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OREGON

## Taking a sample of Portland's saké scene

Nods to Japanese cuisine found throughout the city.

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Springtime in Oregon's Willamette Valley is idyllic. Lush rolling hills meet forests of majestic Douglas firs, golden sunlight streams through hazelnut orchards and cherry blossoms float across the earth like tufts of cotton candy. It is easy to see why Japanese immigrants chose this region to begin farming in the late 1800s.

To this day, Japanese culture can be found woven throughout Portland, which was named sister city to Sapporo in 1958. Performances and celebrations occur throughout the year at the Japanese American Historical Society. The Portland Japanese Garden is the most densely packed and delicious cuisine can be found all over the city. Sushi bars, shops to order teriyaki or

But perhaps the best way to get a taste for Portland's Japanese food culture is to visit one of the many izakayas found around town.

The Japanese answer to a tapas bar or a gastropub, izakayas serve small, shareable plates to lingering guests who toast cups of saké, often at long, narrow wooden tables.

Biwa in East Burnside features an extensive dinner and late-night menu, with everything from noodles to yakimono (grilled items) to agemono (deep-fried selections). They carry over 40 kinds of saké, which can be ordered by the flight, glass or bottle. Zilla Saké House in the Alberta Arts District claims to have the biggest selection of saké in town—over 70 varieties. In addition to the sushi



Saké cocktails are trending in Portland, Ore. CONTRIBUTED BY VERONICA MEEVES

**Saké One**  
America's Premium Saké Company

Yuzu, located just  
VIRGINIA MILLER

menu, choose from snacks like seasonal salad, ika (chewy squid jerky) and tsumono (pickled vegetables), which all pair well against the clean

A visit to Yuzu, located just west of Portland in Beaverton, is well worth the drive. The family-run izakaya is a favorite among area chefs, who flock there for authentic dishes like shiso-wrapped natto (fermented soybeans wrapped in Japanese mint), shishamo (roasted smelt) and kakuni (pork belly) ramen known up and down the

**SakéOne** produces junmai ginjo saké brewed using equipment imported from Japan, Calrose rice from Sacramento, Japanese yeast and mineral-rich water from nearby Hagg Lake.

experts, estimates that Portland has the highest per-capita saké consumption and more saké bars per head than anywhere else in the U.S. The reasons for this, he proposes, include proximity to Japan, "making Japanese culture and food popular"; fairly young and forward-thinking consumers; a "generally hip feel to the city"; and SakéOne, one of only a

junmai ginjo saké brewed using equipment imported from Japan, Calrose rice from Sacramento, Japanese yeast and mineral-rich water from nearby Hagg Lake.

SakéOne president Steve Vuylsteke says that water source and climate had much to do with the chosen location for the kura (saké brewery) in Forest Grove. "The locally sourced water from

the Oregon coast range mountains was tested and found to be excellent for saké brewing," he says. "Portland's temperate climate lends itself to drinking and making saké year-round. It's easier to make great saké when the weather is temperate. Heat makes it tough, since we ferment at cooler temperatures."

SakéOne produces over a dozen different types of saké and imports others from their partner brewery in Japan. They offer three guided

### GUIDELINES FOR DRINKING SAKÉ

Many Americans are unaware of the rituals and etiquette associated with drinking saké — and none of them have anything to do with dropping cups of it into beer. Saké sommelier Marcus Pakiser shares some of the knowledge he's gained from brewing saké and living in Japan.

#### What type of vessel to use?

You will see saké served in a tokkuri (carafe) with tiny cups, in small glasses served in wooden boxes and sometimes even in wine glasses. "Anything is fine, I have found. In Japan, I see all types of glassware," explains Pakiser.

#### What food pairs well with saké?

"I think I see a lot more saké being served with a variety of food in Japan," says Pakiser. "Japanese people eat a variety of food — not just sushi — and saké goes with

we can a culture U.S. — any type of

hers, our your

pt is, for one build our

friendship," Pakiser says.

#### Accept your saké in a cup held with both hands.

This is done as a symbol of respect and humility, usually with one hand wrapped around the cup, which sits in the other palm.