



## The Delight of Japanese Food



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## Tradition

Japanese cuisine was born out of *ichijū-issai*, the eating of rice with a bowl of soup and a side dish. Embodying the Japanese spirit of frugality, this simple dietary style was adopted throughout the nation centuries ago, and has come to epitomize the essence of Japanese cuisine—the preparation of seasonal foods in a simple manner that makes the most of their natural flavors and lets nothing go to waste.

伝統

# Japanese cuisine, captivating the world with healthful, tasty food

## Four reasons for Japanese cuisine's appeal



The concept of *ichijū-issai* formed the basis for *shōjin* cuisine, the vegetarian diet taken up by Buddhist monks around the 13th century. Eschewing seafood and meat, this regimen comprises mainly grains, beans, vegetables, seaweed, and nuts. Today, ascetic monks continue to eat this diet, which also incorporates the “waste not, want not” spirit of Japanese cuisine. *Kaiseki* cuisine evolved from *shōjin* cuisine as a meal of rice, soup, and three other dishes that was originally consumed at tea ceremonies before the serving of tea. Now it is popular with the general public as a lavish dining style in which participants can enjoy elegant presentation of food and tableware without being fettered by etiquette. As a fusion of selected seasonal ingredients, sophisticated cooking techniques, elaborate dishes, and graceful hospitality, *kaiseki* cuisine has been raised to a world-class art form that exemplifies Japan's gastronomic culture. These culinary techniques, styles of eating, and attitudes toward food are the foundation of modern Japanese cuisine.

## Seasons

Japan has four distinct seasons, each of which offers its own variety of seafood, vegetables, and fruits at the peak of their flavor, referred to as *shun* in Japanese. Food in season not only offers a more pleasant taste sensation, but also has higher nutritional value. Whether it be an everyday meal or *kaiseki* cuisine, the fundamental principle of Japanese cuisine is to capitalize on food of the season. This approach has allowed Japanese to relish delectable flavors and the enchanting changes of the seasons throughout the year.

旬

## Beauty

Appearance is a key element of Japanese cuisine. This can be seen in the many slicing methods that have been created for vegetables and *sashimi*—the attractiveness and taste of food can be dramatically altered simply by the way it is sliced. Japanese cuisine takes spatial beauty to new heights, placing emphasis on the three-dimensional form, color patterns, and other visual aspects of food arrangement. Moreover, tableware is carefully selected so that its character, color, and shape are in harmony with the food and the season. Delighting the eyes as much as the taste buds, Japanese cuisine is truly an art.

美

## Health

What really sets Japanese cuisine apart is that it heavily relies on such foods as grains, vegetables, and fish, while limiting the use of cooking oil. Moreover, food is prepared in a simple style that gets the most out of the natural flavors. Since Japanese cuisine offers a nutritionally balanced diet that is rich in vegetable fat, protein, and fiber, but low in calories and animal fat, it has become the focus of global attention as a healthful eating style.

健康



### Ichijū-issai



This is a simple meal of rice, pickles, soup, and a fish or vegetable dish. In an age of increasingly extravagant eating habits, this down-to-earth but nutritionally balanced dietary style is attracting attention for its wholesomeness.

### Shōjin cuisine



Originally created as a diet for Buddhist monks, *shōjin* cuisine does not use seafood or meat. Today, it has evolved into a style in which seasonal vegetables and other ingredients are served in beautiful arrangements, and it is being rediscovered as a healthful way to eat.

### Kaiseki cuisine



Although this cuisine has changed shape over the years, its basic composition remains the same—rice, soup, *sashimi* or other appetizer, a simmered dish, and broiled fish. It is noted for its beauty, as seasonal ingredients are sliced and arranged using refined techniques, and tableware is rigorously selected to enhance the presentation. Available at specialty restaurants, modern *kaiseki* cuisine is enjoyed as a sumptuous meal eaten on festive occasions.

### Seasonal dishes



Seasonal cuisine includes hot pot dishes eaten in winter. Bounded by the ocean and covered with mountains, Japan is endowed with delectable food from both sea and land, so each region boasts of its own special hot pot dish made from local delicacies. The sight of many people surrounding a big pot and savoring its contents on a frosty day is a hallmark of life in Japan.

