

Global beverage experts explore Japan's sake, honkaku shochu, and awamori culture

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The Japan Sake and Shochu Makers Association (JSS) is hosting a special tour inviting top professionals from the global wine and bar industries to explore the depth and heritage of Japan's sake, honkaku shochu, and awamori culture. This exclusive program offers first-hand experience of Japan's traditional brewing and distilling techniques, which were recently recognized as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage.

The sake tour brings together leading sommeliers and restaurant beverage directors from around the world to visit select breweries across Japan. Participants dive deep into the production process, learning about rice polishing, fermentation, and ageing techniques unique to sake. The itinerary extends beyond brewery visits to an educational institute, offering specialised sessions on yeast selection, aroma profiling, and scientific approaches to sake brewing. The tour also includes visits to koji mould producers and rice fields, providing a holistic understanding of sake production from grain to glass.

In the shochu tour, top bartenders and bar managers engage with Japan's distinctive distilled spirit, honkaku shochu. Unlike other distilled spirits worldwide, shochu boasts a diverse range of base ingredients and unique distillation methods. Participants visit distilleries, interact with producers, and gain insights into its complex characteristics through tasting sessions. The tour also features field visits to sweet potato farms – one of shochu's key ingredients – allowing participants to meet local farmers and experience regional drinking customs using traditional vessels. These activities give them a deeper appreciation of shochu from multiple perspectives.

Beyond technical knowledge, past tours have facilitated dynamic exchanges between participants and Japanese producers. Sommeliers have praised sake for its –balanced umami– and –low acidity, making it highly versatile for food pairing.– Similarly, bartenders have commended shochu's –wide range of applications in cocktails– and its –natural, additive-free production,– making it a strong contender in modern mixology.