

In Praise of Fine Sake

Vol. 12

Toshimaya Brewery

Address: Hon-machi 3-9-1, Okaya-shi, Nagano
Telephone: 0266-23-1123
http://jizake.miwatari.jp/

- Alcohol content: 17% ● Seimaibuai (rice milling percentage): 70%
- Nihonshu-do (Sake Meter Value + dry, -sweet): +2
- Acidity: 1.7 ● Rice: Yoneshiro, Shirakaba-nishiki (grown under contract)
- Volume: 720ml
- Price: 1,155 yen (tax inclusive)

Hoka Junmai Genshu Nama-Ippon

Text/ Kaori Haishi (sake sommelier) Photography/ Susumu Nagao



Sake suffused with the vitality of its youthful brewers

Continuing on from last month we introduce Hoka, another label from the highly esteemed Toshimaya brewery. The main Toshimaya brand used to be Miwatari, but in recent years the brewery has introduced the limited release “Hoka” brand. Brewed with a youthful approach that combines a low-temperature fermentation method that draws out the flavor of the rice, and brewing techniques based on the brewer’s own original data, Hoka was an instant hit with younger drinkers and has since grown to rival Miwatari in popularity. Hoka’s plain label, devoid of excess ornamentation, illustrates Toshimaya’s unshakeable confidence in its product.

The brewery selected the Hoka Junmai

Genshu Nama-Ippon from among several varieties. While pouring it I was overwhelmed by the almost voluptuous luster possessed by only the most carefully-made sakes, and a fragrant bouquet reminiscent of ripe fruit. Hoka is characterized by a fresh, dewy quality and resilience at any temperature. First to hit the palate is its sweetness, then just when you think this has been slowly overtaken by acidity, the baton passes to the final runner, dryness. Hoka may be a genshu variety (i.e. not diluted with water after brewing), but it lacks the alcoholic sharpness typical of genshu, instead having the translucent quality of a daiginjo-shu class brew. The generous flavor, long on economy, also fits flexibly with many types of food.

One suggested match for Hoka’s fulsome fruitiness is a marinade of chopped apple and sea bream. The

tartness and fruit flavors blend in the mouth, drawing out the potential of both to maximum effect. For something a little unusual, battered scallops with nozawana tartar sauce make a delicious alternative. Nozawana leaves, a specialty of the Nagano region where Hoka is brewed, are used instead of the usual pickles in a tartar sauce to accompany piping hot battered scallops. These tasty morsels will be quickly devoured while the glasses of sake wait their turn. A sake suffused with hot-blooded youthful enthusiasm is the perfect complement to any dish. Taking advantage of current trends, Hoka’s advance through the sake market shows no signs of stalling as it transcends the “local sake” label to triumph on a much larger stage.