# The stars of Japanese cuisine



魚目

## Sushi, the exquisite finger food

### Appeal: A display of artisanship

*Sushi* is a display of culinary art, with the patrons seated at a counter from which they can closely watch the chef at work. Indeed, one of the great pleasures of *sushi* is relishing the beauty of the chef's polished technique in preparing the ingredients and shaping them into their completed form.

### Distinctiveness: Beauty, freshness, and variety

A truly eye-pleasing morsel is created when a *sushi* chef hand-rolls a ball of vinegared rice (*shari*) and covers it with a carefully prepared slice of seafood or other topping (*neta*). Since freshness is important, *neta* is bought at the market every morning for that day's menu. The wide variety of toppings used means that all sorts of seafood can be savored every season.

### History: An ancient blend of wisdom and technique

The roots of *sushi* are said to go back to an ancient Chinese method of preserving fish by salting it and allowing it to ferment in a container of rice. As a blend of culinary wisdom and skill, this practice spread throughout Japan, where it provided a way to maintain a supply of much-needed protein. This form eventually evolved into the more refined, world-famous modern style of *sushi* in the Edo period, making its debut at street stalls in what is now Tokyo. Today, there is broad array of *sushi* throughout Japan, with many types incorporating locally produced ingredients special to each region.



#### Tidbits

##### Wasabi

Japanese cuisine wouldn't be the same without *wasabi*, a seasoning unique to Japan that is cultivated in pristine stream beds and is used to accent the delicate flavors of food with its pungent bite and distinctive aroma. As a condiment for *sushi* and *sashimi*, it brings out the savoriness of the raw fish and is said to kill bacteria present on the food.

## Tempura, a superb deep-fried food for savoring the seasons

天  
麩  
羅

### Appeal: A beautiful rainbow of colors

The use of various seasonal vegetables and seafood in *tempura* dishes gives them a beautiful, colorful appearance, and makes for the real delight of *tempura*—the ability to relish the flavors of each season.

### Distinctiveness: Enjoyable in different ways

Deep-fried in a thin coating of batter, *tempura* is distinctive for the many different ways it can be enjoyed. Most often, it is dipped in sauce or salt and eaten as a separate dish, but it can also be served on top of rice, in noodle dishes, and in other styles. As a food that remains delectable even when the batter is softened by sauce or broth, *tempura* is a one-of-a-kind treat.

### History: Started out as quick street food

*Tempura* started out as a quick, simple meal of deep-fried seafood served at street stalls in the Edo period. Today, however, *tempura* uses a wide array of ingredients, and can be enjoyed at home and restaurants, including popular, upscale establishments where patrons can lavishly dine upon *tempura* fried in front of them.



#### Tidbits

##### Dashi

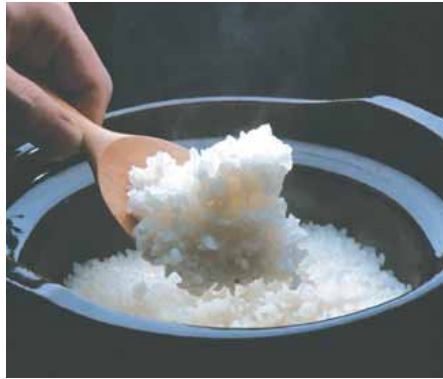
One indispensable element of Japanese cuisine is *dashi* (stock) made by simmering a base ingredient to concentrate its *umami*, or savoriness. One base commonly used is kelp, which is attracting attention as a health food because of its absence of calories and its abundance of fiber and such minerals as iron and calcium. Other ingredients often used are dried bonito and small dried sardines, with the choice of *dashi* being dictated by preference and the type of dish being prepared.

# Made in Japan: The main elements of Japanese cuisine

## RICE

Japanese rice, the short-grained, sticky rice

Japan's delicious rice is both the staple food and a source of pride for the nation. Unlike the more globally prevalent indica variety of rice, the japonica variety eaten in Japan comes in short, round grains that become glutinous when cooked. The basic style of eating rice is to serve it in a bowl alongside other items, but it is also often integrated into all sorts of dishes that make the most of japonica's characteristics, such as *sushi* and dishes in which various ingredients are cooked in the rice. The sheen, aroma, chewiness, and lasting natural sweetness of plump, freshly steamed rice all contribute to the appeal of this delightful food. The savoriness is accentuated when the rice eaten with other dishes, and Japanese cuisine is designed to bring out the full richness of rice's flavor. Indeed, no description of Japan's food culture is complete without an account of rice.



