

## Shiogama Sake: Fit for the Gods

As a port town, Shiogama was a bustling place in its heyday, with many *ryokan* inns, restaurants, and drinking spots where travelers, pilgrims and merchants would congregate to slake their thirst. Of course, this meant there was a great need for sake, and breweries sprang up around Shiogama to fulfill the need, making use of the bounty of rice that is still the pride of Miyagi Prefecture.

Two breweries remain in Shiogama, both located around the Monzenmachi area: Urakasumi and Abekan. Both breweries got their start making *omiki* (sake offered to the deities) for Shiogama Jinja Shrine, a tradition that continues to this day.

Visitors can enjoy daily tours of the Urakasumi Brewery, which has been in business since 1724. The brewery is housed in a large, white-walled building, and the entrance is framed by part of a former temple gate. Urakasumi uses at least 90 percent locally grown rice to make their elegant, light sakes, of which they produce around 40 varieties. A tasting set of three sake varieties is available for 300 yen (for visitors 20 years old and above) in a small gallery attached to the brewery.

Abekan Brewery is slightly older; it started in 1716 to brew sake for Shiogama Jinja's rituals. It specializes in a traditional style of sake-making called *kanzukuri*, which involves making sake by hand (with a few helpful modernizations) during the cold months from November to March. The brewery aims to create a final product that marries well with the fresh seafood for which Shiogama is known, so it is no surprise many of the sushi restaurants around the city carry Abekan sake.