

Aomori 青森

“blue forest”

Named after the year-round blue (“green”) forests that were a landmark for ships arriving into Aomori port

Located at 41 degrees latitude, on the north tip of Japan’s main island, Honshū, Aomori is famous for the island’s largest caldera lake (Lake Towada), the largest apple cultivation (on the Tsugaru Plain) and the cherry blossom around Hirosaki Castle. It was here, in Sannai-Murayama, on the outskirts of Aomori City, that ancient Jōmon remains have indicated the intentional fermentation of Yamabudō to make wine 5–6,000 years ago. It is also here, where Jesus Christ is believed, by some, to have been finally buried. His grave is now a tourist attraction (I’ll let the reader Google this).

Aomori’s vineyards are found in three main areas:

- The northern Shimokita Peninsula (San Mamoru Winery), where the breezes help reduce humidity, snowfall is rarely more than one metre and the sun’s reflection off Mutsu Bay assists with grape ripening.
- Hachinohe City on the east coast
- Around the Tsugaru Plain at the foot of Mount Iwaki and Hirosaki City, one of the largest plains in Japan. “Tsugaru” (as a place name) appears on the labels of several producers’ wines, indicating the source of the grapes. Confusingly, there is also a “Tsugaru Winery”.

Aomori’s climate is generally continental, and the soils are volcanic with an iron-rich clay loam up to two metres deep.

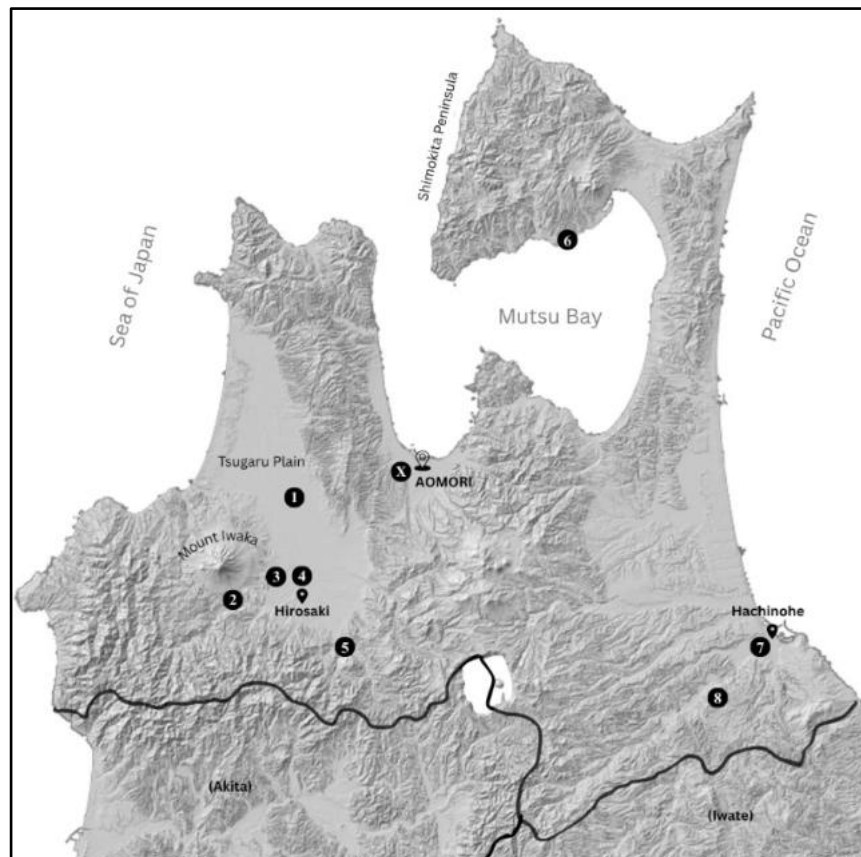
The first winery, San Mamoru, opened in 2006, followed by restaurant winery Fattoria da Sasino in 2010 after Hirosaki was granted a “House Wine Special Zone” (on the basis that such a system existed for the small-scale production of *doboroku*, unfiltered sake). In 2016, San Mamoru opened their second winery in south Tsugaru, followed by Sawauchi Jozo urban winery and Tsugaru Winery (2017), Hachinohe Winery (2019) and Hirosaki Craft Wines (2023).

There were officially nine wine production facilities in 2023, not all of which are actively producing. Two Aomori wineries have been rated three stars on JWA, including Fattoria da Sasino, one of the two restaurants to produce their own wine (the other being Sawauchi Jozo).

Aomori grows 80% of Japan’s Steuben, with most cultivated on VSP. There is also one rare grape crossing grown and vinified only in Aomori: Kita no Yume.

45,000 litres of wine were produced in 2023, 0.1% of Japan’s total wine (of which 43,000 was “Japanese Wine”, 0.3% of total Japanese Wine).

