

[India] Indian staff tastes Japanese RTD Lemon Sour - What is the taste preferred by Indians?

The lemon sour market has been booming in Japan over the past few years, and it is said that about half of the RTD market is lemon-flavored. We asked our Indian staff what they thought of the Japanese lemon sour, and based on the results of a round-table discussion on the taste of lemon sour favored by Indians, we will examine what kind of lemon sour tastes are preferred by Indians.

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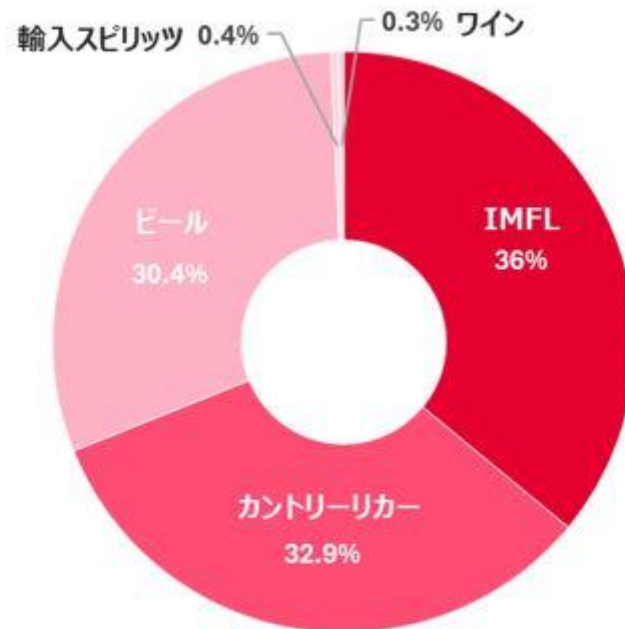
[\[India\] Indian staff tastes Japanese RTD Lemon Sour - What is the taste preferred by Indians? Part 2](#)

Alcoholic Beverages Market in India

Before we get into the roundtable discussion, I would like to give an overview of the alcohol market in India. India is one of the fastest growing countries in the alcoholic beverage market. According to ICRIER (*1), the market is estimated to be worth approximately US\$52.5 billion in 2020, with a projected compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 6.8% from 2020 to 2023. And the population of alcohol consumers in India, which was 219 million in 2005, increased slightly to 293 million in 2018 (ICRIER (*1)). Meanwhile, per capita alcohol consumption doubled from 2.4 liters in 2005 to 4.9 liters in 2019 (World Bank Open Data (*2)), and this increase in per capita drinking is driving growth in the Indian alcohol market.

Figure 1 shows the composition of alcoholic beverage sales. The most consumed beverage is Indian Western liquor (IMFL: Western liquors such as whiskey, vodka, and rum bottled in India), followed by country liquor (inexpensive local liquor produced in India), and third is beer. IMFL is taxed at a lower rate than imported liquor, and foreign companies have adopted strategies such as selling both imported and IMFL.

図 1: アルコール飲料のタイプ別の構成比 (%) (合計 9 億 8,700 万ケース)



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Whiskey is very popular in India, and is enjoyed by a wide range of consumers, from locally produced whiskey to imported Scotch, Bourbon, Japanese, and other products. In 2023, the Times of India (TOI) (*4) reported that of the 367.5 million cases of alcoholic beverages sold in 2022, 242 million cases were sold by whiskey.

Alcohol Consumption Rates by Indian State

According to the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare's National Family Health Survey (2019-21) (*5), the drinking rate across India was 18.8% for men and 1.3% for women. However, because laws vary widely from state to state, drinking rates also vary widely from state to state. Of the 14 states and Union Territories listed in the report, Arunachal Pradesh in northeastern India, which has the highest drinking rate, had 52.7% for men and 24.2% for women. On the other hand, in Rajasthan, the state with the lowest drinking rate, the male drinking rate was 11% and the female rate was 0.3%. Some states, such as Gujarat,

prohibit the sale of alcoholic beverages in principle. Thus, the large differences in alcohol consumption rates among states are a characteristic of India.

Selling alcohol in India

Demand for alcoholic beverages has been growing in India in recent years, and the author visited a local liquor store and a large liquor store to see what types of alcoholic beverages are actually sold in the country.

local liquor store

Although the local liquor store did not carry many products, it was constantly crowded with people, and many of the visitors often purchased whiskey and rum in paper cartons.



(出典) インテージ撮影

large liquor store

The store was very spacious and carried numerous liquors, including wine, beer, and spirits, both domestic and foreign, as well as Japanese whiskeys such as Yamazaki and Hibiki.



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RTD alcoholic beverages sold in large stores

The picture below is an example of an RTD alcoholic beverage. Many of the products are bottle-type, and the types sold are mojitos, fruit-based cocktails such as orange and lemonade, and vodka-based cocktails. Most of them have an alcohol content of 5% or higher, and many of them have a higher alcohol content, such as 8%. However, compared to convenience stores and supermarkets in Japan, the variety and brands are limited, and the choices seem to be limited.



