

The Tanaka Sake Brewery and the Former Okazaki Warehouses

The Tanaka Sake Brewery was one of 50 sake breweries in Otaru when it was founded in 1899. Today, Tanaka is the only remaining sake brewery in the city. Under the wartime regime in 1944, sake brewing in Otaru was consolidated under a single entity to control supply and pricing, and the Tanaka Sake Brewery operated as a retail-only business. In 1996 Tanaka Sake Brewery bought the Okazaki Warehouses and resumed brewing.

Sake brewing is typically conducted in winter when it is easier to control the fermentation temperature and avoid bacterial contamination. However, with Otaru's cool, dry climate and improvements in brewing technology, the Tanaka Sake Brewery has been able to brew sake year-round. Visitors can observe the process regardless of the season and taste fresh, unpasteurized sake throughout the year. Most of the sake is sold locally.

Tanaka Sake is brewed with spring water from Mt. Tengu in Otaru, drawn from a well next to the brewery. All the rice used in the brewing process is grown in Hokkaido. Tours of the brewery are free and do not require prior reservations for groups of fewer than 10 people. Tastings are available of sake, fruit liqueurs, and non-alcoholic drinks such as amazake, a sweetened fermented rice drink.

The brewery operates out of the Okazaki Warehouses in three stone buildings connected by wooden corridors. The warehouses were built south of the city center between 1902 and 1905 by the Okazaki family. They started their business making miso and soy sauce before selling rice and general merchandise, and warehousing goods for other merchants.