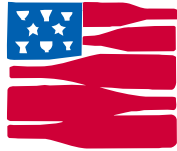


U.S. National
Sake
Appraisal

The 26th Annual U.S. National Sake Appraisal



OCTOBER 20-22, 2026
HONOLULU, HAWAII



The 26th Annual U.S. National Sake Appraisal

Honoring the Legacy of Takao Nihei

The Kokusai Sake Kai is pleased to announce that the 2026 U.S. National Sake Appraisal will be held in Honolulu, Hawaii, on October 20 to 22. Experts from inside and outside Japan will convene to taste this year's entries over three days and judge them based on the four criteria of aroma, taste, balance and overall impression.

The Appraisal was established in 2001 to establish a professional standard for the evaluation of premium sake in the United States. In addition, it honors the late researcher and brewmaster Takao Nihei, whose charisma, knowledge and deep affection for the pleasures of the sake cup inspired hundreds of people to learn about sake and sake culture.

The Appraisal is conducted by eleven judges following procedures based on those developed by the Japan National Research Institute of Brewing, which has supervised Japan's national sake appraisal since its establishment in 1910. The tasting is conducted "blind" and in two phases: a first tasting for all entries and a second tasting for those placing approximately in the top fifty percent of the first tasting.

Following the Appraisal, each entry is showcased at Joy of Sake events in Honolulu and New York, giving the public an opportunity to sample—in peak condition—the wonderful range of sakes being made today. The combination of superb sake, original sake-themed appetizers by top chefs in each location and a friendly party atmosphere has made The Joy of Sake the most eagerly anticipated event of the year for sake aficionados across the U.S.

The Joy of Sake is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, and these events help fulfill its mission of sake education.

We would like to express our appreciation to brewers in Japan and the U.S. for their continued support of the U.S. National Sake Appraisal and The Joy of Sake.

Entries Committee
U.S. National Sake Appraisal

About the Judging

The motto of the Appraisal is “Fairness, Transparency, Authenticity.” The judging is conducted in accordance with procedures established by the Japan National Research Institute of Brewing.



An Absolutely Blind Tasting

The Appraisal is composed of two sessions: a first tasting of all entries and a second tasting of those scoring in approximately the top fifty percent of the first tasting. The entries are sampled by the judges at a cool room temperature of 65 degrees. Bottles are kept in a separate room and there is no possibility of visual contact before or during the judging process.

Entries are judged on aroma, taste, balance and overall impression. Judges weigh these aspects differently depending on the category being judged (junmai, ginjo, daiginjo). Entries are graded from 1 (outstanding) to 5 (flawed).

A Fair and Transparent Judging System

The goal of the Appraisal is to have as fair and open a judging method as possible. The glucose density of each entry is measured prior to judging, with the entries then separated into low glucose, mid-glucose and high glucose groups. The judging is conducted by glucose group. This ensures that entries with low glucose are judged together, rather than being interspersed among high-glucose entries that might overpower them.

Each judge tastes and scores every entry, with scores recorded on an Excel spreadsheet. Those with the highest scores in the *nishin* (second tasting) are designated “gold award” winners, while those that fall below this level are given silver awards.

Every year two research technicians from the Japan National Research Institute of Brewing participate in the U.S. National Sake Appraisal. They form the core of a group of eleven judges, usually nine from Japan and two from the U.S. Judges taste each entry individually during the same session, resulting in a judging that is free from personal bias or outside influence.



The Joy of Sake

Every entry in the Appraisal will be presented to the public at Joy of Sake venues in Honolulu and New York.

The Joy of Sake is the largest sake-tasting held outside Japan, providing guests an opportunity to sample competition-level sake in peak condition. First held in 2001, the event is credited with playing a major role in the popularization of sake in the United States. In 2018, The Joy of Sake traveled to four major cities, including London for the first time. For ten years, from 2010 to 2019, it was held in Tokyo annually. For brewers in Japan, the U.S. and other countries, The Joy of Sake provides an outstanding opportunity to showcase their labels to a global audience.



An Elegant Expression of the Brewer's Art

Outside Japan, sake is seen as a sophisticated beverage choice, appealing to men and women, young and old. This is especially true in the United States, which imports more sake from Japan than any other country. With their stylish party ambience, Joy of Sake events are unique in the sake world, conveying the message that sake is an elegant beverage for modern tastes.

A big draw at The Joy of Sake events is the sake-themed appetizers prepared by local restaurants in each city just for the event. For those new to sake, they act as a catalyst, enticing them into the world of sake enjoyment and planting an awareness that sake is made to be enjoyed with good food and friends.

