

ANOTHER SENDAI

A free journey beyond the everyday city

¥0 FREE ENGLISH

Inaugural Issue!

Each issue is a journey to another Sendai, places that are all too easy to pass by without noticing. This publication is a collaboration between the Sendai Tourist Information Desk and expert local writers.

[Edition Theme] Specialty Shops

We visited two exemplary shops that are restlessly pushing the boundaries of their specialty. Kenta Aizawa of Imosen pioneered a relaxed asa soba breakfast. Tsukasa Aoya of Sake Bar Hatago is experimenting with events to help others fall in love with sake.

imosen

Morning × Soba × Chill

On its cream-colored noren, “imosen” is printed in a bold sans-serif. With his b-boy hat, and granddad jacket with gaping sleeves, Aizawa mirrors his restaurant's trans-generational cool.

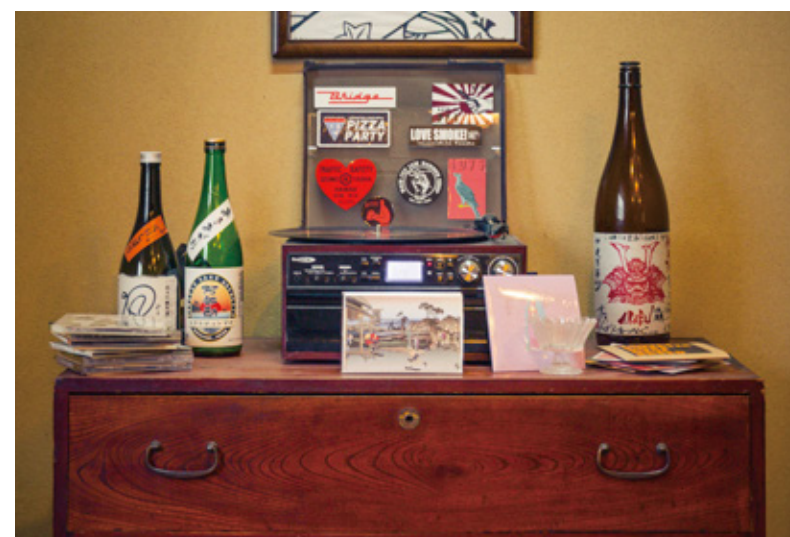
Aizawa leads us up narrow wooden stairs of what feels like an old house. Aizawa's great-grandparents founded imosen in 1927 in its present location, a quiet backstreet just outside Kokubuncho.

Aizawa took over the business from his father in 2011, making him the 4th generation to run it. In his parents' day, soba restaurants were the go-to fast food for students, but now there are many cheap standing soba restaurants, and no shortage of other contemporary fast food. What could he do with his restaurant?

“I've thought about what's possible at a soba shop, and what I can do beyond serving noodles. With morning soba, I've finally made a space where people can hang out.”

Customers come here to relax over an asa soba breakfast, which comes in both cold and hot options.

“I started asa soba because I want to bring people happiness in the morning. We start at 8:30, too late for regular businessmen, but perfect for hairdressers, clothing store staff, cafe staff and others who start work at 10 or 11. Now they drop by here first to relax. It turns out they had been looking for a place like this to eat, too. I hadn't planned it but through asa soba we've built a new community.”



I want to help young people appreciate dashi culture.

While he talks passionately about his customers, eventually the conversation turns back to soba. His soba is 90% buckwheat, made by hand early each morning. He adds some yama-imo starch which lends the noodles a slick texture. Even more so than the noodles, he is proud of the dashi broth the noodles are served with.

“I'm very into dashi. It's a part of our culture that Japanese don't understand as much anymore,” lamented Aizawa.

Aizawa remarked that at first glance people from Tokyo think the broth looks weak, with its almost clear color. But then they taste it and are surprised by how flavorful it is, with

mackerel and other ingredients lending it a distinctive flavor.

“To me, everyone who walks in here is equal. Many times with foreign customers we end up going out drinking afterwards, which I think comes as a surprise to them! Wherever you're from, if you travel a long way to Sendai I want you to have a good experience.” Aizawa continued, “If back home you happen to meet someone from Sendai, I hope you'll return the favor. That's what world peace looks like to me.”

If you have a free morning, stop by imosen for a “morning soba chill out.”



imosen

Ichibancho 4-5-11, Aoba, Sendai, Miyagi
Hours
Mon-Fri 08:30-15:00 (or earlier if soba runs out)
Sat & Holidays 08:30-14:00
Closed on Sundays
Tel: 022-223-1538
URL: <https://www.instagram.com/imosen1927>



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Hatago

Begin a Love Affair with Sake

The windows of Sake Bar Hatago look out upon the Zelkova trees that line Jozenji-dori street, far above the crowds in the nearby shopping arcade. Hatago's founder, Tsukasa Aoya, and his young staff stand behind the long counter in smart white shirts and black jackets. We've arrived just before one of their Saturday sake tastings. In front of each seat are six small wine glasses and a sheet explaining key differences between sake varieties. Aoya explained, "I started Hatago as a place for people who don't drink sake to try it. I really want to help them appreciate it, even if that means going from no knowledge to just the basics." His own love of sake began when he began to drink it while working at a friend's restaurant. At that time specialty sake bars were rare and he eventually traveled across Japan in search of different types. Today the participants are a local student accompanied by three members of her family who are visiting from Guatemala. They begin by chatting about what each likes to drink, Aoya explaining similarities between the agave spirits the father enjoys and certain types of sake. Amidst fruity new sakes and cloudy nigori sake, the father finds one he likes: a strong-flavored aged sake. As their session comes to an end, they ask to set up another tasting- this time for eight people.



We're not just serving drinks, we're also teaching about sake

Hatago is more than just a bar with 60 varieties of sake. "Each sake is from a place I've visited and has its own story," said Aoya. I try to translate and share them the best I can, as this type of business doesn't mean much to me without the stories. We're not just serving drinks, we're also teaching about sake." Hatago hosts other events, for example a sake study event for college students where they can try the latest seasonal sake and learn about it from a representative of a brewery. He's also considering hosting an affordable "sake buffet," aimed at international

residents and visitors, where they would be able to sample many different types. Spreading a love for sake is Aoya's passion. He especially wants to introduce sake to more people from abroad. "Simply put, it's a lot of fun for me," he says. Bi-monthly tastings (with an interpreter) are held through the Sendai Tourist Information Desk. He also offers special drink and food courses (reservation required) to coincide with the Pageant of Starlight illuminating the line of trees outside Hatago, beginning on December 14th.

Hatago

3rd floor, Ichibancho 4-10-11,
Aoba, Sendai, Miyagi
Hours
Mon-Thu 18:00-25:00
Fri 18:00-26:00
Sat 16:00-24:00
Closed on Sundays
Tel: 022-797-4490





