

Alcoholic Beverages

May 24, 2018

THE AMENDMENT OF THE LIQUOR TAX ACT HAS TRIGGERED THE CREATION OF NEW BEERS WITH DIVERSE FLAVORS

The Liquor Tax Act was amended on April 1, 2018, broadening the definition of “beer”.

Until now, beer was defined as having “at least 67% malt, with secondary ingredients limited to barley, rice, corn, etc.” From April 1, the definition changed to “at least 50% malt, with fruits, spices, herbs, etc. usable in addition to the previous secondary ingredients”. Therefore, from April it became possible to market products that were previously “*happoshu*” (low-malt beer) as beer.

The diverse added secondary ingredients for beer include fruit, coriander seeds, spices, herbs, vegetables, sesame seeds, coffee, *katsuobushi* (dried bonito), and *miso* paste. The beer companies were reluctant to develop such products before the amendment, because they would have been taxed at a high rate despite being *happoshu*, but with the wider range of usable ingredients, it is easier for them to develop and market new products.

Kirin Beer have launched three new types of beer, using secondary ingredients such as fruit.

All of the newly-announced new products have very carefully-designed packaging. In particular, two products under the Grand Kirin label have vivid watercolor-style designs and novel-like titles. They are expected to make tables brighter and more fun.



<p>Spring Valley Brewery Sour Citrus</p> <p>This is a refreshing fruit beer characterized by the fruity and crisp citrus scent of <i>kabosu</i>. Ingredients: Malt (from wheat and barley), hops, <i>sudachi</i>, <i>kabosu</i></p>	<p>Grand Kirin Ame Nochi Taiyo (Sun After Rain), Belgian white beer</p> <p>This Belgian white-type beer is crisp and easy to drink, with a fresh aftertaste of orange peel. Ingredients: Malt (from wheat and barley), hops, orange peel, coriander seed</p>	<p>Grand Kirin Hikokigumo to Watashi (Airplane Track and Me) - Lemon Edition</p> <p>This lemon beer, flavored with lemon peel, gives the scent of citrus and a refreshing aftertaste. Ingredients: Malt, hops, lemon peel</p>
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Photos from the Kirin website

Yo-Ho Brewing of Karuizawa, Nagano Prefecture, Japan’s biggest craft beer brewer, has launched “Sorry Umami IPA”, using katsuobushi as a secondary ingredient. Company president Naoyuki Ide says “The Liquor Tax Act amendment is very significant for the industry. Some craft beers that were *happoshu* getting labeled as beer is a big thing. The big breweries are putting out beers using all kinds of secondary ingredients, but they have to target the mass market. We can also try more “pointed” products that appeal to narrow target markets”.



(Photo: From the Yonasato.com website)

Bars and restaurants are also starting to bring in craft beers as they look forward to the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. By now, there have actually been a few craft beer booms. It has been said that action is needed to instill craft beer as culture, rather than ending again as a transient boom, and perhaps the recent amendment has brought Japan’s beer scene one step closer to the free world of beer.



Photo: Craft beers lined up in a food store in Tokyo