (glucose),

which can then be fermented into alcohol. European spirits are made from ingredients grown to have rich carbohydrate contents, like grapes (brandy) or barley (whisky), so the ingredients themselves can be converted to sugar on their own.

On the other hand, Asian spirits are made by using koji to convert the ingredients into sugar.

Koji-kin is a microorganism

— a type of mold, in fact. There are many varieties of koji, and the varieties used in Japan, China, and Southeast Asia are completely different.

The distillation method used also differs.

Whisky and brandy are distilled twice, because the fermented mash produce a fairly low alcohol content of just 7%.

For honkaku shochu and awamori,

the mash produces a higher alcohol content (around 15%). As a result, even though they are usually distilled once, the resulting spirit is about 40% ABV before dilution. Distilling just once means that the flavor and aroma of the ingredients are better preserved, as well.



# A Unique Fermentation Method Using the Properties of Koji



黒麹  
Black Koji

## Deep Flavor and Crisp Finish

The black koji used in honkaku shochu was originally used for awamori.

This type of koji propagates rapidly, and produces significant amounts of acid (citric acid), making the fermentation mash acidic enough to prevent unwanted microorganisms from growing. The resulting honkaku shochu has a distinctively deep flavor and a crisp finish.



白麹  
White Koji

## Dry, Delicate Finish

Most honkaku shochu produced today is made with white koji. Much like black koji, white koji produces large amounts of acid (citric acid), but is easier to handle than black koji. The results have a drier, more delicate flavor than honkaku shochu made with black koji.



黄麹  
Yellow Koji

## Light and Clean

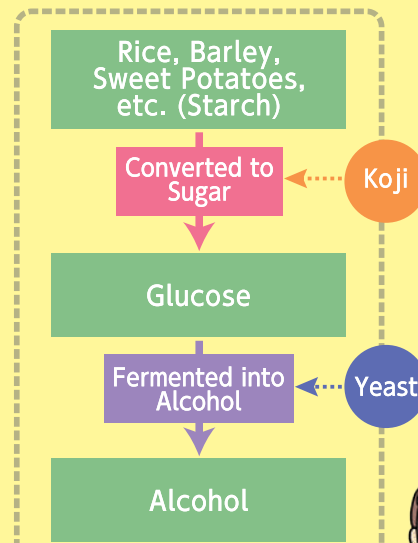
Yellow koji is used in traditional Japanese foodstuffs like sake, miso, and soy sauce. This type of koji doesn't produce as much acid (citric acid), which means that it spoils easily in warmer climates. However, modern production environments have temperature control and hygiene management that make it much easier to produce honkaku shochu with yellow koji, for a light, clean flavor.

\* Photographs shown are of koji starter; the color of the actual koji used in the production is closer to white.

There's more than one type of koji!

## A Uniquely Japanese Fermentation Method Using Koji

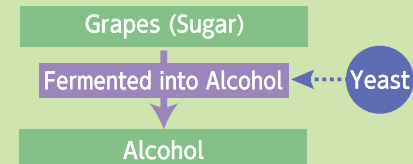
In the mash, koji converts starches into glucose, and yeast converts glucose into alcohol. Because both fermentation processes occur simultaneously in the same container, this is known as "multiple parallel fermentation."



A distinctive and unique parallel fermentation process!

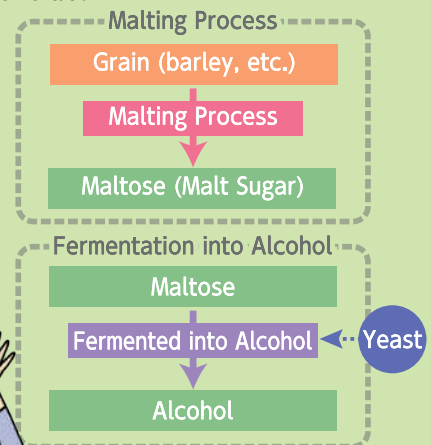
## Wine & Brandy

The grapes used as the main ingredient already contain plenty of sugar, so there's no need to convert starches into sugar.



## Beer & Whisky

Malt is grains that began germinating and converted their starch into sugar (maltose). This process is halted with high heat before fermentation. In other words, conversion of starches into sugars happens separately from fermentation.



The type of koji-kin that has been used in Japan the longest, yellow koji, is indigenous to only Japan.

Koji-kin is used to make a number of traditional Japanese foodstuffs, including sake, miso, and soy sauce.