### Rice cultivation, the wellspring of Japanese culture

Some 2,500 years ago, rice cultivation was introduced from China to Japan, where it spread to every region and became the source of the nation's staple food. Rice growing has also shaped Japanese culture, as seen in the many traditional harvest rites and festivals that continue to be practiced across the country. Because of their strong attachment to rice, Japanese are choosy about the region, variety, and brand of rice they buy, and many look forward to each year's shipment of new rice.

### Rice's appeal as a health food

The typical Japanese method of cooking rice, steaming, does not use oil, and thus is a very healthful practice. Rice chiefly consists of carbohydrates and protein, and also contains vitamins, minerals, and fiber. Japanese most commonly eat rice in its white, polished form, but also sometimes consume brown, unpolished rice—an eating style that is peculiar to Japan. Brown rice is being hailed around the world as a wholesome food because of its high nutritional content.



## The two kings of Japanese seasonings

### SOY SAUCE

A distinctly Japanese seasoning made from soybeans, soy sauce is the clincher that decides Japanese food's flavor

Originally derived from *bishio*, a flavoring adopted from China, Japanese soy sauce is a brown liquid seasoning made by fermenting soybeans and wheat with *kōji* mold. Its use of soybeans distinguishes it from the fish-based sauces seen in other Asian countries, and it also marked by the special flavor created by slowly, painstakingly fermenting soybeans in a selected environment. Soy sauce is the miracle seasoning of Japanese cuisine, indispensable for enhancing savoriness and adding aroma and flavor to dishes. In fact, it can be said that soy sauce is the essence of Japanese cuisine's flavor, providing zest to *sashimi*, *sushi*, grilled fish, vegetables, stewed dishes, and more.



### MISO

A vital source of flavor and aroma, miso has kept Japanese healthy for centuries



*Miso* is made by fermenting and aging a mixture of soybeans, salt, and *kōji* mold. A diverse assortment of *miso* is created by choosing different *kōji* types (rice, wheat, bean, etc.) and altering the length of the aging process to produce a reddish or whitish hue. Traditionally, *miso* was the main source of protein for Japanese, and it still remains a vital seasoning in Japanese cuisine, as its rich, distinctive fragrance and flavor add an exquisite touch to fish and vegetables. For centuries, it has helped Japanese to stay fit with its health-enhancing powers, which are said to include cholesterol reduction and prevention of the effects of aging. *Miso* can be eaten as is, or used for soup, pickles, grilled dishes, and other cooking.



# FRUIT

Handcrafted gems with eye-catching shapes and colors

Spring, summer, autumn, and winter in Japan each produce different types of fruit, meaning that all sorts of wonderful taste sensations can be experienced throughout the year. By savoring the natural flavor of fresh fruit each season, Japanese partake of the pleasures afforded by the passing of the seasons. Improvements continue to be made to cultivation techniques, producing a steady stream of enhancements to flavor, shape, and color. No effort is spared to raise quality, with some growers taking the time to cover fruit on trees with protective bags. As such, Japan's beautiful, high-quality fruit can be thought of as handcrafted gems. Native species include persimmons and Japanese pears, and peaches are old-timers as well, as evidenced by their appearance in the eighth century *Kojiki*, the oldest chronicle of Japanese history.



Covered Japanese pears in an orchard  
After Japanese pears reach a certain size, growers cover each and every one with a bag to protect them from heavy rain, strong winds, insects, and other foes, resulting in beautiful, unblemished produce.

## 春

Spring



### Strawberries

Treasure houses of vitamin C that enhance health and beauty

Rich in vitamin C, Japan's fragrant, strongly sweet strawberries are very popular treats both raw and in such processed forms as jam and jelly.



### Cherries

Lovely orbs with delicate flavor

Cast in a lustrous, beautiful hue, Japanese cherries offer a refined, unadorned sweetness and an abundance of minerals. High-grade varieties are carefully packed one by one in boxes that make for welcome gifts.