(出典) インテージ撮影

Intage Indian staff tasted a Japanese lemon sour. What was their reaction?

Now we would like to see the reactions of our Indian staff when they tasted Japanese lemon sours. Here are the four lemon sours we tasted this time:



1. Hyoketsu Sicilian Lemon
2. Lemon Do - Regular Lemon
3. Horoiyoi Honey Lemon
4. Strong Zero Double Lemon

Profile of participating staff

Ms. R: The only female staff member in this roundtable (in her 30s). She drinks alcohol several times a month, usually wine, Bacardi Breezers and cocktails. She usually drinks in restaurants, but not frequently, and only on celebrations or when she goes out with friends, relatives, or colleagues.

Mr. P: Male staff member in his 40s. He enjoys drinking a few times a month and drinks mostly beer. He often goes out for drinks with friends and colleagues to bars and other places. He rarely drinks alone, but often enjoys drinks in a group.

Mr. M: A male staff member in his 20s. He drinks alcohol several times a month, mostly beer. He usually drinks at restaurants and enjoys drinking with friends on weekends.

Mr. S: Male staff member in his 30s. He drinks several times a week and is the most frequent drinker among the participating staff members. He often drinks beer. He often enjoys drinking with a group of colleagues at a bar, but sometimes enjoys drinking alone.

Mr. V: A male staff member in his 20s. He drinks alcohol several times a month, mostly beer. He enjoys drinking at restaurants during parties and with meals, and at bars and other places only when he is with his colleagues/friends.

Many of this year's participants were beer drinkers. The female staff members said that they mostly drank wine and cocktail-type drinks, and rarely drank beer. Interestingly, among the participants this time, S was the only one who drank alcohol alone, and his drinking occasions were limited to restaurants, bars, and other eating establishments with friends and colleagues, or at parties. In addition, Hindu families do not inform their parents that they themselves drink alcohol, and parents do not know that their sons drink. Catholic families, on the other hand, were more tolerant of alcohol.

Hyoketsu Sicilian Lemon

The first drink we tasted was "Hyoketsu Sicilian Lemon". It is a standard drink in Japan, and is characterized by its clean and refreshing taste without being too sweet.

Ms. R: "I usually really value the taste of alcohol. For me, this one is not too sweet and not too bitter. The lemon flavor is exquisite and there is a nice aftertaste."

Mr. M: "It tastes good and has a nice mouthfeel. It's kind of like BACARDÍ LIMON. Bacardi

lemons are usually mixed with soda or something, but this one is good to drink on its own.

Mr. S: "This is a new type of drink for me. It's a little sweet and has a lemon flavor. But it doesn't feel like alcohol to me."

Mr. P: "The bitterness is not a problem. I could taste the lemon flavor. But I don't think it has alcohol in it. Whiskey, for example, has bitterness, but this one doesn't have much. I think it's well balanced."

Mr. V: "It has a nice aftertaste. It tastes like lemonade."

The impression seemed to be that the lemon flavor was effective, although not bitter and not overly sweet. However, it seemed to have a weak alcohol taste and felt like a juice.

Lemon Do - Regular Lemon

Next is "Lemon Do - Regular Lemon". The "Lemon Do - Regular Lemon" is made with plenty of lemon and has a refreshing taste that is neither too sweet nor too bitter.

Mr. P: "The lemon is very strong. I didn't think it had alcohol in it either. For me, it's 0% alcohol. I don't like it because the lemon is too strong. There was no sweetness either."

Ms. R: "This is like lemon mixed with water or soda. The first sip has a lemon taste, and it's fine up to that point, but I don't get any aftertaste at all."

Mr. S: "The lemon taste is very strong. It just feels like I'm drinking lemon as it is, and I can't really taste it. I probably won't drink it."

Mr. M: "It has a strong bitter taste. I didn't like the aroma either."

Mr. V: "I don't like it much."

This product had a much stronger lemon flavor, a stronger bitterness, less sweetness, and seemed to have a slightly stimulating taste. It also did not seem to have an alcoholic taste.

Horoiyoi Honey Lemon

The third item is "Horoiyoi Honey Lemon". This sake combines the freshness of lemon with the sweetness of honey. It was the sweetest of all the alcoholic beverages we tasted.

Ms. R: "This is a little sweeter and not as strongly lemony. It's not too acidic, not too bitter. It's not refreshing, but I think it's good, and the aroma is nice. It has a nice aftertaste. I also thought it tasted like green apple."

Mr. M: "I don't feel the taste of lemon, but more of apple. The sweetness is good and the bitterness is good. The aftertaste is fine."

