

Food & Drink

For Heaven's Sake

Oregon water proves ideally suited to brewing Japan's famous rice wine

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A glass of Sake One's Momokawa, a premium sake brewed in Oregon

THREE LIQUIDS USUALLY come to mind when most people think of Oregon: sublime coffee, craft-brewed beer and rain. High-end sake does not immediately make the cut—which is one reason it's surprising that leading U.S. producer Sake One is located in the Oregon college town of Forest Grove. Turns out, however, that despite the lack of an indigenous industry, it's not unreasonable to expect to make good sake in the Pacific Northwest. Apart from the area's rich history of craft brewing, Oregon's Coast Range filters close to 120 inches of rain each year through igneous rock, basalt flows and basaltic sandstone, leaving water with very little iron and magnesium. "The water here is soft and sweet—exactly what you want for brewing sake," says Dewey Weddington, Sake One's vice president of marketing.

Visitors to the brewery can take a tour and learn about making the rice wine—from polishing the grain to pasteurizing and bottling the finished product—and then retire to Sake One's wood-paneled tasting room to sample sake flights paired with local cheeses, pears and buffalo jerky. For those less familiar with the Japanese brew, Sake One offers a line of fruit-infused versions (such as raspberry, plum and coconut-lemongrass) that may be more palatable to a country obsessed with fruit-infused vodkas. "They're uncommon in Japan," says Weddington. "When we offer them to our Japanese customers, they are surprised that such a thing even exists." Looks like there's another resource Oregonians have in spades: ingenuity.