

ASSESSMENT OF NEW ZEALAND CIDERS:

SENSORY
EVALUATION,
COMPETITION
PERFORMANCE,
AND FOOD PAIRING

REPORT BY



FOR



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STRATEGIC OVERVIEW

This report is the conclusion of appraising the level of success in the Japanese market for four SKUs of New Zealand ciders via the following means:

- Focus Group Study
- Japan Cider Cup Tasting Competition
- Cider Pairing Dinner





KEY FINDINGS

- Overall, the New Zealand portfolio performed extremely well, with most comments being positive.
- Ciders were regarded as premium quality with a compelling backstory. Key remarks included “well balanced”, “enjoyable”, “easy to drink” and “aromatic”.
- In addition to the liquid, the packaging and labels were favourably received.

CULTURAL CHALLENGES

- Japan's cider market is predominantly niche and currently led by domestically produced brands.
- Japanese consumers are largely unaware of cider as an alcoholic beverage and require a high level of demonstration and storytelling.
- Imported brands are often seen as novelty; creating a long-term footprint in Japan requires time, commitment, and an on-the-ground support system to advocate the product.



SENSORY EVALUATION

- A blind tasting focus group sensory evaluation was conducted late February.
- 3 SKUs were evaluated:
 - Aporo Secco
 - Apple Blossom
 - Vanilla Blossom
- 10 persons participated:
 - 5 restaurant/pub owners
 - 3 importers
 - 2 American Cider Association Certified Cider Guides™



RATING: 93/100

(Aroma, Flavour, Mouthfeel, Structure, Balance)

CONSENSUS:

"Well balanced", "Delightful mouthfeel", "Bright and refreshing"



RATING: 95/100

(Aroma, Flavour, Mouthfeel, Structure, Balance)

CONSENSUS:

"Subtle yet complex", "Great deep apple taste", "Marvelous fruit undertones"



RATING: 90/100

(Aroma, Flavour, Mouthfeel, Structure, Balance)

CONSENSUS:

"Lovely aromas", "Would love this with food", "Soft but with a slight punch"

COMPETTTON PERFORMANCE

■ 3 SKUs were entered into Japan Cider Cup 2026:

- Aporo Secco
- Apple Blossom
- Vanilla Blossom

■ Competed against:

- 20 other ciders in the same category
- 6 other countries outside Japan

■ Each entry assessed and scored by:

- 15-20 individual judges
- Professional members of the food/drinks industry
- General Public





- Exceptionally strong Silver Medalist, points scored not too far from Gold.
- Judges were wowed by its mouthfeel, refreshing taste, and mild acidity.
- Ranked very high in the areas of balance and drink enjoyment.



- Very solid Gold Medalist, ranked in the top tier of all Gold Medals awarded.
- Judges commented positively on its complexity and depth of character.
- Some judges suggested a slightly higher carbonation would have increased their enjoyment.



- Very strong Bronze Medalist, points scored not too far from Silver.
- Many judges remarked how they thought this would pair perfectly with food.
- Some judges found the cider a bit "too much" for their "simple palate".



FOOD PAIRING

- An intimate cider and food pairing event was held at esteemed New Zealand restaurant Rangitoto in Tokyo early June.
- 4 SKUs were showcased:
 - Aporo Secco
 - Apple Blossom
 - Pure Blush
 - Blushing Pomme
- 12 persons participated:
 - 3 importers of New Zealand alcoholic beverages
 - 2 American Cider Association Certified Cider Guides™
 - 3 Cider enthusiasts

RESULTS & INTERPRETATION

- OVERALL PROFILE
- ALIGNMENT WITH FOOD
- LABEL & PACKAGING





OVERALL PROFILE

- New Zealand ciders, like other New Zealand products, offer premium quality, craftsmanship, and sophistication.
- The portfolio's origin story was seen as authentic and convincing, intriguing, and reason to explore the brand.
- The ciders were complex but accessible with interesting variety between SKUs. They were also viewed as easy and enjoyable to drink.
- Least positive comments had more to do with personal preferences and cultural perceptions than the ciders themselves.
- Participants were eager to learn more about the apple behind the ciders and looking forward to next releases.

ALIGNMENT WITH FOOD

Canapés

- Unanimously agreed: cider portfolio complimented excellently with the diverse range of foods presented.
- High degree of surprise: to discover ciders paired well with marinated fish, particularly *kohada* – a fish associated with sake.
- The evening's event: opened participants eyes (and taste buds) to the extent of how cider can be enjoyed.





LABEL & PACKAGING

- Visual appeal resonated notably with participants, echoing similar reactions to our previous focus group study.
- Labels are “clean” and “clearly indicate what’s inside the bottle”. In the case of Apple Blossom and Pure Blush, their visual presentation also conveyed sophistication. The most outstanding response was with Blushing Pomme; participants reacted immediately to the “cute, simple and effective” illustrative style - keeping in line with Japan’s *kawaii* (cute) aesthetic.
- On-premise owners remarked that the bottles stood out on their own against other (wine) offerings and easy to catch the eye and interest of consumers.

A photograph of a dark wooden fence with colorful, three-dimensional letters. The top row of letters spells 'RANGITOTO' in light blue, yellow, and red. The bottom row of letters spells 'TOKYO' in blue and light blue. The letters are mounted on the fence with small screws. A semi-transparent white banner is overlaid at the bottom of the image.

RANGITOTO TOKYO

SUMMARY

- There is clear potential for New Zealand cider success in the Japanese market.
- The ciders were met with enthusiasm and acclaim in groups ranging from those with little or no knowledge or experience with cider to seasoned industry professionals.
- All ciders performed outstandingly in competition under blind taste conditions.



THE FUTURE

- **As previously stated, there is clear potential for New Zealand cider success in the Japanese market based on the following strengths:**
 - **Built-in cultural appreciation for New Zealand and New Zealand goods**
 - **Brand and product are seen as premium, artisanal, with a unique origin story**
 - **Wide variety of product with the continual addition of new or seasonal SKUs**

MOVING FORWARD

Options to examine:

- Collaboration with Japanese cidemakers and orchardists
- Showcasing products at Japan Cider Cup 2027 (May 29)
- Partnering with importer mid-to-long term and deeply exploring Japanese market





OBSTACLES

Difficulties to consider:

- Cider is still a new, developing sector in Japan and is widely misunderstood by consumers.
- There is a current surge in domestic ciders being produced creating a surplus of choice in minimal market space.
- The number of importers willing to add cider to their portfolios has decreased in recent years. This is partly due to the weak yen, but also because of the struggles selling cider. Likewise, there are presently limited channels to sell to. New opportunities must be created.



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