

# WINE



## Koshu wine's continuing growth The ever-present vanguard of Japanese winemaking

Yamanashi Prefecture has always lead Japan in wine culture, labeling itself Japan's "Wine Prefecture" in August 2019. Wine made from Koshu grapes, unique to Japan, have seen remarkable improvements in quality over recent years, winning awards at authoritative wine competitions. Yamanashi wines, including those made from "Muscat Bailey A" grapes, have come to represent Japanese wine as a whole.

### ● In a first for Japanese wine, "GI Yamanashi" promises local ingredients and fine products

In 2013, Japan's National Tax Agency announced Japan's first geographic wine label, "Yamanashi." This was permitted thanks to Yamanashi's history of pioneering wine production, dating back to 1870, and is now famed for hosting the majority of wineries in Japan. A geographic label puts Yamanashi shoulder-to-shoulder with the likes of Bordeaux and Champagne, all regions with specific ingredients and production methods. On wine labels, you'll find them marked as "GI Yamanashi."

### ● Japanese varieties registered with the International Organisation of Vine and Wine (O.I.V.\*)

In 2010 and 2013, Koshu grapes and Muscat Bailey A grapes were registered with the International Organisation of Vine and Wine, fostering exports of wines made with these grapes to Europe.

\*Organisation International de la Vigne et du Vin

### Koshu



A Japanese variety with bright, pink color. A thicker skin lets these grapes thrive in Japan's humid summers. They're a cross between western *Vitis vinifera* grapes and wild varieties from China. Wine made from these grapes is elegant: subtle in scent and flavor, with a hint of astringency mixed amongst the grapes' original aroma and tartness. This wine is made in a variety of styles, including recent citrus twists like buzz-worthy "orange wine."

### Muscat Bailey A



A cross between American Bailey grapes and Muscat Hamburg grapes created in 1927. Yamanashi Prefecture is Japan's largest producer of this variety. Their bunches and grapes are large with deeply-colored skins. Wine made from these grapes is known for a strawberry-like aroma and taste, with mild flavor and little astringency. They come in many forms: red wine, rosé, sparkling, and more. They can be aged in barrels to create rich flavors with full body; the specifics are up to the winemakers.

## TOPICS #1

1000 years of vineyards,  
the oldest in Japan



Yakushi Nyorai Statue (early 9th century), an Important Cultural Asset Publicly shown only once every five years. In its left hand, a bunch of grapes. (Stored at Daizen-ji)

Theorists are split on the origin of Koshu grapes, but either theory points to 1000 years in the past. The DNA of Koshu grapes was analyzed in 2013, with the results showing that they possess DNA from European grapes and Chinese wild grapes. This tells of a long journey near the Caspian Sea along the Silk Road, finally reaching Japan. Yamanashi Prefecture is the origin of winemaking in Japan. In 1874, Hironori Yamada and Norihisa Takuma began the first steps in earnest. The first privately-owned winery was established in 1877, in Katsunuma.

## TOPICS #2

The most land in Japan  
suitable for vineyards



Yamanashi's main municipal area for vineyards

Yamanashi is an inland prefecture in the center of Japan's main island, just next to Tokyo. Most of its vineyards are found in the Kofu basin. Even now, new vineyards are popping up in the basin's northwest area and at the foot of the Yatsugatake Mountains. Its weather is generally clear with little relative rainfall. The addition of distinct warm/cold periods and mountain water make it an excellent area for fruit cultivation. The many wineries in the basin's east area around the cities of Koshu, Yamanashi, and Fuefuki form the core of Yamanashi wine. As the birthplace of winemaking in Japan, many of these wineries have been in business for at least a century. Of Japan's prefectures, Yamanashi has the most wineries, upwards of 30%.

## TOPICS #3

Koshu earns fame with  
the rise of EU-bound exports



Wines attracting worldwide fame are emerging from Koshu

The quality of Yamanashi wineries has been rising sharply, Koshu wine in particular. Among other things, this comes as a result of the open-sourcing of methods from big businesses and young winemakers bringing back winemaking methods from around the world. Exports of Koshu wine to the EU began with the "Koshu of Japan / KOJ" project. In 2014, the flagship wine of a Koshu City winery won gold in a competition put on by the British wine magazine, Decanter. Yamanashi wines continue to win awards to this day, and are becoming recognized around the world.

## TOPICS #4

Koshu wine pairs wonderfully  
with Japanese dishes



Dry Koshu wine, with its light barrel aroma, pairs with mild smoked Fujinosuke fish and Kurofujii soft-boiled egg

The combination of wine and food such that the wine enriches the dish is called "pairing" or "matching." Japan's wines are said to have the benefit of "gently supporting" food. Koshu wine goes particularly well with Japanese food. Statistically speaking, Koshu wine is reported to be low in iron. Iron content in seafood and white wine pairings can produce unflattering results, but low iron content makes raw fish in Japanese cuisine such as sashimi easier to eat. The most basic pairings involve serving a wine with ingredients from the same region. Yamanashi's new brand-name fish, "Fujinosuke," has smooth meat and the perfect amount of fattiness, and goes well with Koshu wine.