Japan's Pinot Noir: What Comes Next

The Challenge of a New Terroir in the Age of Climate Change

JAPAN PINOT NOIR × THE NEXT FRONTIER



INTRODUCTION

Why Japan's Pinot Noir, Why Now

Pinot Noir is the world's most celebrated red wine grape, native to Burgundy, France. Notoriously difficult to grow — sometimes called the “temperamental lady” — its suitable ground in Japan is now expanding beyond Hokkaido to regions across the country.



A Noble Variety, World-Renowned

Led by Burgundy, it is the signature red grape behind some of the world's most expensive wines.



Thrives Only in Cool Climates

Its thin skin and early ripening make it vulnerable to heat and humidity, limiting where it can be grown worldwide.



Trials Are Spreading Across Japan

Climate change is opening the door beyond Hokkaido, with new trials now underway in Nagano, Yamagata, Iwate, and beyond.

ABOUT THE VARIETY

The Character of the Pinot Noir Grape

Because it is so demanding to grow, differences in climate and soil come through directly in the glass — a variety that truly mirrors its terroir.

Thin Skin

Low in pigment and tannin, it yields delicate, elegant wines — but is also vulnerable to disease.

Prefers a Cool Climate

When growing-season temperatures run too high, acidity fades and the wine can turn unremarkable.

Early Ripening

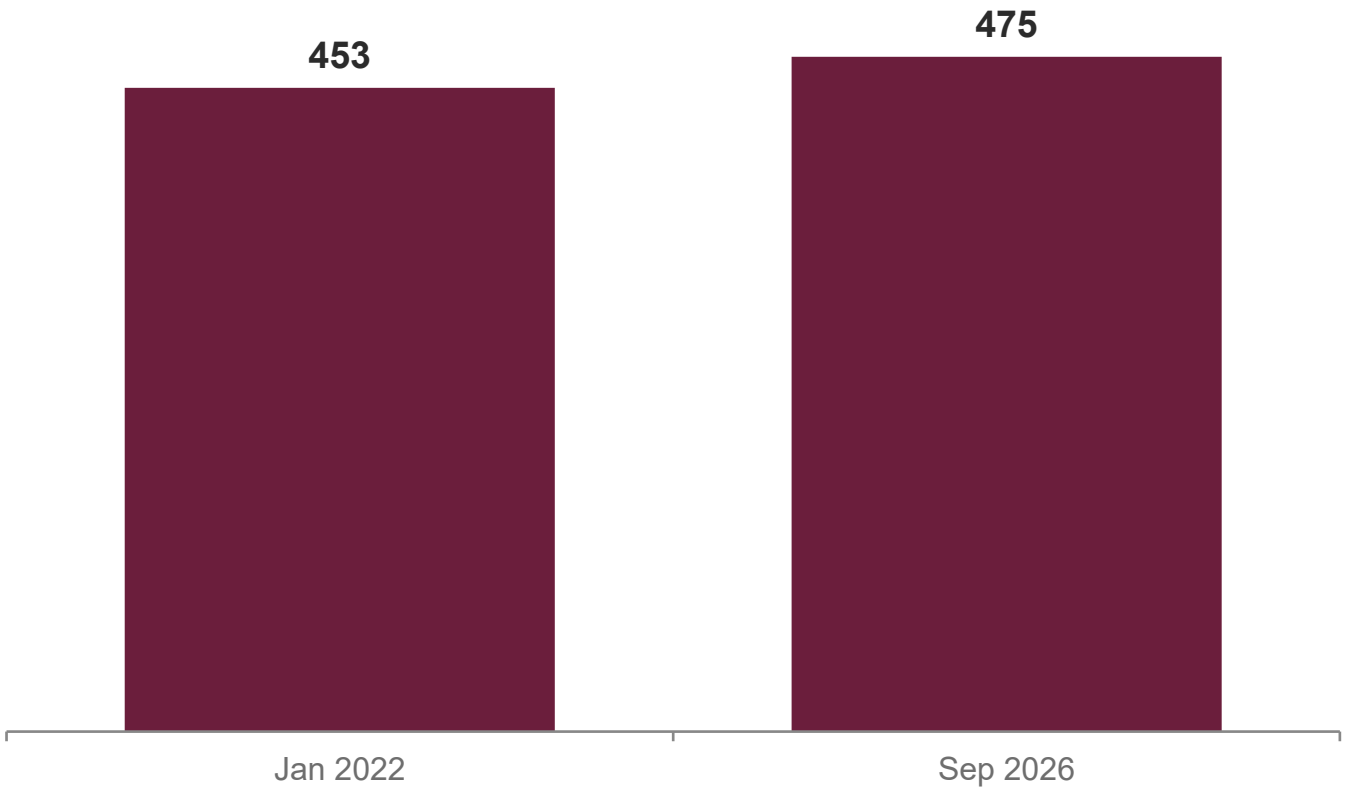
Its early harvest leaves it exposed to autumn rains and typhoons.

A Mirror of Terroir

Differences in soil and climate come through directly in the glass, giving each growing region its own distinct character.

MOMENTUM

Japan's Wine Industry Keeps Expanding



475

Wineries nationwide,
as of September 2026

Domestic wine consumption is also up about 1.3x over the past decade

GLOBAL TREND

Cool-Climate Regions Are Rising Worldwide, Too

Climate change is a global phenomenon. Cool lands once dismissed as “unsuitable” are now emerging as celebrated new wine regions — and Japan is part of this worldwide shift.

