

# Embracing the true-to-nature taste at Kurambon Winery

Come visit Kurambon, a winery that holds both people and nature dear.



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Yamanashi Prefecture, Japan's wine capital is home to 82 wineries, more wineries than anywhere else in the country. From large wineries with national recognition to small wineries adored by enthusiasts the reason is clear as to why Yamanashi's Governor proclaimed this Wine Prefecture just last August. Among this mass of wineries, I embarked on a journey out to one just a half an hour east of Kofu. A relatively small, yet magical place named Kurambon located in the winery rich area of Katsunuma known to locals as home to the Japanese grape. The word Kurambon rings nostalgic to me. It is said to be derived from the folktale "Yamanashi" by legendary Japanese storyteller Kenji Miyazawa. The people working at Kurambon Winery carry with them a deep sense of respect for Miyazawa's tale that told a moving story of coexistence between humans and nature, the limits of science, and the importance of compassion for others. Not only has it become the source of their winery name, but his ideologies are engraved into their company philosophy.



## 1. The history of Kurambon

Kurambon first opened the doors of its cellars more than 100 years ago, when in 1913 its founder Chosaku, began to brew wine with his own grapes. Later, in 1932 he joined forces with local grape farmers and began the "Tanaka Winery Union," nearly 30 years later Chosaku acquired all rights to the union and established the "Yamanashi Winery Ltd." And in 2013 at the 100th anniversary of the wineries founding, they dedicated themselves to a policy of using only Japanese grapes. Then the following year, the company re-emerged under their current name Kurambon.

Yamanashi's wine industry is truly survival of the fittest, and while it's often said that 10 years are enough to make or break a company, it is a true testament to Kurambon's quality, craftsmanship, and spirit that it has prospered for over a century.

## 2. Facilities of Kurambon

Kurambon Winery host a vineyard, a brewery, and a wine shop. The entire production process from grape harvesting to sale all happen within Kurambon's walls.

### Vineyard

Within a one-minute walk from the winery, you can reach the 2 hectares of Kurambon's vineyard. Here you can see where the vine cultivation magic of Kurambon wine happens, while enjoying the ephemeral scenery it creates during harvest season. The main varieties of Kurambon wine are Koshu, Chardonnay, and Muscat Bailey A.

### Main house

The main house is a traditional Japanese architectural beauty with more than 130 years of history. To fans of the winery its traditional design reminiscent of the olden days, has become the symbol of Kurambon Winery and was even the model for the brands logo.

The main building has a rest space, a wine library, and a tasting room. At the wine library, you are invited to freely read wine literature introducing the history of winemaking, and at the tasting room you can enjoy wine tasting or even purchase a bottle to-go at their in house shop.

### Wine Cellar

As soon as you enter the wine cellar, the deep aroma of wine excites your nose as it flows deep into your lungs. Here, it almost seems that time flows slowly: French oak barrels are lined up carefully while the wine ages away. Further in to the basement of the building, which was originally used as a storage for grapes, Kurambon's specialty wine is aged in a cool and mild atmosphere.

Here, individual customers can buy and keep their wine for up to ten years. Unfortunately, at this moment the wine cellar is full, so they don't offer this service at the moment. It's an interesting thought that I could store my own bottle of wine here in such a perfect environment, maybe I'll check back in a couple of years for an opening.

## 3. Production and Sales at Kurambon

### Wine production

It is said that Kurambon Wine aims to make wine that have a truer to nature taste. Instead of wine being something forced into creation by humans and machines the craftsmen here embrace the idea of only assisting the grapes along their journey. Any damaged grapes are thoroughly removed and while it rests in the oak barrel it takes in the gentle oak flavor. There is ferments slowly, in the best natural environment and to protect its natural taste filtration is kept to a minimal. Furthermore, it is said that



winemaking using self-cultivated grapes that fermented together with the grape skin brings out a unique and natural taste. This is thanks to native yeast on the grape skin and the distinct characteristics of the soil.

Although about 30% of Kurambon's grapes are cultivated in their own vineyards a good 70% is outsourced to local grape farmers. In total they produce around 100,000 bottles of wine yearly. Although at the home vineyard they focus on only 3 varieties their entire variety extends to 20 different types, ranging from sweet to dry wines and even sparkling.

### **Wine sales**

Kurambon's vast variety of wines is sold not only in Japan but also exported overseas. In the case of domestic sales, it is open at major tourist spots in Yamanashi such as Katsunuma Budou no Oka, souvenir shops, famous restaurants, etc. You can also order directly via the internet or telephone. For those who would like to acquire a bottle while overseas, they currently export to countries such as England, France, and Germany, among others.

To its fans, the Kurambon wine feels much more intimate than the large winery brands, and that warm welcoming feeling it gives is probably part of the reason why people enjoy it so much. Among the diverse products of Kurambon, the most popular products are the slightly sweet Adiron and Niagara wines brewed in Koshu.

## **4. Let's enjoy Kurambon**

A wine tour is available at Kurambon Winery. The tour lasts about 30 to 40 minutes, and it gives you a chance to visit the vineyards, the main house, the wine cellar, and a added wine-tasting experience in the end. This tour is available on Mondays, Fridays, Saturdays, and Sunday, and can be held for up to 15 guests on a first-come-first-served basis with telephone reservation. As compared to other wineries the price of Kurambon's tour is quite inexpensive at, 500 yen per person and is certainly worth every yen.

Of course, the main part of the tour is tasting. You can drink many varieties of wine bursting full of flavor for just 500 yen. However, they enforce a strict zero tolerance policy for drinking and driving. Another unique policy at

Kurambon is that for those who purchase a wine after the tour, the price of your tour is fully reimbursed. In addition to winery tours, they also hold grape harvesting experiences once a year. To secure your spot - it is necessary to be at the right time and to have a bit of luck. See Kurambon's homepage for details.

## **5. The future of Kurambon**

At Kurambon there is a total of only four staff members. It is only a testament to the hard work and brilliance of those four staff members that the winery runs so well with so few staff members.

The person who leads Kurambon wine now is Takahiko Nozawa a young man in his forties and descendant of Chosaku, who studied grape cultivation and brewing in France. In particular, when studying in France, he was impressed by the natural style of wines produced in the Southwest of France, and in 2007 he switched his grape cultivation process to all-natural and organic farming. Filled with passion and obsession for preserving tradition, he is the true young winemaker of this era.

"We will continue to make true-to-nature wines using grapes cultivated by natural farming," said Nozawa, full of pride. "We will work hard to make Kurambon into a brand loved more and more by customers and eventually be recognized as some of the best of the best." However, to keep the highest quality wine to customers who love Kurambon, Nozawa does not wish to expand the winery size. To him, it is not just a store or a company to make money, but a craft he wishes to hone and an ideology of coexistence with nature and natural processes that he wishes to share with the world.

Within each bottle of Kurambon wine is packed a warm and relaxed sense of freedom. The walls of its winery perhaps feel small yet it is a journey that leaves its guests feeling fulfilled. Here is a winery that welcomes you like a family with a smile always and a relaxing and charming environment. I for one hope to see this winery grow, mastering the world of Japanese wine and lasting 200, 300, and even 1000 years into the future. On your way through Yamanashi, how about a glass at Kurambon today? 