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Tokyo Sake Fair 2024 Attracts Record Crowds, Showcases Japan's Diverse Sake Culture

Sake Exports Soar: Fair Aims to Further Boost Global Appeal of Japanese Sake

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The 16th Sake Fair, organized by the Japan Sake and Shochu Makers Association (JSS), unfolded in Tokyo on July 5th and 6th, 2024, drawing an impressive crowd of approximately 4,600 attendees from both Japan and abroad. This annual event,

traditionally held between June and July, aims to preserve the essential elements of sake brewing, such as rice cultivation culture and koji culture. It showcases the unique appeal of sake, which is deeply intertwined with the diverse environments and cultural backgrounds of various regions. As the largest sake event in the world, the Sake Fair is comprised of three main attractions: the "All Japan Sake Fair," the "Public Tasting of Award-Winning Sakes," and a series of sake seminars.

The "All Japan Sake Fair" featured around 600 brands from 45 prefectures across Japan, offering participants a comprehensive tasting experience. Meanwhile, the "Public Tasting of the Annual Japan Sake Awards," the oldest sake competition in the world, highlighted approximately 400 varieties of award-winning Daiginjo sake. This combination of events provided a rare opportunity for sake enthusiasts to explore a wide range of flavors and styles, deepening their appreciation for this traditional Japanese beverage.

Hitoshi Utsunomiya, Director of the JSS, emphasized the anticipation surrounding the Sake Fair, noting that tickets sold out quickly. He remarked that the ongoing success of the event, now in its 16th year, has allowed regional sake producers' associations to refine their public relations strategies, presenting and offering tastings in increasingly creative ways.



This year's Sake Fair introduced two significant initiatives. The first was the implementation of a direct ticket purchasing option from abroad. This move reflects the growing global interest in sake, with export values expanding to approximately 41.1 billion yen in 2023, nearly 3.9 times the figure from 2013, marking a compound annual growth rate of 14.6%. Utsunomiya pointed out that interest in the Sake Fair is particularly high in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the United States, making the sale of international tickets essential to accommodate travel plans. Looking ahead, the JSS plans to add business meeting functions to attract international buyers, aiming to transform the Sake Fair into a truly international sake exhibition.

The second new initiative was the introduction of an information desk for foreign participants, staffed with interpreters fluent in English and Mandarin. JSS personnel conducted tours highlighting regions certified with Geographic Indications (GI). With global interest in sake on the rise, the association recognizes the importance of disseminating accurate information about sake and the geographic characteristics that contribute to its quality. One participant from Taiwan enthusiastically noted that learning about sake's GIs was enlightening and would guide future sake selections,

underscoring the value of this educational initiative.

Kensuke Shichida, Chairman of the JSS Demand Development Committee, expressed his hopes for deepening the sake experiences initiated by the Sake Fair. With over 10 million visitors to Japan as of April this year, post-COVID, the Sake Fair offers a unique opportunity for individuals to discover the distinctive characteristics of sake from each prefecture and appreciate its rich diversity. Shichida hopes the event will encourage people to visit sake breweries across the country, further fostering a deeper connection with sake culture.

In 2023, sake was exported to 75 countries and regions, with the average unit price per 720 ml bottle exceeding 1,000 yen for the first time. Sake exports in 2024 remain robust, with a 105% year-on-year increase in value from January to May. However, Shichida noted that challenges remain for sake. Abroad, sake is predominantly served in Japanese restaurants. His goal is for sake to be enjoyed with local cuisines worldwide. He envisions consumers who discover the taste of sake at the Sake Fair to experiment with pairing it with various global ingredients such as cheese and oysters, highlighting ongoing efforts to enhance sake's global appeal.

The Sake Fair 2025 is set to be held in Osaka in June, coinciding with the Osaka-Kansai Expo. The JSS plans to continue strengthening frameworks to make the Sake Fair more accessible to international participants, enabling them to discover the regional characteristics of sake and experience its modern charm. This ongoing evolution of the Sake Fair ensures that sake continues to gain recognition and appreciation on a global scale, bridging cultural gaps and fostering a deeper understanding and love for Japan's national beverage.