Map of Aomori Wineries



1. Tsugaru Winery
2. Shirakami Winery
3. Hirosaki Craft Wines
4. Fattoria da Sasino (★★★)
5. San Mamoru Winery (★★★)
6. San Mamoru Shimokita Winery
7. Sawauchi Jozo
8. Hachinohe Winery

Other

- Matsufuku Wine
- X Sannai-Murayama

Producer Profiles

Fattoria da Sasino (★★★)



A fine-dining Italian osteria producing its own wines

Founded in 2010 by chef Michiaki Sasamori, who worked for two and a half years in Michelin-starred restaurants in Italy. Returning to his hometown of Hirosaki, he opened the fine dining Osteria Enoteca da Sasino in 2003, where he also makes award-winning Jersey cow's milk Mozzarella and Burrata.

In 2006, he planted 1.4 ha of Italian grape varieties, mainly Nebbiolo with some Malvasia and Barbera, and convinced the city authorities to grant a "House Wine Special Zone" to allow him to produce small quantities of wine as a restaurant. This was approved in 2010, the year of his first vintage. Without any other wineries in the Hirosaki region, Sasamori-san learned viticulture and winemaking from scratch via trial and error.

His vineyard has since increased to 3.2 ha with the focus on Chardonnay, Malvasia, Merlot and Nebbiolo. 2021 saw the first release of his single-varietal Barbera, and recently, he has participated in international competitions with his traditional-method sparkling and "Scorpiione" (Nebbiolo / Merlot blend). His Nebbiolo is perhaps the best in Japan, comparable to lighter Italian styles.

Total annual production (including as négociant) is 30-40,000 bottles. There are plans to open the winery to visits and sparkling disgorgement experiences.

🌐 dasasino.com

FB @OsteriaEnotecaDaSasino IG @dasasino

🕒 Lunch & dinner (¥13,000-31,000)

¥3,500 - 9,000

Hachinohe Winery



A local winery that opened in 2019, producing still and sparkling wine from Merlot, Steuben and labrusca grapes and some cider. The winery operates the wine bar "Vintas" in Hachinohe town centre in the Yurinoki Building.

🌐 h-winery.com

FB @hachinohewinerynew IG @hachinohewinery

Winery: 🕒 Sat-Sun 10:00-16:00 ▶ store, tours

Wine bar: 🕒 Mon-Sat 15:00-20:00 ▶ sales, wines by glass

¥1,500 - 2,000

Hirosaki Craft Wines

Hiroki Nagauchi retired from a major alcohol manufacturer in 2020, trained at Arc-en-Vigne (Nagano) and planted a 0.9 ha vineyard in his hometown of Hirosaki in 2021. In 2023, he opened a small winery with a local apple grower and cider producer.

Hirosaki Craft Wines produces minimum intervention rosé, Blanc de Noir and pét-nat from Steuben under the brand "Primo Passo". The labels feature the footprint of his pet cat.

The winery is not currently open to the public, but the wines are available from local stores, online and natural wine fairs.

🌐 hirosaki-jozo.hp.peraichi.com IG @hirosaki_craft_wines

¥3,500

Matsufuku Wine

A wine store with a 0.2 ha vineyard managed by Kei Hattori, producing a pétillant Campbell Early from Aomori and bought-in Kōshū from Yamagata and Katsunuma. These are minimal-intervention, natural wines available via their online store.

🌐 matsufuku.net IG @matsufukuwine1891

¥3,500 - 4,500

Sawauchi Jozo



A local chef making natural wines.

Established in 2017 by chef Akihiro Sawauchi, producing a range of red, white and sparkling natural wines and cider to pair with his dishes. Both vinifera and labrusca are used, sourced from Aomori and Yamagata Prefectures. The wines can be found at Sawauchi's restaurants and wine fairs (including Raw Wine).

🌐 sawauchi.info

IG @sawauchi.jozo

Shirakami Winery

Cider, mead and natural wine, produced at the village road station *Tsugaru Shirakami*, selling local produce and snacks. Shirakami's range of wines includes still and pétillant from Delaware, Niagara, Pione and Steuben.

🌐 garutsu.base.shop

IG @shirakami.wine.honey IG @garutsu1130

🕒 Daily 11:00-15:00

▶ sales, snacks

¥2,000 - 3,000

Sun Mamoru Winery (★★★)



Striving to recreate premium Burgundy in Japan

San Mamoru operates two wineries in Aomori. The original Shimokita San Mamoru Winery in Mutsu City on the Shimokita Peninsula was established in 2006 with 12 ha of vines planted in 1998 across 20 small fields. Pinot Noir (40% of the plantings), Chardonnay, Kerner, Reichensteiner, Schönburger and Steuben were determined to be suitable for the Shimokita climate and soil. San Mamoru also co-developed a unique hybrid grape with Yamanashi's Shimura Grape Institute; *Kita no Yume* (Gyōja no Mizu x Pinot Noir). The grape was named after their founder and president, Kitamura, and to date, they are the only winery to cultivate and produce wine from it.