2026 U.S. National Sake Appraisal Summary

Dates	October 20–22, 2026
Place	Japanese Cultural Center of Hawaii, Honolulu

Important Dates

June 19 (Fri)	Entry application form submission deadline
June 30 (Tue)	Entry fee payment deadline
August 5 (Wed)	U.S. entry sake delivery deadline
October 20 (Tue)–22 (Thu)	Appraisal of Entries (closed to public)
October 28 (Wed)	Announcement of Gold and Silver awards
Early November	Mailing of information for award seal download
Mid-December	Mailing of award certificates

Schedule of Related Events

Joy of Sake Honolulu	Joy of Sake New York
February 4 (Thu) 6:30 pm–9:00 pm Sheraton Waikiki Expected attendance: 1,500	Date: TBA (2027 Spring) Metropolitan Pavilion Expected attendance: 1,000

Entry Submission Guidelines

Purpose

To recognize, through a rigorous judging process, entries of outstanding quality and to elevate the awareness and appreciation of premium sakes overseas. In addition, through Joy of Sake events, to present a wide variety of regional sakes in peak condition to the public.

Entry Categories

Entries may be submitted for the following five categories:

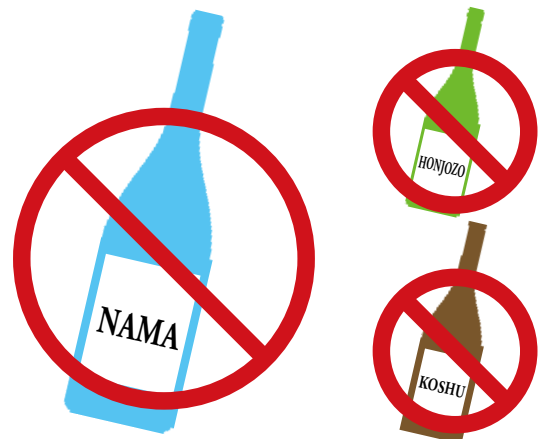
Daiginjo Section A (including Junmai Daiginjo)	Polishing ratio 40% or less
Daiginjo Section B (including Junmai Daiginjo)	Polishing ratio 50% or less
Ginjo Section (including Junmai Ginjo)	Polishing ratio 60% or less
Junmai Section A	Polishing ratio 60% or less
Junmai Section B	Polishing ratio over 60%

- Junmai ginjo sakes should be entered in the “Ginjo” category, and junmai daiginjo sakes should be entered in the “Daiginjo” category.
- In case the rice polishing ratios differs between “kakemai” and “kojimai,” the ratio for “kakemai” determines the category.
- The category designation stated on the bottle label (junmai, ginjo, daiginjo) is the basis for determining the category. Your entry will be reclassified if it is entered in a wrong category.
- A high aroma component is not viewed as a positive attribute in the judging of junmai sakes.
- Genshu sakes may be submitted as entries and will be judged together with other entries in each category. Entries with a 17° or higher alcohol content or 14° or lower alcohol content are indicated on a reference sheet.
- Kimoto entries are judged together with the rest of the entries in that category for award determination.

Ineligible Entries

Please read carefully.

- There are no judging categories for **Nama** (unpasteurized), **Nigori**, **Koshu**, **Kijoshu**, **Honjozo**, **Futsushu** and **Sparkling Sakes**. Please do not submit entries in these categories. **All entries must be pasteurized prior to submission.**



Number of Entries

There is a limit of ten entries per brewery.

Judging Method

- The judging is conducted blind, with a first tasting of all entries followed by a second tasting of those scoring in the top 50%.
- Entries are divided into three or four groups in each category by glucose density (low group to high group). Twenty entries are placed on each tasting tray in random order prior to the judging session.

Judging Results

Gold and Silver award certificates are presented to entries with the highest scores. In addition, “Grand Prix,” “Second Grand Prix” and “Third Grand Prix” awards will be presented to the three entries that receive the highest marks in their respective categories. The “Emerald Award” is presented to the brewery with the highest cumulative total of gold and silver awards from 2001 to 2026.

Judging results will be posted on the U.S. National Sake Appraisal website (www.sakeappraisal.org/en) and printed in the Joy of Sake programs. Award certificates will be mailed out after the Appraisal. Digital files of gold and silver award stickers for both print and online usages will be available free upon request. Digital files of bottle neck tags are also available free upon request.



Gold and silver award stickers



Bottle neck tag

Entry Submission Guidelines (continued)

How to Submit Entries

Entry applications can be submitted online, faxed or scanned and submitted as email attachments to entries@sakeappraisal.org. Please refer to page 8 for instructions.

