

Report: Rediscovering the Appeal of Japan Wine! Yamanashi Winery Tour



On November 19, 2024, in collaboration with the Japan Winery Award Council, DMO TOKYO Marunouchi held a winery tour in Yamanashi Prefecture, the birthplace of Japan Wine. In addition to experiencing tastings and pairings of Yamanashi wines, this tour included opportunities to visit the vineyards and to see the production processes, as well as to deepen communication with the winemakers. 12 members from DMO Tokyo Marunouchi participated, including certified sommeliers. Prior to this tour, Marunouchi Japan Wine Weeks 2024 was held in the Marunouchi area from October 24 to November 10. Some guests decided to participate in the tour after their experience with high-quality Japan Wine during the event.

The main goal of this tour was to deepen their understanding of Japan Wine, promote local production for local consumption, and contribute to the revitalization of the countryside while providing a means to attract visitors and future MICE tourism. The wineries visited were selected by the Japan Winery Awards Council, including “up-and-coming,” “long-established,” and “large-scale” wineries that have been awarded 4 and 5 stars in the Japan Winery Awards® 2024. It was truly a unique DMO TOKYO Marunouchi excursion, featuring exclusive experiences such as tours of areas which are not usually open to the public and special guided tours led by the establishments’ winemakers.

● **98wines: A wine tourism that cultivates wines of “local culture”**



Group photo at 98WINEs



Representative Shigeyuki Hirayama

At 9:00 AM on the day of the tour, participants gathered at JR Enzan Station. Under the clear weather of a cloudless sky, the participants arrived from Tokyo one after another. They climbed aboard a charter bus and headed to their first destination: 98wines, an up-and-coming four-star winery that opened for business in 2018. Amidst stunning views of Mt. Fuji, participants tasted white, rosé, and red wines in sequence, concluding with a beer brewed by the winery.

Founder Shigeyuki Hirayama said, “Wine is a local culture born from the land. Our stance on winemaking is to trust it to the land.” Participants tasted the unique flavors of Koshu and Muscat Bailey A while enjoying views of the vineyards. They also enjoyed tours of brewery and wine storage.

● **Château Mercian Tengusawa Vineyard (not open to public)**

After leaving 98wines, the party next headed for Château Mercian’s Tengusawa Vineyard, which is usually closed to the public. This three-hectare vineyard, situated at an elevation of 850 meters, is one of the brand’s highest-altitude properties. It was established to preserve grape quality in response to the rising of climate change. Under the guidance of Manabu Kurosawa from Mercian Corporation, the group toured the vineyards where five types of grapes - Shiraz, Tempranillo, Albariño, Pinot Noir, and Pinot Gris are cultivated using espalier training. Amid the expansive, tranquil scenery of grapevines turning yellow after the harvest, participants asked questions about the characteristics of the grape varieties and the land, fostering deeper conversations.



Manabu Kurosawa of Mercian Corporation giving an explanation Vineyard with grapevines after harvest

● **Pairing of wine with ingredients from Yamanashi Prefecture at Bistro Mille Printemps**

For lunch, the group dined at Bistro Mille Printemps, a French restaurant opened in Katsunuma in 2010, which practices local food production and consumption. The owner, Takemi Gomi, who was a chef-sommelier at the Grand Maison in Ginza, treated the group to a meal of courses that used plentiful amounts of fresh ingredients from Yamanashi Prefecture.

This was a valuable experience that enabled DMO TOKYO Marunouchi members, who rarely have a chance to meet each other, to enjoy chatting over a glass of wine and deepening exchanges. Local winemakers Yoshio Amemiya from Diamond Shuzo and Hirotaka Aruga from Katsunuma Winery both joined the lunch and introduced their wines, which were served along with the meal. Many participants praised the pairing of the wines with the food.



Participants listening to Mr. Amemiya from Diamond Shuzo Expertly crafted dish of local ingredients for local consumption

● **Marufuji Winery: Winemaking with 134 years of history and culture**

The afternoon journey began at the long-established Marufuji Winery, which was founded in 1890 and was the winner of five stars at the Japan Winery Awards® 2024. Haruo Omura, the representative of this company, led a guided tour of the processing area, cask cellar, and fermentation area. The old fermentation warehouse, with the winery's "R" logo on its white walls, and the bottle storehouse are both registered as tangible cultural properties of Japan. The tasting room, attached to the underground cellar, provided a European-style hideout, an exotic atmosphere that made the group almost forget they were in Japan.

After the tour, participants experienced wine tasting in the guest room of the new office building built in 2017. The new office building was built with Japanese-style construction and features both an office space and a store. It used to be Mr. Omura's house. While listening to the explanations about seven wines of the company brand "Rubaiyat", participants tasted and enjoyed their flavors.



Tour of the fermentation area led by Mr. Omura



Wine tasting in the guest room

● **Château Mercian Katsunuma Winery: the cooperation of many grape producers**

Next, the group visited Château Mercian Katsunuma Winery, which earned a rating of five stars at the Japan Winery Awards® 2024. The adjoining factory is a large-scale operation that handles 500 metric tons of grapes every year. Mr. Kurosawa from Mercian once again led the group on a tour of the winemaking process. The underground wine cellar was a sight to behold, with countless casks neatly lined up, quietly waiting for the wines to mature. After the tour, participants tasted six different wines in the visitor center. These wines included three types of Koshu and two types of Muscat Bailey A grown by local farmers, as well as a wine debuting to the public made from grapes harvested in 2019 at the company's own Jyonohira Vineyard. Participants partook the glass of wine as they listened to Mr. Kurosawa delight them with stories of the development and origin of each wine. Some of the participants were seen purchasing two or three bottles of wine when the group visited the company's wine shop.



Participants at the factory, with casks in the background



A space set up in the cellar

● **Choosing wine at the Katsunuma Winery Market Nitta Store on the return journey**

For the final stage of the trip, the group stopped by the Katsunuma Winery Market Nitta Store for some shopping. This store is packed with all kinds of unique wines, boasting products from over 100 wineries mostly in Yamanashi, including the three they visited. Participants carefully chose their favorite wines, with some purchasing close to ten bottles. The store also offers express home delivery, ensuring a relaxing trip back home.

It was nearly dark when the group returned to the bus, and the tour of 8.5 hours came successfully to an end. Participants expressed their appreciation, stating that this was a valuable experience that allowed us to connect with the terroir and winemakers. They also added that they would like to introduce more Japanese wines at their own facilities, as it will help spread Japanese culture.

The Japan Winery Award Council, which organized the entire tour, commented, “One of the appeals of Japanese wineries is that you can easily travel to the actual site. We hope that many people will come to know about the amazing qualities of Japan Wine with their delicate flavors and perfect pairing with Japanese food.”

This tour aimed to promote Japan Wine by offering the special tour that included wines and places that are not normally accessible. In collaboration with its members, DMO TOKYO Marunouchi will continue to refine content that enhances the value of MICE tourism in the Marunouchi area, one of the largest wine consumers in Japan.