

KOKUTO SHOCHU THE TRADITIONAL DARK SUGAR SPIRIT

Kokuto shochu is a regionally exclusive creation from the enchanting Amami Islands. It stands in a league of its own and can be likened to regional gems like Mezcal, Scotch, Bourbon, and Champagne. Exceptionally rare and challenging to find even in the bustling cities of Tokyo and Osaka, its key ingredient is the traditional dark sugar known as *kokuto*—a highly aromatic and flavorsome staple crafted on the islands of far-south-west Japan. The tropical paradise of Amami constitutes the kingdom of kokuto shochu.

HISTORICAL NOTE

Sugarcane first found its way to the Amami Islands in the early 1600s, thanks to the fascinating tale of Sunao Kawachi. Shipwrecked in China in 1605, Kawachi seized the opportunity to learn about sugarcane farming during his time there. Upon returning to Amami the following year, he smuggled three sugarcane plants with him. The inception of *kokuto* is believed to have followed shortly thereafter.

Although early versions of the spirit existed on Amami much earlier, it wasn't until 1953 that the *kokuto* was officially employed to create what is now recognized as kokuto shochu.

THE BASICS

Imo and kokuto shochu stand out as two of Japan's most remarkable distilled spirits. Bursting with rich flavor and enticing aroma, they embody the essence of Kagoshima, offering a cultural and historical experience with every sip.

These spirits are meticulously crafted in two distinct corners of the region—imo shochu hails from the Kagoshima mainland to the north, while kokuto shochu is produced on the outer Amami Islands to the south.

Both locales are graced with nutrient-rich soil and steeped in a cultural heritage that spans millennia, providing the ideal backdrop for centuries of shochu craftsmanship.



DISCOVER THE NATIVE SPIRITS OF KAGOSHIMA



IMO SHOCHU THE SWEET POTATO SPIRIT

Imo shochu stands as the quintessential specialty of Kagoshima. Crafted from locally grown sweet potatoes, this spirit is celebrated for its aromatic and full-bodied character. Much like an IPA beer, imo shochu is renowned for its bold and distinctive notes, attracting a dedicated following of enthusiasts throughout Japan. Nowhere else can you encounter such a finely-tuned drink crafted from sweet potatoes—Kagoshima truly serves as the motherland of imo shochu.

HISTORICAL NOTE

The sweet potato first arrived in Kagoshima in 1705, when a local fisherman named Maeda Riemon brought this revolutionary tuber back from his travels to Ryukyu, present-day Okinawa. Its cultivation quickly gained momentum, thriving in the local soil and earning acclaim for its resilience. It played a critical role averting widespread famines that plagued the region in the 1730s, saving countless lives.

While the exact date remains unclear, it is believed that the sweet potato began weaving its narrative in the world of shochu in the latter half of the 18th century, some 50 years after its introduction to Kagoshima.

PAIRING IDEAS

On the Amami Islands, kokuto shochu is enjoyed with a range of local dishes, from *buta no kakuni* (simmered sweet soy pork) to *keihan* (chicken rice) and passion-fruit. This exceptional spirit complements rich and sweet dishes, and here are some tantalizing examples to try in the comfort of your home.

Teriyaki chicken
BBQ meat skewers
Rum and raisin ice cream



SHOCHU GOOD

PAIRING IDEAS

In Kagoshima, imo shochu is often paired with *satsuma age* (fried fish cake), *jjdori sumibiyaki* (char-grilled chicken), and *kurobuta* (black pig). Enhance your experience by dabbling with these or try one of the easy options below.

Sushi & sashimi
Cheesy pizza
Grilled chicken or pork

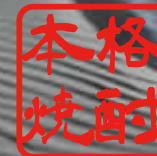


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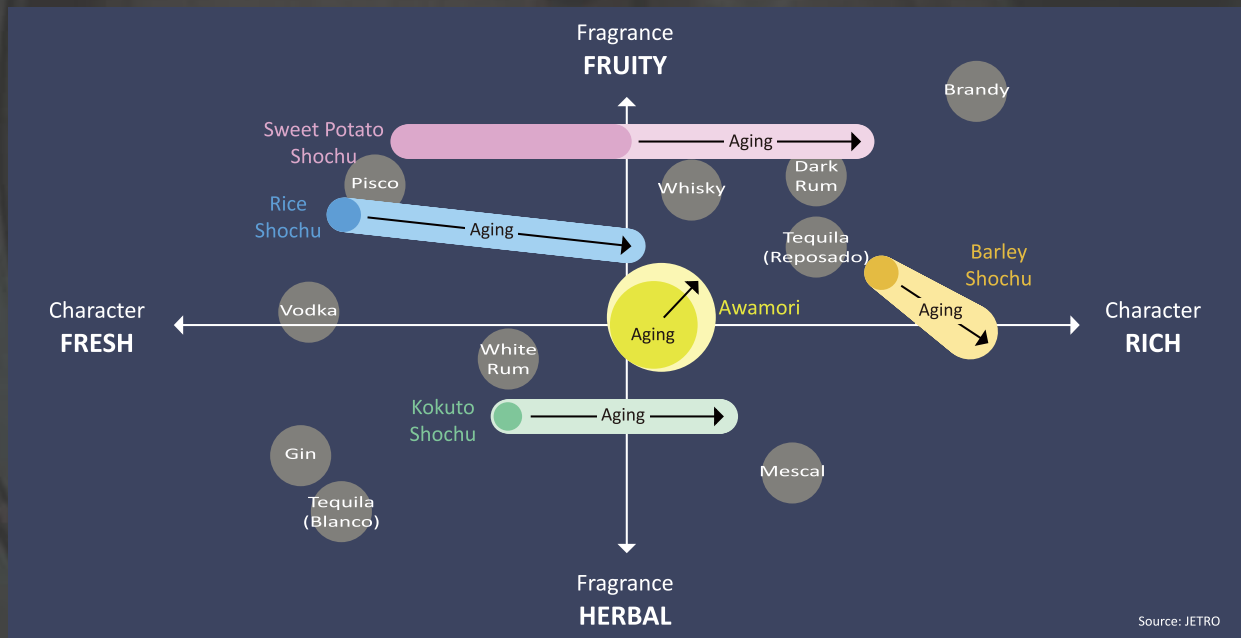
Kagoshima Prefecture unfolds in breathtaking beauty, stretching from the southwestern tip of Kyushu to the southernmost reaches of the Amami archipelago.

