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### Sake & Sushi 101

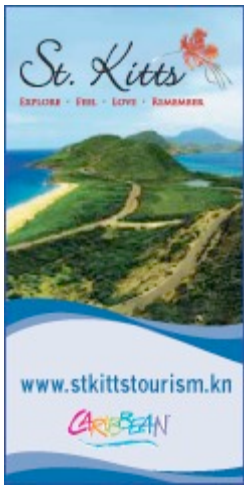
By : Rosa Rojas  
Photos by J. Kevin Foltz



Not a big sake drinker? Neither was I until I sampled the four main types of sake at a tasting class offered by SushiSamba and discovered that not all sakes are the same. I was used to the tasteless, rubbing-alcohol-style sake offered at most places, so I was pleasantly surprised to find that the higher-grade sakes are fruity. The clincher? Sake does not cause hangovers. This could very well be the perfect drink.

SushiSamba, on South Beach and two locations in New York City, offers the class once a month. Paul Tanguay, the restaurant's sake expert, is your teacher at the South Beach locale. He begins by giving a brief history of the libation and clearing up some common misconceptions. For example, not all sake should be served warm; the higher-grade varieties are best chilled. Secondly, sake is not a wine: wines come from a fruit, while sake is made from rice grains. It's also not a distilled beverage like gin, vodka or other spirits. The main ingredients in sake are water, rice (the more the rice grain is polished, which can be as little as six hours or as long as 120 hours, the fruitier the taste), koji (a mold that creates enzymes that break down rice starches into glucose) and yeast.

Once you have the basics down, the tasting begins. The light and approachable Honjozo, which runs about \$35 a bottle, is similar to watered-down vodka and is best served warm. Junmai has a slightly heavier body and will cost you about \$40. The smooth Ginjo (\$45) has a cherry blossom bouquet and is fruity in flavor. Lastly, melony Daiginjo, the most expensive at \$70-\$100, is excellent for sipping and is comparable to shiraz in taste.





After the tasting, the sushi chef shows the class how to put together a roll. It wasn't as easy as it looked. The key is to continually dip your hands in water, which helps the rice stick to the roll and not to your gloved hand. As each masterpiece is completed, it is passed around for the judgment and enjoyment of fellow classmates. You definitely won't leave the class hungry.

When it comes to pairing sake with food, keep in mind that pairing is an imprecise art that requires lots of imagination and should be—above all—fun. Spicy food, wild game and rich sauces do not marry well with sake. The fruity sakes work well as aperitifs, while the milder types allow the flavors of food to shine through.

Sake & Sushi 101 cost \$60. For information, visit [sushisamba.com](http://sushisamba.com).

SushiSamba dromo  
600 Lincoln Road  
Miami Beach, FL  
305-673-5337  
Next class:  
July 13

SushiSamba 7  
87 7th Avenue South  
New York, NY  
212-691-7885  
Next class:  
September 26

SushiSamba Park  
245 Park Avenue South  
New York, NY  
212-475-9377  
Next class:  
September 26

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