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SAKES TO TRY AT HOME

	Dassai 23 £70, 31dover.com		Kabuki-Kijoshu 2012 £62.95, thewhiskey exchange.com	
Konishi Gold £28, tengu sake.com		Shochikubai Shirakabegura Mio £14.19, japancentre.com		Jinzu gin £33.50, amazon.co.uk



Kampai! Sake is a little-understood drink
PICTURE: GETTY

Yoshinori Ishii is head chef at Mayfair's Umu, which has more than 160 sakes on offer. His staff are knowledgeable about which sake to recommend with which course. And what's more, he not only makes his own serving dishes, he also does calligraphy on his specials menu.



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For-sake all other drinks

With sake cocktails gaining in popularity, **Tania O'Donnell** reveals why this Japanese beverage has slowly become one of her favourite tipples

THE first time I ever tasted sake was when I was worse for wear after an evening of low-level debauchery in Soho. My compadre and I stumbled into Tokyo Diner and, since I am one of those irritating, smug horrors who knows how to use chopsticks and prides themselves on cultural chameleon status, I thought I'd follow my Asahi beer and chicken katsu don with a post-dinner sake.

It was not an immediate love affair. It was more like friendship

that grows into love, when your pal suddenly starts to look really attractive under the right light and with a touch of alcoholic myopia.

A couple of years later I was shopping for a vintage kimono in a Japanese emporium in San Francisco when the owner offered me a cup of cheer. Taking a sip, I had my tiny mind blown. This was lightly sparkling, like a rice-based prosecco, and utterly delicious – still sake in flavour but fresh and effervescent in texture.

This cemented my love of this complex and little understood drink. I began to attend Japanese

fairs and try different types. There are a variety of styles, each using different brewing techniques, and how they are named indicates the percentage of rice that is milled away and whether any distilled alcohol has been added.

Nothing is more heavenly than a plate of shrimp gyoza and a wee glass of good Ginjo sake – simple and delicious. You can, however, take your explorations even further. The exacting aesthetic of Japanese food and drink is an art form and I encourage you to explore this fascinating world.

If you're not convinced by it straight up, then enjoy sake Hollywood-style – both Kate Hudson and Jessica Biel are fans of sake-based cocktails.



Sake sisters: Jessica Biel and Kate Hudson

MIX IT UP COCKTAILS TO TEST

Sushi Samba, London
This Bishopsgate bar offers a range of Japanese flavours, including a green tea-ni made with green tea-infused sake.



sushisamba.com

Hyde & Co, Bristol
Dee Davies, the creator of Jinzu – a mix of gin and sake – used to be a bartender here and the cocktail list uses her creation in a number of concoctions.



hydeand.co

Sakana, Manchester
Choose from a huge selection of both sake cocktails and sakes for the purist at this pan-Asian restaurant and bar.



sakanapan-asian.co.uk