**Aizu Sake**

Sake production requires a cool climate, high-quality rice, and fresh water, and the Aizu region has these in abundance. Local breweries consistently win top prizes in national competitions, establishing Aizu as one of Japan’s premier sake-producing regions. Sampling the local sake is a highlight for many visitors to Aizu-Wakamatsu, and it makes an ideal souvenir or gift for family and friends.

The key ingredients in sake are rice, water, koji mold, and yeast. The rice is very important, influencing the aroma, taste, and alcohol content of the final beverage. Aizu rice typically has large grains and a soft texture, making it good for both eating and making sake. Moreover, the local water tends to be soft, which helps to give the sake a light and refreshing taste. The brewing process is complex and requires great attention to detail. Drawing on more than 400 years of history, local breweries continue to produce top-quality sake while developing their products in new and exciting directions.

*A proud tradition of brewing*

Sake brewing in Aizu began during the sixteenth century, when Gamo Ujisato (1556–1595) became leader of the region. Ujisato invited sake brewers to Aizu, where they found ideal conditions for production. By 1667, there were more than 320 sake breweries in Aizu. A new generation of expert brewers arrived in the area during the time of daimyo lord Matsudaira Katanobu (1744–1805). This led to further improvements in techniques and a rise in sake quality.

There are currently around 30 breweries in Aizu, six of which are located in Aizu-Wakamatsu. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, when local sake producers faced a decline in domestic demand for sake, they began switching their focus from production volume to improvements in the quality of their product. These efforts paid off, and Aizu-Wakamatsu contributed to the eight consecutive gold medals awarded to Fukushima Prefecture at Japan’s national sake competition. Some of the city’s breweries offer tours and tastings for visitors who would like to learn more. Advance booking is recommended.