Vines are grown on VSP as the constant breeze keeps humidity low, and snowfall is rarely over one metre. The soil is a mix of volcanic and deep red clay (two metres deep), requiring extra efforts to increase drainage.

The winery has the capacity to produce 168,000 bottles annually and to date has released 50 wines. Their premium wine is the "Shimokita Ryo" available as "Selection" and "Classic". "Selection" is a New World style aged in American oak, while the "Classic" is an Old World style aged in French oak that they hope will become the Romanée-Conti of Japan. Their wider range includes "Sara" (Schönburger / Kerner blend), "Kanon" (Reichensteiner), still white and traditional sparkling with a Prosecco

profile. They have also dabbled in natural wines with a premium natural 2022 Pinot Noir (7,000 bottles due to be released in 2025) and an orange Schönburger. Their “Party Wine” range is made from imported Chilean grapes.

The original intention for the Shimokita winery was to be part of a resort; however, this coincided with the 1997 financial crash, so plans were put on hold. In 2016, their second winery was built in a renovated indoor swimming pool in their Aomori Winery Hotel. This winery uses only bought-in grapes (mainly Steuben) and Aomori apples for cider production. The wines are sometimes listed as “Tsugaru Wine” in reference to the location of the winery in Minami (south) Tsugaru, not to be confused with “Tsugaru Winery” below.

Shimokita: Kawadai-1-6 Kawauchi, Mutsu, Aomori, 039-5201

🌐 sunmamoru.com IG @shimokita.wine

Ōwani: Takinosawa 100-9, Ōwani-cho, Aomori, 038-0223

🌐 a-wineryhotel.com IG @aomoriwineryhotel

¥1,500 – 5,500

Three Farm Winery

Tsugaru Winery’s winemaker, Daiki Fujii, started his own brand in 2022, now producing it at his winery in Tsuruta town.

The initial release was zero alcohol Steuben under the label “Pure & Zero”. The winery is now cultivating Chardonnay, Gewürztraminer, Riesling and Sauvignon Blanc, with the first wines, 400 bottles of Chardonnay, to be released in 2025.

🌐 lavigne.handcrafted.jp

🌐 threefarm.studio.site IG @three_farm.aomori

Wine Stores, Bars & Restaurants

Juichigatsu Kokonoka



IG @casual_dining11.09 🕒 Tue-Sat, reservation recommended

Hanauta



IG @hanauta_aomori 🕒 Mon-Sat from 18:00

Yanagida Sake



🌐 yanagida-sake.jp FB @yanagida.sake

🕒 Wed-Mon 10:00-18:00 (Sun. to 17:00)

Tsugaru Winery



A natural winery with a focus on Steuben

Founded in 2016 as “Wano Winery” by the late Hideki Yagihashi, who loved Steuben and natural wines. It was renamed “Tsugaru Winery” by Daiki Fujii, who took over in 2023.

Fujii-san has worked in wineries in Yamanashi, Nagano and internationally in six countries before working in grape cultivation in Hokkaidō, joining Wano Winery in 2022.

90% of the winery’s 1.3 ha is Steuben, with some Campbell Early, Niagara, Chardonnay, Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc & Pinot Noir. No herbicides are used, only organic fertilisers and minimal pesticides.

Wines are naturally fermented, with a total of 10,000 bottles produced annually, 30% from bought-in grapes and apples.

Their range includes red, white, rosé, pét-nat and a unique sweet wine that’s a blend of sweet passito (dried for two months) and barrel-aged ripasso Steuben.

🌐 tsugaru-winery.com

FB @wano.winery.tsuruta IG @tsugaru_winery

🕒 Tue-Sun 10:00-17:00 📍 snacks, sales, tastings. ENG

¥1,500 – 4,500



A noteworthy Nebbiolo

Events

Natural & Craft Hirosaki

IG @natural_and_craft_in_hirosaki

May

Aomori Vinsankai (Aomori City)

IG @aomori_vinsankai

July

Hachinohe Wine Fes

June-July

Last held in 2023.

🌐 winefes8.info FB @8winefestival

Any ad hoc and individual winery events will be advertised on www.love-wine.jp/wineevent/Aomori/

Enjoyed this sample? Discover the full book

Thank you for reading this short preview chapter of Japanese Wine.
If you enjoyed what you've read, the full book is available here:

www.winefogg.com/Japanese-Wine

You'll find more in-depth chapters, insights and stories waiting for you.

