

Iga Sake

There are only four ingredients in sake: rice, water, yeast, and koji—steamed rice, upon which a specific mold has been grown. With these simple components, sake brewers can create an impressive variety of tastes and styles.

Sake is usually brewed in the colder months of the year. Rice is harvested in autumn and milled to remove excess fat and protein. It is then steamed, and a portion is used to grow the koji mold (*Aspergillus oryzae*). Next, steamed rice, water, and koji rice are mixed together, and yeast is added. Once the yeast population is high enough, more water, steamed rice, and koji are added in stages.

As fermentation proceeds, brewers closely monitor the tanks to ensure a precisely controlled temperature—a variation of even a single degree can change the flavor of the final product. After fermenting for 20 to 35 days, the milky liquid is filtered to remove the remaining rice solids, and usually pasteurized, before being returned to tanks to mature. The sake is allowed to mature for 6 months before bottling, but very occasionally sake is aged for years. Once the sake is finished aging, it is bottled and labeled.

The Iga region benefits from an ample supply of smooth, soft water from the snowmelt of nearby mountains. Every aspect of the sake is a regional endeavor: farmers in Iga and around Mie Prefecture produce high-quality rice, and local breweries source their preferred rice types directly from the farmers. Iga has particularly cold winters, which help keep the temperature down during the brewing process, making it easier to produce distinctively aromatic sake. While each Iga brewery has its own individual flavor profile, all breweries in Iga have something in common: they produce high-quality sake and have an appreciation for their special environment.