### Watermelons

Tasty, chilled fruit that beats the summer heat

Sweet, succulent watermelons are synonymous with summer in Japan, and are especially tasty when chilled. Offering a distinctive taste sensation with their intricate flesh, watermelons also have a strong diuretic effect, making them good for people concerned about swelling, kidney trouble, or high blood pressure.



### Peaches

Juicy, luscious fruit best enjoyed raw

Popular as gifts because of their dainty beauty, Japanese peaches are noted for their soft, juicy flesh, and intense sweetness and fragrance. Peaches are a good source of fiber.



Summer

## 夏



### Japanese pears

Unparalleled juiciness

Compared with European pears, which are often used in processed form, Japanese pears are very succulent, making them very delicious when eaten raw. They also offer a pleasant, distinctive crispness, and are rich in fiber.



### Melons

The sweetness-packed king of fruit

Considered by many to be the superlative fruit, melons are a big item in Japan, pleasing the senses with their melt-in-the-mouth sweetness and elegant aroma. Chilling increases the sweetness, enhancing the flavor.

## 秋

Autumn

### Grapes

A delightful assortment of flavors and fragrances

What makes Japanese grapes special is that many varieties are grown, allowing all sorts of flavors and fragrances to be experienced. The polyphenols in grapes are believed to combat lifestyle-related illnesses and slow down aging of the skin.



### Persimmons

A long-time favorite in Japan

Soft, distinctly sweet persimmons contain an ample amount of vitamin C, as well as tannin, which is said to be good for relieving hangovers. One of the great pleasures of late autumn in Japan is persimmons that have been peeled and dried outdoors.



Winter

## 冬



### Apples

A wholesome treat that's especially tasty when eaten whole

Japan's apples come in abundant varieties that provide a continuum of flavor from powerfully sweet to crisply tart, and their eye-catching shapes and colors have earned acclaim from around the world. In addition to aiding digestion, apples hold a rich supply of nutrients that makes them good for staying healthy and relieving fatigue.



### Tangerines

Sweet symbols of winter in Japan

Easily peeled and devoid of seeds, tangerines make for a quick-to-eat snack that is succulently sweet. Tangerines are always found on Japanese tabletops in winter, partly because of their copious vitamin C, which helps ward off colds.

# SEAFOOD

## The starting point of Japanese cuisine

As inhabitants of a long island chain, Japanese have made fish and shellfish a key part of their diet from time immemorial, building up a distinctive culture of seafood over the centuries. Today, many different methods are used to prepare the diverse bounty of fish that each season brings, allowing a spectrum of flavors to be enjoyed throughout the year. This frequent consumption of seafood is also believed to be one of the secrets behind Japanese longevity, and the world is now turning its attention to seafood as a low-fat, low-calorie diet offering abundant nutrients that can help prevent lifestyle-related diseases.

## Different ways to make a tasty seafood meal



## Sashimi

Fresh, raw seafood sliced thin and served with such seasonings as soy sauce mixed with *wasabi* or ginger, *sashimi* originated as a simple meal for fishermen while out at sea. Along with the spread of soy sauce, *sashimi* evolved into a lavish dish also enjoyed at home. Satisfying both the palate and the eyes, *sashimi* is recognized around the world as a classic example of Japanese cuisine.

### Examples of fish good for sashimi


Tuna, sea bream, flounder, bonito, yellowtail, sardine, horse mackerel





Horse mackerel

### Typical method of preparing sashimi

#### Wild horse mackerel sashimi

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Scale and gut the fish, and remove the head. Spread open the body to cut out the central bone, and extract the small bones with a bone picker.
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Sprinkle salt on the fish and let it sit for a moment. Rinse it with water and then dip the entire body in vinegar water. After peeling the skin by hand and making decorative incisions across the flesh, cut the fish into small slices.
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Arrange the slices on a plate and garnish with grated ginger, decorative leaves, etc.

## Grilling

Fish grilled over an open flame is another common feature of Japanese cuisine, representing a broad spectrum ranging from homemade dishes to masterpieces created at posh restaurants. Before grilling, fish is seasoned in various ways, such as sprinkling salt on it, coating it with a soy sauce-based dressing, or marinating it in *miso*.