Mr. P: "This tastes like apple vodka. It's like Sprite added to it. I taste both flavors. I don't think there is lemon in it. But when I first smelled it, it smelled like medicine."

Mr. S: "To me, this is a soft drink, like a mix of Appy (apple juice sold in India) and Sprite. The sweetness is not a problem. But I don't think it has alcohol in it."

Mr. V: "This is like Sprite. I think it has 0% alcohol."

The "Horoiyoi" seems to have a moderate lemon flavor. It has a strong sweetness without bitterness, making it easy to drink. As with the "Hyoketsu" and "Graduates," the alcohol taste was not felt as much, and many staff members said they could drink it as if it were a soft drink.

Strong Zero Double Lemon

Finally, the last tasting, "Strong Zero Double Lemon". It is a standard product in the "Strong Zero" series, characterized by its strong lemon taste and high alcohol content. It has the highest alcohol content and the least sweetness of all the products we tasted this time.

Ms. R: "The taste is not very good. No sweetness or saltiness. It was kind of bitter. It also has a whisky feel to it."

Mr. P: "Zero sweetness, high acidity, and strong bitterness. I don't feel any alcohol because of the strong non-alcoholic elements added to this drink."

Mr. M: "This is not good. The bitterness is quite strong. It might be good when you go out somewhere with friends. Other than that, I don't think so."

Mr. S: "I don't like this one very much. This is bitter and tasteless. Zero points."

Mr. V: "I think the alcohol content is too high."

The last "Strong Zero" had less sweetness and more bitterness. Here, one of the staff members felt the first hint of alcohol.

Package Evaluation

In this roundtable discussion, we also asked them to evaluate each of these packages.

Hyoketsu Sicilian Lemon

Ms. R : "Hyoketsu has a nice looking package and a refreshing and premium feel. I think this one matches everything, including the taste and the aroma."

Mr. M : "I don't think the color combination matches the sake itself."

Lemon Do - Regular Lemon

Ms. R : "It didn't give me any excitement when I drank it. It looked like a beer can."

Mr. S : "In terms of color alone, this is a package that looks like it's for men. Because it is a dark color. I guess Hyoketsu is for women."

Mr. M : "I didn't like this one too much because there was too much written on it. I don't think the color of the package was right."

Horoiyoi Honey Lemon

Mr. P : "I thought the Horoiyoi was perfect, with its eye-catching packaging."

Mr. M : "The package was simple and I liked it. For me, it tastes simple, the packaging is simple, and I thought it was a perfect package compared to the others."

Ms.R : "When I saw the package, I thought it looked good. It didn't give the impression that it was alcohol. I thought it was packaged like a fruit drink. It looks like something for women."

Mr. V : "I like this one, even though it looks like a soft drink."

Strong Zero Double Lemon

Mr. M : "The alcohol seemed strong. I think the package matched the strength of the alcohol."

Mr. R : "I got the impression it was a strong lemon drink."

The "Horoyoi" package was the most preferred, with a sense of simplicity, although there were some differences in the way the package was received by the respondents. On the other hand, "Lemon Do" was perceived differently by the Indian staff, with some saying that the package was too informative, "looks like a man" and "looks like beer."

What do Indians like?

Finally, although limited to the responses of our staff who participated in this survey, we will consider what factors were favored based on what was said at the roundtable discussion. Based on the overall responses to the four products tasted this time, it seems that the preferred flavor was a good balance of "subtle lemon flavor/taste" and "sweetness. And the lemon flavor itself was recognized as a positive element of refreshment. On the other hand, the fresh "lemon acidity and bitterness" of freshly squeezed lemons in Japan tended to be avoided.

In terms of alcohol content, the respondents tried a range from 3% "Horoiyoi" to 9% "Strong Zero," but none of them felt that the alcohol content was too strong. The "Horoiyoi" was described as "like a juice," and even the "Strong Zero" did not seem to have a strong alcohol taste. Compared to the strong beer commonly drunk in India, which Japanese people may perceive as having a chemical alcohol taste, Japanese chu-hai is noticeably easier to drink and may not feel like an alcoholic beverage. In the case of RTDs such as

chu-hi, it may be considered more acceptable to be able to actually feel the alcohol. In terms of packaging, simple designs seemed to be preferred over informative packages.

We hope you will refer to this article, keeping in mind that it is based on our five Indian staff members and may not apply to all Indians.

source

(*1) ICRIER (no date) DEVELOPING PRINCIPLES FOR REGULATION OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES SECTOR IN INDIA EXECUTIVE SUMMARY. ACADEMIC

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(*3) Tecknopak Advisor (2022). <https://www.abdindia.com/media/htgiv1ie/industry-report-21-jun-2022.pdf> accessed 04 03 2024.

(*4) Times of India (TOI). (2023). At 66%, whiskey leads spirits' sales:

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(*5) Ministry of Health & Family Welfare. (2021). National Family Health Survey 2019-

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