It is endowed with mineral-rich soil, pristine waters, and a favorable climate, and enjoys ideal conditions for cultivating agrarian crops. Drawing on these natural advantages, Kagoshima proudly claims the title of having the largest number of distilleries in all of Japan. A total of 111 establishments call the region home, and craft an impressive array of exquisite beverages derived from locally sourced ingredients.

The northern mainland offers optimal conditions for cultivating sweet potatoes, while the islands extending southward provide excellent terrain for sugarcane farming.

Steeped in tradition and widely acclaimed for its historical significance in Japan, Kagoshima embodies the essence of these two distinct worlds—geographically and culturally separated, yet bound as a cohesive state within Kagoshima Prefecture.

COMPARISON TO OTHER SPIRITS



Though subjective, it's worth taking a look at where shochu stands in comparison to other spirits from around the world. Note that this chart doesn't factor in shochu aged in barrels or earthen pots, but is focused on the spirit aged in tanks. Imo and kokuto shochu aged in barrels and earthen pots introduce an additional layer of complexity to the products. For example, kokuto shochu aged in barrels exhibits a character similar to high-end rhums with a twist, while imo shochu aged the same way brings a new dimension to barrel-aged spirits.

VARIED VARIABLES

While each *koji-kin* variant contributes distinct characteristics to the liquor, several other variables play a crucial role in determining flavor and aroma.

POT STILL

Atmospheric and vacuum distillation are the two types of distilling employed in shochu production. Each method imparts distinct characteristics to the final product; atmospheric distillation draws out the innate qualities of the key ingredients, while vacuum distillation delivers a crisp and clean liquor. The type of pot still, whether it is atmospheric or vacuum, along with its size and shape, among other factors, inevitably influences the taste and aroma it imparts upon the shochu.

Atmospheric → robust, punch, and full
Vacuum → light, easy, and crisp

AGING VESSEL

Aging vessels also play a significant role in shaping the taste and aroma of the final product.

Tanks → retains the inherent character of the distillate
Pots → unrefined earthy notes, occasionally imparting greyish hues
Barrels → woody, sweet, and vanilla notes with amber hues

SHOCHU & HOW TO ENJOY IT

DISCOVER WAYS TO APPRECIATE SHOCHU!

Kagoshima shochu is incredibly versatile, presenting a range of drinking styles to compliment your preferences or occasion at hand. From the classic to the modern, whether sipping it neat or cutting it with warm water or a fizzy carbonated mixer, delve deep and explore the many ways to experience shochu. The choice is yours.

UNLOCK THE EXCITEMENT!

Scan the QR code to explore the fascinating ways to enjoy your shochu, from the classic *oyuwari* to modern cocktails, including an epic Negroni and an old fashioned with a twist.

PERFECT PARING WITH MEALS!

Keep in mind that shochu is one of the few distilled spirits that complements a meal, just as it has done in Japan for millennia. Go ahead and explore the culinary possibilities, too!

Scan the QR code for shochu recipes and creative ways to enjoy your drink!



KOJI-KIN — THE SUPERFOOD

Koji-kin, an edible mold, plays a pivotal role in fermenting the mash in shochu production. Serving as the catalyst for saccharification, it facilitates the breakdown of complex sugars into simpler forms, enabling yeast to transform them into alcohol.

Considered a superfood, *koji-kin* has the unique ability to enhance the inherent goodness of any food it encounters, arguably contributing to the delectable taste of Japanese cuisine. This essential ingredient is widely utilized in the creation of various traditional staples, such as soy sauce, miso, and sake, imparting them with rich flavors and distinctive character.

Koji-kin comes in three types, each imparting a distinct flavor to the shochu it helps produce.

Black → robust and punchy
White → fresh and clean
Yellow → elegant and fruity

PRODUCTION: A CONCISE OVERVIEW

The making of shochu is an extensive process that can last anything from a few months to several decades before bottling. Given the limited space within this pamphlet, here's a snapshot into the artistry of imo and kokuto shochu production. For a deeper dive into the process, simply scan the QR code below.

1. Koji Rice Making
2. First Stage Mashing
3. Second Stage Mashing
4. Distilling
5. Aging
6. Bottling

Scan the QR code for additional insights into the production process!



Dive deeper into the world of shochu by scanning the QR for an immersive experience!