### Examples of fish good for grilling


Red sea bream, parrot fish, mackerel, horse mackerel, sardine, saury





Salmon

### Typical method of grilling

#### Grilled salted salmon

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Sprinkle salt on slices of salmon and let them sit for a while.
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Grill both sides of the slices over an open flame.
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Arrange them on a plate and garnish with slices of lemon or lime.

## Sea delicacies other than fish

### Abalones

One of the sea's finest delicacies, abalones are univalves that have a saucer-shaped shell. Offering a distinctively firm texture, abalones are served raw in *sashimi* and *sushi*, steamed in *sake*, grilled whole, and prepared in other ways.



### Sharkfin

The tail and dorsal fins of large sharks are dried for use as a luxury ingredient for dishes. After preparation and simmering, sharkfin becomes a pleasantly soft, gelatinous substance. Japan is one of the world's top producers of sharkfin.



### Scallops

Featuring a large adductor muscle, these bivalves have thick, flavorful flesh that is sliced into *sashimi*, fried in butter, stewed with other ingredients, and used in soup.



### Roasted laver

A very familiar part of the Japanese diet, these thin sheets of dried seaweed are used in different ways, such as to wrap *sushi* rolls, rice balls, or roasted rice cakes.



### Tidbits

#### Dried seafood

Seafood can be preserved by slicing it open and drying it in the air, which causes a tough membrane to form over the surface. Exposure to the sun and mineral-laden sea breezes create a firmer flesh and a condensed savoriness not found in other forms of processing. This practice is truly the embodiment of the wisdom and skill that grew out of the Japanese people's intense fondness for fish.



## Stewing

In Japan, dishes are often prepared by stewing various ingredients in a broth of water, *dashi* (stock,) and seasonings, allowing the richness of the broth to be marvelously fused with the ingredients' flavor. The type of broth base—soy sauce, *miso*, or other seasoning—is varied for certain types of fish to create an assortment of taste experiences.

### Examples of fish good for stewing


Sardine, flounder, yellowtail, bonito, mackerel





Yellowtail

### Typical method of stewing

#### Yellowtail with Japanese radish

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Scald slices of yellowtail in boiling water. Cut a Japanese radish into round slices and pre-boil them.
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Heat the fish and radish slices in a pot containing shaved ginger, water, *dashi*, *sake*, sugar, and *mirin*. After the pot comes to a boil, add soy sauce and let the mixture stew.
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Turn the stove off after the broth has sufficiently permeated the fish and radish, and serve them in a dish.

## Deep-frying

Frying food in a pot of hot oil locks in its savoriness, and gives it a nice crispiness on the outside while keeping the inside tender.

### Examples of fish good for deep-frying

Horse mackerel, conger, salmon, flounder



Flounder

### Typical method of deep-frying

#### Fried flounder

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Cut up flounder into pieces, salt them, and let them sit for a moment. Sponge off the moisture and coat them in potato starch.
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Deep-fry them in moderately hot oil.
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Arrange them on a plate and serve with *tsuyu* sauce and salt, or lemon slices.



TAKUMI



## Expertise built up from centuries of eating fish

The skills involved in sanitarily handling raw fish, preserving it, and enhancing its flavor represent Japanese expertise that comes from knowing fish inside and out

### Ikejime

This is a method of preserving the freshness of fish by draining their blood from holes cut near the gills and tail. Often used by fishermen out at sea, this technique also improves the flesh texture and eliminates fishy odors.



Yubiki

### Yubiki

In this technique, boiling water is poured on raw fish, which is then immediately cooled by immersion in cold water. This toughens the surface, sealing in the savoriness and nutrients, and also kills bacteria, making *yubiki* a common procedure for preparing *sashimi*. It is also often used for sea bream and grouper, since their skin is richly flavorful and nutritious.

### Arai

Sea bream, flounder, or other white fish sliced as *sashimi* is shaken in ice water to clean and firm the flesh, as well as to remove fat. This technique has been popular for a long time not only for improving texture, but also for creating a cool sensation when *arai*-prepared fish is served on top of ice in summer.



