

## A Historical Walk Around Kyoto



Gekkeikan Okura Sake Museum

Fushimi, located in the southern part of Kyoto, is well-known for sake brewing. There are now about 30 sake breweries in Fushimi. The oldest existing sake brewery in Fushimi is the one started by Okura Jiemon in 1637, and the Okura's sake business later became GEKKEIKAN Sake Co., Ltd. This museum was established by remodeling the Okura's traditional sake brewery and warehouse to display 6,120 brewing tools according to various processes for sake brewing.

As shown in the photo, the decorative ball is hung under the eaves. It was customary that guardians of shrines gave the decorative ball (made from fresh leaves of cedar) to sake brewers in return for the fresh sake they received. The greener the ball was the fresher the sake was understood to be.

Nowadays, the ball represents the sign of the sake brewery, regardless of the color.

### The Origin of Sake

Sake is a Japanese traditional brewed alcoholic beverage made from rice and water which are important parts of Japanese people's diet. It is believed that sake making started in the Yayoi Era (300 B.C.–300 A.D.) when wet paddy rice growing was popularized in Japan.

It is said that there were the following methods to originally brew sake in Japan.

Oldest	Rice was chewed by a woman, spit out, and then fermented.
Second oldest	Fungi on ears of rice plants or fungi on cooked dried rice were added to rice, and then fermented. These fungi were the origin of the <i>koji</i> .

\* Malted rice containing *Aspergillus oryzae*

When an alcoholic drink is made, fruits can be easily fermented, but cereals including rice cannot be naturally fermented. Therefore, in order to brew sake, rice should be converted into glucose by using *koji*, making it possible to ferment.

### Why is Fushimi Well-Known for Sake Brewing?

Fushimi used to be unsuitable for living because of its swamplike environment. However, Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536–1598), who succeeded in dominating the whole country of Japan, created not only a castle but also the town in this area to spend the rest of his life. Fushimi became a big city with a population of sixty thousands at the time, and flourished as a castle town.

Since then, a lot of people have been active in the sake brewing business because Fushimi has a rich natural environment with high quality groundwater which is an important ingredient of sake.

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