

PRESS RELEASE

IWC announces its 2021 Sake Champions

On the 30th June in London, the International Wine Challenge (IWC) announced the three biggest sake award winners including the IWC 2021 Champion Sake, this year's overall winner.

The IWC sake judging was successfully carried out in April at a Covid-secure venue by the most experienced and respected 33 sake judges in the UK. This year, the IWC received a staggering entry of 1499 sake from 402 sake makers, which is the second largest IWC sake judging held in London since the competition started in 2007. The final results are;

★ IWC Champion Sake 2021

Sponsored by Japan Airlines (JAL), the IWC Champion Sake 2021 Award, which is the 'Oscars' of sake industry, went to ***Mikotsuru Junmai Ginjo Sankeinishiki by Suwamikotsuru sake brewery in Nagano prefecture.*** This Junmai ginjo sake stood out for judges with its prominent fruity aroma of cherry, pineapple, vanilla, galia melon and banana with a fine structure, texture and vibrant finish.

This is the first Champion Sake to have come from Nagano prefecture. At the same time, this is an epic joint win for Fukushima prefecture where the new owner Banei Holdings resides. In 2018, the current owner of Banei Holdings, chairman Mr. Hiroyuki Murata, took over the one hundred year old beloved brewery in Nagano, turning it around from bankruptcy and reviving the brewery with a new team and advanced technology. *Mikotsuru* refers to a unique species of crane on Lake Suwa, one of Japan's beautiful tourist destinations.

This year, the Champion Sake beat off 1498 sake to take the top spot. The shortlisted finalists included;

- Futsushu Trophy: Hokusugi 'Shuujun' Futsu-shu by Kawabu Brewery in Mie
- Honjozo Trophy: Shirayuki Honjozo, Itami Morohaku, by Konishi Brewing Co in Hyogo

- Ginjo Trophy: Haneya Ginjo by Fumigiku shuzo in Toyama
- Daiginjo Trophy: Bunraku, Daiginjo Fukuro-shibori Naka-Gumi by Kitanishi shuzo in Saitama
- Junmai Trophy: Matsuno-kotobuki, Yamahai Junmai Gohyakumankoku by Matsui Shuzoten in Tochigi
- Junmai Ginjo Trophy: Mikotsuru, Junmai Ginjo Sankeinishiki by Suwa-mikotsuru in Nagano
- Junmai Daiginjo Trophy: Shichisui, Junmai Daiginjo 40 Y3 by Toraya Honten in Tochigi
- Koshu Trophy: Benten 21, Junmai Daiginjo-Genshu by Goto Shuzoten in Yamagata
- Sparkling Sake Trophy: Kikuizumi 'Hitosuji' by Takizawa shuzo in Saitama

★ IWC Great Value Sake 2021

The winner of the IWC Great Value Sake Award sponsored by Sake Samurai Association has been revealed as ***Hokosugi Shuujun Futsu-shu from Kawabu Co., Ltd. from Mie prefecture.*** This Futsu-shu, the most popular style in Japan that accounts for 75% of all sake produced, demonstrates a rich concentrated aroma of dried mango, guava, pear, yogurt, and lily. Palate is full of mixed berries with dense oily texture and a fresh juicy finish. To qualify for a Great Value Award, entries must receive a Gold or Silver medal at the competition, have a minimum production volume of 10,000 bottles and be available nationwide for less than Yen 1,000 (approximately £7) for 720 ml.

★ IWC Sake Brewer of the Year 2021

Finally, the highly coveted IWC Sake Brewer of the Year award, which is the sake equivalent of the Winemaker of the Year award and is awarded to the brewer with the highest consistency of results across their entries, went to ***Shimizu Seizaburo Shoten in Mie Prefecture.*** Shimizu Seizaburo Shoten has been one of the most successful breweries at the IWC sake competition winning trophies and high medals, but this year, Shimizu Seizaburo Shoten produced a winning formula. Two trophies, three gold medals, 5 Silvers, 1 Bronze. An amazing achievement.

The brewery was established in 1869 and globally known by its leading brand called *Zaku*. The current sake maker Mr. Shinichiro Shimizu says it is their duty to carry on the tradition and brew good sake to keep up with the reputation. Their dedication to

craftsmanship has been rewarded. NB: Mie prefecture won 2 awards this year, and the Champion Sake 2020 last year!

Key Facts and statistics:

- The IWC sake champion went to a brewery in Nagano prefecture for the first time, owned by a company in Fukushima
- Mie Prefecture grabbed two IWC Awards this year
- Six countries namely Japan, USA, Brazil, France, South Korea, and England submitted sake into this competition and saw the first ever English Silver medal.
- Under the pandemic restrictions, the sake industry's expectation to the IWC sake competition is growing stronger as an invaluable tool to promote sake globally. Sake consumption is shrinking but exports are thriving even under the current pandemic situation
- There were many new entries and styles this year
- Judges found Sparkling sake to be of excellent quality as the category comes of age. The IWC received 73 entries in the sparkling sake category including rose sparkling sake, more than any other year
- The top 5 prefectures for Gold medals are; 1 Yamaguchi (9), 2 Toyama (8), 2, Tochigi (8), 4 Nagano (7) and 5 Hyogo (6)
- Top 5 Prefecture for Trophies. 1. Hyogo (4), 2 Saitama(2), Yamaguchi (2) and Mie (2)

About the IWC Sake Competition:

The IWC sake competition started in 2007 under the auspices of the Sake Samurai Association, with 228 sakes entering that year. Now the IWC is widely regarded as one of the largest, most credible and prestigious sake competitions in the world.