Arai

### Shime

Often employed for such fish as sardine, mackerel, small horse mackerel, and spotted shad, this technique involves heavily salting deboned flesh, allowing it to sit for a while, and then rinsing it in water and running it through vinegar water. As a result, the flesh becomes firmer, the flavor is enhanced, and bacteria are destroyed. As a method for accentuating natural flavor, *shime* is indispensable to the preparation of mackerel for use in *sushi*.



Shime

# Drinks that complement Japanese cuisine

## Japanese green tea

The all-powerful drink that enhances health and beauty

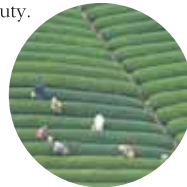


Japanese green tea, which has been a perennial favorite in Japan since the Edo period, is produced by steaming freshly picked tea leaves to prevent their fermentation. It is now being rediscovered as a health food, as its rich balance of vitamins help to fend off colds and lifestyle-related illnesses while also enhancing the complexion. Green tea is not only consumed as a beverage, but is also used in powdered form in sweets and other desserts. An indispensable part of everyday life in Japan, green tea is an all-powerful drink that enhances health and beauty.

### A medley of varieties

#### Sencha

The most popular form of green tea, *sencha* is made by steaming, crumpling, and drying freshly picked tea leaves.



#### Gyokuro

This is the highest grade of green tea, possessing a distinctive sweetness that comes from shading the growing leaves from the sun.

#### Matcha

Tea leaves grown out of direct sunlight are steamed and dried without crumpling, and then are ground into powder using a stone mill. *Matcha*, which is mainly used in tea ceremonies, is prepared for drinking in a unique manner—the powder is rapidly mixed with hot water in a bowl, producing a froth.

## Making a tasty cup of sencha

The key factors in preparing green tea are water temperature, amount of tea leaves, and steeping time. The optimum water temperature for *sencha* is around 70°C, but the water should first be brought to a boil and then cooled to this temperature.

1. Put the tea leaves in a teapot (approx. 6 g for 3 people).  
When making only a couple cups, a larger ratio of leaves produces a tastier result.
2. Pour hot water in the teapot and allow it to sit for about two minutes to allow the leaves to open. The teapot should not be shaken, as this will release bitter flavors from the leaves.
3. Pour the tea into cups, taking care to maintain the same concentration of flavor for each cup.



### Tidbits

#### Tea ceremony

The tea ceremony is a unique tradition of Japan that involves serving *matcha* to guests according to special rules of etiquette. Rather than being simply the consumption of tea, this ritual is a comprehensive art that includes tastefully decorating the tea room for the guests and expressing sincere hospitality to them. As such, it engraves the hearts of participants with a special spirit, and stands as a core element of traditional Japanese culture.



## Sake

The best companion for Japanese cuisine

*Sake* is a rice-based fermented liquor that, like *shōchū*, has been delighting taste buds in Japan since ancient times. It is so loved by Japanese that a party is just not a party without a good supply. Most often consumed with a meal, *sake* is the best companion for Japanese cuisine, creating a synergy that brings out the full flavor of the food. Delicious *sake*, which requires delicious water and rice, is a world-class work of gustatory art that embodies Japanese wisdom and skill. *Sake* has been exported to other countries for some time, and improvements in quality have sparked greater foreign demand recently.



## The way to enjoy sake

*Sake* comes from various regions in many different varieties and brands. The flavor and aroma of each type are best experienced at a certain temperature range—chilled, room temperature, warm, or hot.

## Shōchū

A diverse beverage consumed the way you like

This distinctively Japanese beverage is a distilled liquor found in different varieties in each region, including rice liquors, potato liquors, wheat liquors, and *awamori*. *Shōchū* has a long shelf life, and can be stored for decades if kept in a cool, shaded place. Its big appeal is that it can be enjoyed in all sorts of styles, satisfying the individual preferences of any drinker. A *shōchū* craze is now sweeping across Japan, creating many fans among young people in particular.



## The way to enjoy shōchū

*Shōchū* can be enjoyed in many ways, whether it be on the rocks or mixed with such companions as hot water, cold water, tea, soda, or fruit juice. Note that hot water *shōchū* is best prepared by pouring the *shōchū* into the hot water, as this will mix them better and provide a more pleasing bouquet.