



Sake Terminology

Seimaibuai (say-my-boo-eye): The degree to which rice has been polished (milled) before brewing. A value of 60%, for instance, means that the rice has been milled so only 60% of the rice kernel remains (40% of the kernel has been ground away). Each sake grade has a specific seimaibuai value. For example, Ginjo sake must be made with a seimaibuai of at least 60% (no more than 60% of the original size of the rice kernel remains). In general, the higher the rate of milling, the cleaner, more refined and more fragrant the flavor of the sake.

Nigori (knee-goh-ree): Sake which is either partially unfiltered, or clear sake that has had some of the lees of the fermented rice added back. It ranges from slightly murky to chunky. While it lacks the refined character of clear sake, it does have its own unique charm, and it tends to give a slightly off-dry to very sweet impression on the palate.

Honjozo (Han-joe-zo): Sake to which a small and limited amount of distilled alcohol is added at the end of fermentation, which has the effect of lightening the flavor and bringing out the aroma. Must have a *seimaibuai* of at least 70%.

Nama (nah-mah): Unpasteurized Sake. It must be kept refrigerated to prevent bacterial spoilage, thus it also tends to be a bit more expensive, and one rarely sees these in the U.S. The flavors tend to be fresher yet more aggressive than its pasteurized counterpart.

-Shu (shoo): Simply another reading of the Japanese character meaning sake (which, in Japan, can refer to any alcoholic beverage). While this suffix is officially a part of all terms defining types of sake (e.g. junmai-shu, ginjo-shu), it is often dropped in abbreviation. Nihonshu refers to Japanese sake rather than sake made abroad.

Nihonshu-do (knee-hohn-shoo-doe): The specific gravity of a sake relative to water. A very general scale of reference to the sweetness or dryness of the sake, but in practice a highly unreliable tool.

Kanzake (kahn-zah-kay): Heated sake. Boiling or overheating is done to dull the aromas and flavors. Unfortunately, heating sake is most often a way to mask the flavors of a poorly made, low-grade product. Super and Ultra-Premium Ginjo Sake is always served chilled.