

# 5 Great Japanese Spirits That Are Not Whisky

 [liquor.com/slideshows/japanese-liquor](http://liquor.com/slideshows/japanese-liquor)

Per our updated privacy policy, we use cookies to track your browsing behavior on our site and provide you with ads or other offers that may be relevant to you. To view our privacy policy in full, [click here](#). By using our site, you agree to these terms.

I agree



Search

Join

|

Login

Contributed by [Kat Odell](#)

Posted on May 16, 2018

If you're drinking a Japanese spirit, chances are it's whisky. Thanks to the country's uncompromising approach to craftsmanship, the Japanese continue to release elegant whiskies that are some of the most coveted spirits in the world.

But there's more to Japanese distilling than whisky. Lately, a handful of top-notch clear spirits have emerged from the Land of the Rising Sun, from silky gins to lush, creamy vodkas. These are five bottles you should try now.



## 1: Nikka Coffey Gin (\$50)

---

Last year, after nearly a century of whisky production, iconic Japanese whisky brand Nikka rolled out a duo of clear spirits as part of its Coffey series. The gin is loaded with botanicals ranging from angelica and orange peel to yuzu and kabosu and clocks in at a stiff 47 percent ABV. It's silky in texture and tastes decisively Japanese thanks to the perceptible peppery sansho note. Try it in a Martini with a drop of white soy sauce and a splash of dryvermouth.

Advertisement



## 2: Suntory Ao Vodka (\$50)

---

Recently, Suntory broke away from its almost century-long whisky production path to birth its first clear spirit: Ao vodka. Named after the Japanese word for “blue,” Ao is made from Japanese rice and water sourced from the country’s southern island of Kyushu. Distilled in copper pots then refined through a bamboo filtration system, this vodka is creamy and lush, with an ethereal lightness and purity reminiscent of fresh spring water. Such a delicate spirit would get lost in a cocktail, so drink it straight in a classic Martini.



## 3: The Kyoto Distillery KI NO BI Dry Gin (\$65)

---

KI NO BI was all the rage at Japanese bars this past year. Bartenders are intrigued by The Kyoto Distillery’s sophisticated cocktail-friendly rice gin. Paying homage to the distillery’s home in its namesake prefecture, distillers source most ingredients locally, using a range of botanicals including juniper, orris, and hinoki wood, plus yuzu, lemon, ginger, bamboo leaves, shiso and green tea. KI NO BI is, in fact, Kyoto’s first hometown gin, and to make the spirit, producers divide botanicals into six categories, and after each group is macerated in rice spirit, they’re separately distilled, then blended. The resulting 45.7 percent ABV spirit is delicate, with initial notes of yuzu, followed by a subtle greenness from the sansho and a hint of warmth from the ginger.



## 4: Nikka Coffey Vodka (\$45)

---

Another release from the whisky-famous Nikka folks, this vodka is made from a blend of of corn and barley, both distilled separately in the company’s famous Coffey stills, brought over from Scotland in the 1960s. The mixture is then filtered through white birch charcoal to yield an ultra-smooth, clean-drinking vodka.



## 5: Suntory Roku Gin (\$80)

---

Suntory named its first gin Roku, which means “six” in Japanese, the number of Japanese ingredients used to flavor this 43 percent ABV spirit. Those are added to eight more common gin botanicals. Think sakura (cherry blossom) flower, sakura leaf, yuzu peel, green tea and sansho, plus more usual suspects like juniper berry, cinnamon and cardamom seed. The result is a smooth, aromatic gin imbued with complex layers of bright yuzu and spicy sansho. Roku has been available in Japan since last summer, but Suntory is slowly releasing it throughout Asia and Europe. So for now, you’ll have to score a bottle [online](#).

**Series & Type:** [Products](#)

Appears in [8 Collections](#)

[More From This Series](#)

---