Deadline for Submission of Entry Form

Friday, June 19, 2026

Please note that entries submitted close to the final deadline may not be accepted for the Appraisal. This is because there is a limit on the number of entries that can be judged during a three-day period.

Entry Fee (Submitted from outside Japan)

For breweries submitting more than one entry, multiply the number of entries by \$260.

Basic Entry Fee	\$180
Shipping and Storage Fees (Honolulu–New York)	\$80
Total per Entry Submitted from U.S.	\$260

Payment Method from U.S.

Basic Entry Fee + Shipping and Storage within U.S.: \$260

Please make check payable to “The Joy of Sake” and mail to:

U.S. National Sake Appraisal
1144 Tenth Avenue, Suite 430
Honolulu, HI 96816

For breweries that submit entry applications online, credit card payment is also available.

Payment Deadline

Tuesday, June 30, 2026

Entries for which payments have not been received will not be submitted for judging. All payments are nonrefundable.

Sample Submission

1500ml / 1800ml	5 bottles
640ml / 720ml / 750ml / 900ml / 1000ml	10 bottles
500ml	12 bottles

■ Bottle size smaller than 500ml cannot be accepted.

Shipping Method

Please ship samples via FedEx or UPS to:

The Joy of Sake
1144 Tenth Avenue, Suite 430
Honolulu, HI 96816

Shipping Deadline

Samples shipped from the U.S. Mainland to Hawaii must be received by **Wednesday, August 5.**

Inquiries

Please contact the e-mail address below for inquiries. Contact: Naoko DeCosta
Email: info@sakeappraisal.org

Website

www.sakeappraisal.org/en

How to Submit Online Entries

Online entry is now available. Below is the flow for online entry.

Notice! Data entered is not saved when you exit the online entry portal. Therefore please refer to page 9 and write down all information needed before filling in the online entry form.

Online Entry Form URL

<https://entries.sakeappraisal.org/en>

Online Entry Flow

① Input your company information

② Input your entry(s) information

- If you would like to submit two entries or more, click “Add entry” button and repeat this step.

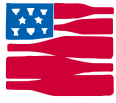
③ Confirm your entry information

④ Select payment method

- You can select either credit card or check.
- If you select credit card payment, please fill out the credit card information and click confirm button to complete the payment.

⑤ Receive confirmation e-mail

- You will receive a confirmation e-mail right after completing step ④. If you do not receive the confirmation e-mail in 24 hours, please look for it in your junk mail box. If you cannot find it there, please e-mail us at entries@sakeappraisal.org.
- If you selected payment by check, please send a check to the address in the confirmation e-mail by June 30.
- Please keep the confirmation e-mail as your receipt if you select credit card payment. The confirmation e-mail serves as our invoice for those who select payment by check.



2026 U.S. National Sake Appraisal Entry Form

- Entry Submission Deadline: **Friday, June 19, 2026**
- Please use a separate entry form for each entry, making copies of this form as necessary.
- Please keep copies of your entry forms for your records.
- Please check the “Name of Company” and “Name of Sake Label” carefully. These names will appear on the Appraisal web link, website, award certificates and other printed materials.
- Please write “undisclosed” for any items on the form that you do not wish to disclose.
- Upon completing the information below, please fax to:
From Japan: (03) 3779-1268 • Within U.S.: 808-739-1000

■ Name of company _____

■ Contact person _____ ■ Title _____

■ Address _____

■ Telephone No. _____ ■ Fax No. _____ ■ Email _____

■ Name of sake label _____

■ Classification (Please circle) Junmai Daiginjo Daiginjo Junmai Ginjo Ginjo Junmai

■ Brewing method (Please circle) Sokujo Yamahai Kimoto High temperature saccharification

■ Is this entry a genshu sake? (Please circle) Yes No

■ Volume _____ ml/bottle ■ No. of bottles (No./Case) _____ ■ Suggested retail price in Japan _____

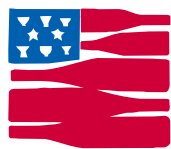
■ Availability in the U.S. (Please circle) Sold in U.S. Not sold in U.S.

■ Name of importer (if sold in U.S.) _____ ■ FDA registration number _____

■ Rice variety used _____ ■ Yeast variety used _____

■ Glucose percentage _____ ■ Polishing ratio _____ % ■ Alcohol percentage _____ % ■ Acidity _____ ■ Amino acid _____

■ Submission method (Please circle) **Ship from Yokohama** **We will arrange shipping ourselves**



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