



Barley Shochu Island

On Iki Island (Iki-no-shima) in Nagasaki Prefecture, shochu has been made for around 500 years. It is made from malted rice and barley using Iki's pure, mineral-rich groundwater.

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Located off the northern coast of Kyushu in the Sea of Japan, Iki Island stretches 17 kilometers from north to south and 15 kilometers from east to west and is blessed with nature's bounty. It was a base of maritime trade in the Yayoi period (c. 10th century BCE to 3rd century CE). Although Iki Island is part of Nagasaki Prefecture, it can be reached in approximately 60 minutes by the quickest ferry from Hakata Port in neighboring Fukuoka Prefecture.

One of Iki Island's specialties is shochu, a distilled spirit. With its flat topography and the second

largest fertile plain in Nagasaki Prefecture, grains such as rice and barley have been cultivated extensively here since ancient times. Shochu making using of rice and barley began in the sixteenth century. At the time, barley was the staple food of the islanders and any that was not consumed was used to produce homemade shochu. This is the origin of the "Iki Shochu" made today.

Iki Shochu is thought to be the first shochu in Japan made from barley, based on records which remain, so Iki is regarded as the "birthplace of *mugi* (barley) shochu." "Iki" has been designated as



□ A field of barley on Iki Island

Photo: Courtesy of Iki Sake Brewers Cooperative

a geographical indication (GI) by the Japanese government along with two other spirits distilled in Kyushu, "Kuma" from Kumamoto Prefecture and "Satsuma" from Kagoshima Prefecture.

Today, there are seven distilleries on the island making Iki Shochu according to the traditional method. The main characteristic of Iki Shochu is that it is made from barley and malted rice,



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whereas mugu shochu in other regions is made from barley and malted barley. The island's mineral-rich groundwater is another vital raw material.

Yamauchi Akito of the Iki Sake Brewers Cooperative says, "Traditionally, the ratio of ingredients in Iki Shochu is one-third rice malt and two-thirds barley. When matured at this ratio, Iki Shochu is characterized by the refreshing aroma of barley, the sweetness and depth of flavor of malted rice, and a clean taste derived from the water used to make it."

Although the distilleries all follow the same basic method of production, each distillery's shochu takes on its own unique taste and aroma owing to differences in the design of the stills, the material used for the storage vessels and the length of time the spirit is allowed to mature. Distilleries use a variety of storage vessels such as unglazed vats, oak barrels and metal tanks. The shochus may be aged in these from around one year to more than twenty years, so people can enjoy comparing the taste of the same year's shochu made in seven different distilleries.

Many locals prefer to drink Iki Shochu straight to enjoy the aroma of the barley and the sweetness of the malted rice, but drinking it on the rocks, *mizuwari* (with water) or *oyuwari* (with hot water), or mixed with a fruit juice in cocktails is also recommended.

The local cuisine of Iki Island further complements the flavor of Iki Shochu. Iki Island's specialties are seafood such as sea urchin, abalone and squid, and Iki Beef. Born and raised on the island, Iki Beef is highly regarded for its tenderness, though with only around 900 cattle shipped annually it is not readily available outside the island. Restaurants and lodging facilities on the island serve delicious food made with these locally

- 1 Making malted rice for Iki Shochu
- 2 People raising a toast at an event held on July 1, designated "Iki Shochu Day" by Iki City

Photo: Courtesy of Iki Sake Brewers Cooperative

grown ingredients.

Yamauchi says, "Iki Shochu goes perfectly with a local dish called *hikitoshi*, a hot pot dish with ingredients such as chicken, tofu, *somen* noodles, and vegetables simmered in a sweet and spicy sauce; as well as with fresh seafood, Iki Beef and Ishu (Iki Island) tofu, a slightly firmer type of tofu."

Nurtured by abundant nature and loved by the people on the island for 500 years, Iki Shochu enhances the charm of Iki Island as something to be savored. 7



Iki Island's hotpot dish *hikitoshi*



Katsumoto Port, a natural harbor on Iki Island
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