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Japan’s beer sales rose 22% in October after a tax overhaul

The first full month under new rules pushed more beer-like drinks into the beer category, limiting year-over-year comparisons

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Beer sales in Japan rose 22% in October from a year earlier, according to an industry estimate based on the sales volumes of the country’s four largest brewers, in the first full monthly reading after a tax revision and changes in how some products are classified.

The figure, reported by Jiji Press and carried by Nippon.com on Thursday, November 12, points to a sharp rebound in the beer category in October 2026 compared with October 2025. But the increase does not by itself show that beer drinking grew by the same amount on a like-for-like basis, because part of the jump reflects a shift in products moving into the legal beer category from a separate segment of beer-like drinks.

Japanese media reports said the October result was shaped by two forces at the same time. One was the tax change, which reduced the burden on beer and narrowed the gap with lower-tax alternatives. The other was a change in product composition, as beverages that had previously been sold in the so-called third segment began to be marketed as beer.

That distinction matters in Japan’s drinks market, where beer has long competed with related categories that resemble beer but are treated differently under tax and product rules. For years, brewers used those categories to sell cheaper alternatives. After the latest reform, some of those products were reformulated or repositioned so they could be sold as beer instead.

FNN, the news arm of Fuji Television, reported on Thursday, November 12, that the category shift materially changed the makeup of the market. According to that report, beer’s share within the broader group of beer and similar drinks rose to about 80% from about 60%, a change of roughly 20 percentage points. That means a larger portion of what consumers bought in October was counted as beer than in the same month of 2025.

Because of that shift, the reported 22% gain is not directly comparable with a constant-scope measure of demand. Neither of the cited reports published absolute sales volumes in liters, a year-to-date comparable figure, or a breakdown showing how much of the increase came from tax effects and how much came from products being reclassified into beer.

The estimate still offers an early look at how strongly brewers benefited from the October overhaul. Beer has traditionally carried a heavier tax burden than adjacent categories, which encouraged both producers and consumers to move toward cheaper substitutes. By reducing that gap, the reform gave major manufacturers a reason to

steer sales back toward beer, a category that has stronger brand recognition and, in some cases, higher pricing power.

The October figure covered the four major manufacturers, which dominate Japan’s beer market. The reports did not provide company-by-company numbers in the summary of the industry estimate, but the broad increase suggests the shift was marketwide rather than limited to one brewer or one brand.

The data also underline the limits of reading a single monthly percentage as a clean sign of higher consumption. If more products qualify as beer than they did a year earlier, the beer category can expand quickly even if total purchases across beer and beer-like drinks grow only modestly or remain flat. Without a primary consolidated table separating those effects, it is not possible to determine from the published reports how much of October’s increase reflected stronger consumer demand and how much came from accounting for sales in a different category.

Still, the October result marks an important turning point for Japan’s brewers. It was the first full month to reflect the new tax structure and the product changes tied to it, giving investors and the industry an initial measure of how quickly purchasing patterns could shift once the relative price of beer improved.

The reports did not include revenue figures, and no currency measure was involved in the estimate. The published number referred only to the physical volume of beer sold in October 2026 compared with October 2025.