This type of mold readily attaches itself to ears of rice, so it came to be used to make various items as Japanese rice agriculture developed.

Around a century ago, yellow koji was used to make honkaku shochu, as well.

However, when yellow koji was used for the fermentation mash, it wouldn't produce enough acid to prevent the mash from spoiling, and in warm areas like southern Kyushu, these fermentation mashes would often go bad.

And yet, even further south in

Okinawa, the awamori production process had no such problems.

When honkaku shochu makers tried using the black koji that was ordinarily used for awamori, they found that their fermentation mashes no longer spoiled, and their production volumes increased significantly.

Honkaku shochu production has used black koji ever since.

Since then, there has also been

the discovery of a new type, known as white koji. Today, we can enjoy comparing the flavors produced by these three types of koji.



# History of Honkaku Shochu and Awamori

## A Listing for Shochu in a Portuguese Dictionary

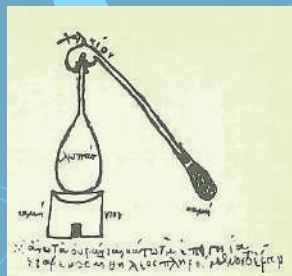
During the 15th and 16th centuries, Jesuit missionaries visited Japan in order to spread Christianity. A dictionary from this era contains an entry for "Xôchû," defining it as "liquor made by heating it over flame."



Mesopotamia

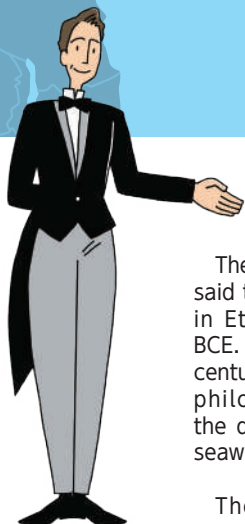
Distillation Technology

To Europe via the Mediterranean



## Ancient Greek Stills

Based on the shape of the still, we can tell that the vapor from heating the fermented ingredients was cooled and collected as an extract.



The history of distilled spirits begins with the invention of the still.

The world's first distilled spirit is said to have been made from beer in Ethiopia, in the 8th century BCE. Later, writings from the 4th century BCE by the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle mention the distillation of substances like seawater and wine.

Then, distillation equipment

Gandhara



Distilled spirits have a surprisingly long history!

## Japanese Distilled Spirits Reported on by Missionaries

Around the mid 16th century, the Portuguese explorer Jorge Álvares, who stayed in Kagoshima, sent a letter to the Christian missionary Francis Xavier. In this letter, he noted that the people of Kagoshima all drank shochu, regardless of their social standing.



Thailand

Honkaku shochu and awamori are uniquely Japanese distilled spirits.



Korean Peninsula Theory

Southeast Asia Theory

Ryukyu Islands Theory

The Origins of the Uniquely Japanese Distilled Spirits  
Honkaku Shochu and Awamori



Distilling Techniques from Overseas

Okinawa

Awamori

Black Koji

Honkaku Shochu

Sake

Fermentation & Koji-Growing Techniques

Yellow Koji

Honkaku shochu and awamori were born from a combination of distilling techniques brought from overseas, added to existing uniquely Japanese techniques. These spirits are unlike anything found anywhere else in the world, due to Japan's history, climate, and culture.

Ingredients Grown in the Production Region

Japan's history, climate, and culture are closely tied to these drinks. The different ingredients and production methods used in each region give the results their unique characters.

Various Maturation Methods Provide Deeper Flavor

Maturing spirits gives them deeper, more complex flavors. Awamori that has been aged for a long time is known as "kusu," and is highly prized.



Earthenware Pot

Barrel

Tank

and techniques began to spread throughout the world.

To the west, it spread along the Mediterranean Sea to Northern Africa, then to Spain. Distillation techniques went on to be used in Europe to make brandy, whisky, and other distilled spirits.

To the east, distillation gave rise to a Middle Eastern spirit known as arak, and these techniques continued to spread further east to mainland China and Japan.

There are a number of theories about the specific route by which distillation was brought to Japan.

Some believe it arrived via the Ryukyu Islands, such as Okinawa.

Some believe that it came from Southeast Asia, brought by Japanese pirates.

Some believe that it was brought to Japan via the Korean Peninsula.

Regardless of how, exactly,

distillation came to Japan, it is believed that the production of honkaku shochu in Japan began somewhere between the end of the 15th century and the end of the 16th century.



