

Japanese Beer: A Love Story

[PR]

In both the shimmering heat of midsummer, and the bitter chill of winter, beer, that hallmark Australian drink, is also embraced in Japan. Australians are ranked as fourth in the world for annual beer consumption per capita. Japan comes in at a slightly less impressive 32nd.¹ Despite this, Japan's national beer consumption is three times the Australian total.

The most obvious differences between Japanese and Australian beer are the secondary raw materials and of course, the taste. While the basic raw materials of barley, hops and water are common to both countries' beer, Australia uses wheat as a secondary material, whereas Japan uses rice. The fragrance and taste lent by the rice gives most Japanese beer a cleaner, crisper palate, in comparison with the majority of Australian beers.

In Japan, a clean, smooth, pilsener-style taste is popular. In Australia, however, heat treatment produces the kind of body and bitterness found in lager-style beers such as Swan, Emu and Tooheys New, and the predominant use of roasted malt gives a characteristic thick bitterness found in such beers as the crowd favourites; ale-style Tooheys Old, and James Squire. However, in recent years crisp, drinkable styles, which more closely resemble Japanese beers, such as Australia's XXXX, and Tooheys Extra Dry, have become increasingly popular.

For many years in Japan, men and women have drunk beer on a multitude of occasions, from the end of a day's work, to a lavish wedding. Indeed, for many in Japan, if one is to think of alcohol, beer is often what first springs to mind. National alcohol consumption in Japan for the year 2007 puts beer consumption at 6 billion litres. This compares to approximately 600 million litres of pre-mixed RTD (Ready to Drink) beverages such as *Chuhai* and cocktails, about 900 million litres of Japanese *Shochu*, and around 720 million litres of Japanese *Sake*, indicating that beer is significantly more popular than other alcoholic beverages.

Australia and Japan have quite different beer cultures. While Australian pubs serve beer in different sized glasses (middies, schooners, pints), Japanese people usually prefer to drink from a glass mug, and beer consumed at home is most commonly drunk from cans rather than bottles. These are, in a style peculiar to Japan, sold at convenience stores in the same manner as soft drinks.

Within Japanese beer companies, the Kirin Brewery, boasting a hundred-year history, remains one of the most prominent and respected breweries in Japan. Kirin's most popular products include the generation- spanning long-seller, '*Kirin Lager Beer*', and the first-press beer (beer drawn solely from the first mix of malt and water), '*Kirin Ichiban Shibori*'. In addition, the company produces *Happo-shu*, which uses a lower ratio of malt than traditional beers, and an alcoholic beverage known as *The Third Beer*, which doesn't utilise malt, but retains the flavour and smooth palate of beer. The names '*Tanrei*' and '*Nodogoshi*' are extremely popular brand names within these respective categories.



Photo: Lion Nathan Limited

Kirin's first-press beer is also available Australia-wide. Made by the sole Japanese brewery operating in Australia, there is a secret to the smooth, fresh flavours. Under the management of Japanese specialist brewers, using the Kirin unique first-press brewing method, water is blended with carefully selected Australian malt. Only the liquid yield from the first mix is used, in order to produce the finest brew, and it is completely free of preservatives and additives. '*Kirin*' is a beer of exceptional quality, with a smooth palate and clean, pure flavour, that beer connoisseurs are sure to savour. This beer was renewed in 2007 and Australian national sales in 2008 were twice that of the previous year. In particular, there are many premium beer drinkers in WA, and the sales in the state were three times higher than in 2007.

Using only the first press-beer drawn solely from the first combination of malt and water, *Kirin* is a fine companion for any meal, and it's particularly compatible with seafood, enhancing the delicate flavours of oysters and scallops, and white fish such as salmon and ocean trout.

1. Kirin Holdings Co., Limited, Per Capita Beer Consumption by Country, 2004



Available Australia-wide; *Kirin*. The design of the word '*Megumi*' ('blessing' in Japanese) lends the bottle a uniqueness which has drawn comment in Australia. Photos: Lion Nathan Limited

Photos and Information:
Lion Nathan Limited Tel: 02 9290 6600 www.kirinbeer.com.au