

Inaugural winner of the Sake Sommelier of the Year announced



Sake Sommelier of the Year:Rajan Rengasamy

The first ever Sake Sommelier of the Year competition to be held outside Japan has been won by **Rajan Rengasamy** of wine supplier Spinneys, based in the UAE.

Barry McCaughley of London's Chotto Matte and Sam Tse of the Hong Kong Wine Academy were runners-up, following the semi final and final held at London's Westbury Hotel yesterday [11 November 2013]. The competition was organised by the Academy of Food & Wine Service, together with the Sake Sommelier Association.

Said Xavier Chapelou, director of the London-based Sake Sommelier Association: "Although the standard of competitors was exceedingly high, Rajan's knowledge and skill made him stand out as a top class sake sommelier. He was cool under pressure and was able to clearly demonstrate his service skills and sake knowledge.

"We are delighted with the response we have had in the first year of this competition ? it's a great start, and a fantastic boost to the skills of sake sommeliers all over the world."

Rajan receives a fully-funded trip to Kyoto and Hyogo in Japan to take the five-day Sake Sommelier Association Advanced Sake Sommelier course. On receiving his award, Rajan commented: "Winning the competition is a huge sense of relief, but I am also very proud. Even though I was the winner, I still feel that I can learn so much more about sake."

The launch of the competition, sponsored by Gekkeikan, one of the world's oldest and finest sake producers, was prompted by the huge growth in the number of varieties of sake available outside Japan and the fact the skills of the sake sommelier are becoming more prominent. The Sake Sommelier of the Year is designed to raise awareness of sake and sake sommeliers within the industry and amongst the general public and to promote sake education across the world.

Some 50 sake sommeliers entered the competition, whittled down to five semi-finalists based on a written questionnaire and essay questions. Of the five, three were then chosen to go through to the grand final in front of a live audience, with tasks including a food pairing test, a service task and a blind tasting, all using traditional Japanese crockery.

The Sake Sommelier Association (SSA) is the first and only organisation to offer sake education in the UK. Candidates passing the Introductory Sake Professional and Certified Sake Sommelier become sake sommeliers, a certificate accredited by the SSA.

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EDITOR'S NOTES

About the competition

Some 50 sommeliers from Europe, Asia and the Middle East entered the competition, completing an initial questionnaire and two essay-based questions. The five top-scoring sommeliers were then invited to the semi final, from which three were chosen to go through to the grand final, both of which were held on 11 November 2013 at London's Westbury Hotel.

The five semi-finalists were:

Jonathan Beagle (Yashin Sushi and Bar, London W8)

Barry McCaughley (Chotto Matte, London W1)

Jean-Louis Naveilhan (Sumosan, London W1)

Rajan Rengasamy (Spinneys, UAE)

Sam Tse (Hong Kong Wine Academy, Hong Kong)

About the Sake Sommelier Association

The Sake Sommelier Association (SSA), is the first organisation in the UK to offer sake education outside of Japan. The organisation is based in London, but provides Sake sommelier certification to sommeliers all over the world.

Candidates passing the Introductory Sake Sommelier and Certified Sake Sommelier will become a sake sommelier (this certificate is accredited by the SSA).

The course draws amateur sake lovers as well as professionals from many European countries.

www.sakesommelierassociation.com