# SECTION 4: FUN FACTS ABOUT HONKAKU SHOCHU AND AWAMORI



## Kusu: Preciously Treasured Matured Awamori

As awamori is matured, it develops a progressively deeper flavor. Matured awamori is known as “kusu.” The standards for kusu are strict, as well: only products consisting of 100% awamori matured for at least three years can be labeled as kusu.

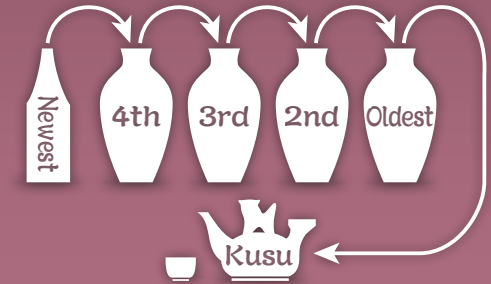
## November 1 is Honkaku Shochu and Awamori Day in Japan

Makers start the production of honkaku shochu and awamori in August or September, and each year’s new batches arrive on the market around the start of November, so November 1 was selected as the date for honkaku shochu and awamori events held nationwide.



## Shitsugi: the Unique Awamori Maturation Process

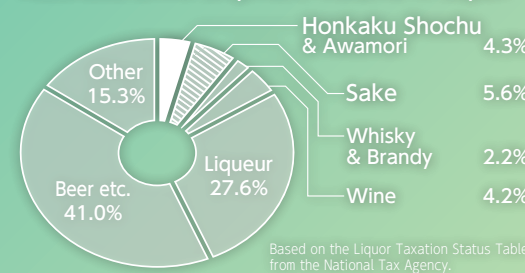
Since the days of the Ryukyu Kingdom, centuries ago, the awamori makers of Okinawa have used a maturation process known as “shitsugi.” This unique process uses a number of containers, which are used to refill each other in order, based on how long the awamori inside has been stored for.



## Other Special Dates for Honkaku Shochu and Awamori

May 9 and 10 are Dark Brown Sugar Shochu Days. July 1 is Iki Shochu Day. August 8 is Kuma Shochu Day. Each of these dates was chosen for a reason. Some of these reasons are pretty surprising, so if you’re interested, see if you can find out the stories behind them!

## Alcoholic Drink Shipment Volume in Japan



## Honkaku Shochu and Awamori Are Just as Beloved as Sake

In Japan, honkaku shochu and awamori are as popular as sake, and are enjoyed nationwide. Roughly equal amounts of sake and honkaku shochu/awamori are produced and sold in Japan.

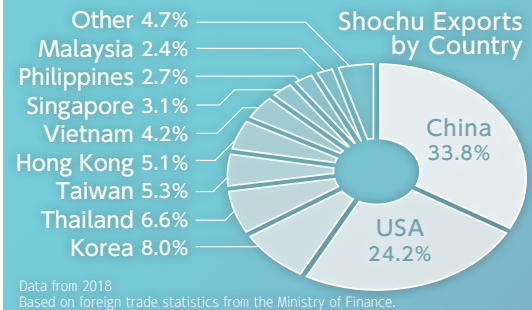
## “Pre-Mix” Honkaku Shochu or Awamori for a Milder Flavor

One unique way to try honkaku shochu or awamori is by “pre-mixing” it. It’s simple: just add water to these spirits, and let rest for one to three days before drinking. The result is a smooth, pleasant drink — give it a try sometime!



## Honkaku Shochu and Awamori Exported to the World

Honkaku shochu and awamori are exported from Japan to countries around the world. China and the US are the primary export markets, together accounting for more than half of all exports.



## Charming and Distinctive Regional Serving Sets

Both honkaku shochu and awamori have a wide variety of different serving sets used in different regions. In Kagoshima, people serve honkaku shochu from a kuro-joka, a unique serving vessel that resembles a flattened teapot. In the Kuma region, people serving warmed honkaku shochu will use a gara, which has an unglazed bottom. In Okinawa, awamori is often served from a karakara, which has a clay ball that rattles around when the awamori inside runs out, or from a dachibin, a portable container shaped to be comfortably worn at the waist.



## Traditional Wooden Barrel Distillation

While metal stills are most commonly used to distill honkaku shochu and awamori, there are some shochu makers who have revived the use of stills made of wooden barrels. Shochu distilled this way loses a bit of its alcohol content through gaps in the barrel, but gains a subtle aroma from the wood.