England

Riding the benefits of warming, English sparkling wine has grown into a globally acclaimed category.

Champagne (France)

A prestige cuvée once released only once every few years was bottled every single year from 2002 to 2009.

Japan

Following Hokkaido's lead, cool-climate land in Nagano, Tohoku, and beyond is emerging as new ground for Pinot Noir.

THE SCIENCE

The Turning Point: 1998 — The Science Behind the Climate Shift

Research by Japan's National Agriculture and Food Research Organization (NARO) has shown that a climate shift occurred across northern Japan around 1998. The zone where Pinot Noir thrives — an April–October average of 14°C or higher — has been steadily expanding within Hokkaido ever since.

1998

The year the climate shift was confirmed

14°C+

The benchmark growing temperature for Pinot Noir

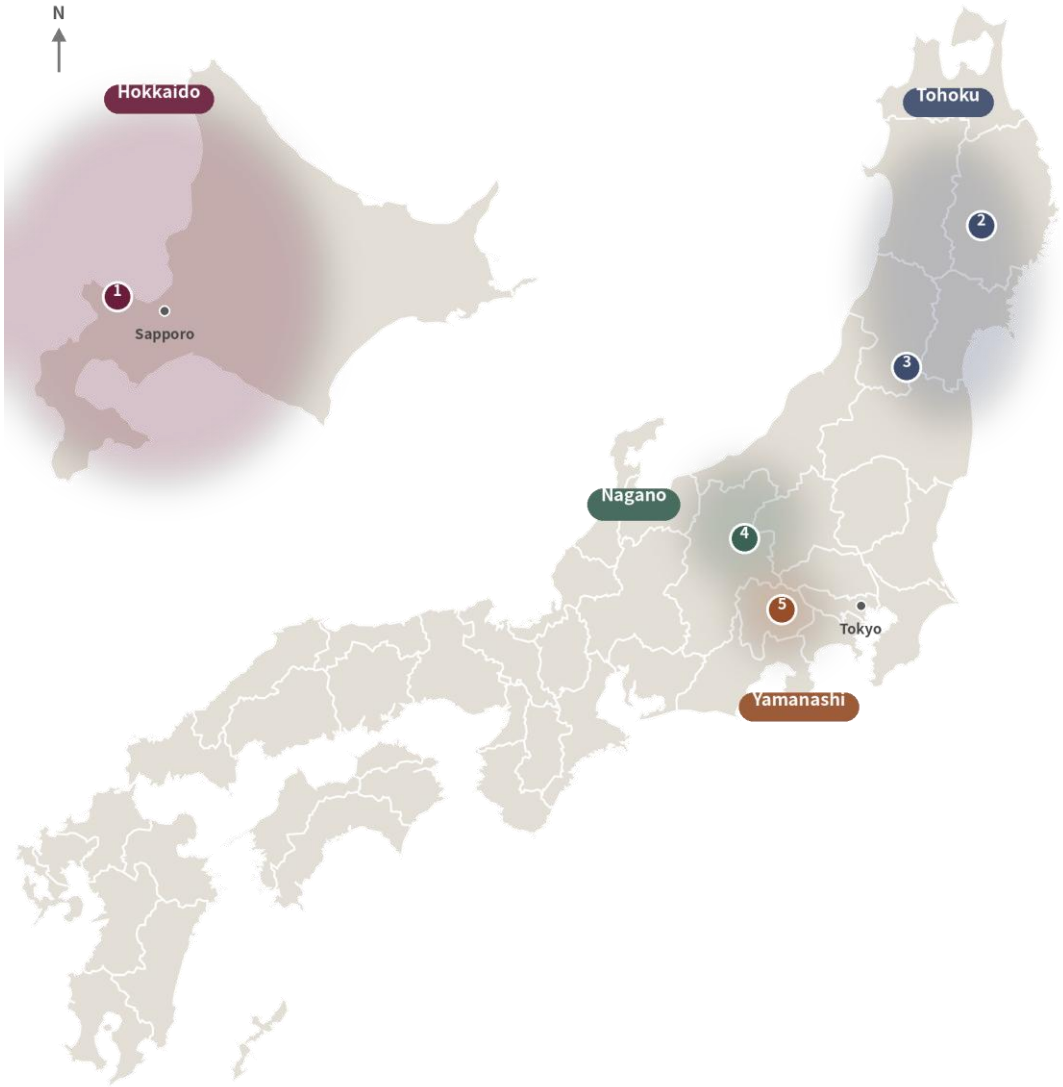
10 → 33

Wineries in Hokkaido (before 1999 → 2017)

Source: NARO Cold-Region Climate Change Group, “Climate Change Makes Premium Wine Grape 'Pinot Noir' Viable in Hokkaido's Leading Growing Areas” (2017)

MAP

Japan's Pinot Noir Frontier



Hokkaido

1. Yoichi

Tohoku

2. Hanamaki (Iwate)
3. Takahata (Yamagata)

Nagano

4. Tomi & Komoro (Chikuma River Valley)

Yamanashi

5. Koshu-Katsunuma

REGION SPOTLIGHT

Hokkaido — A Pioneer's Presence

Centered on the Shiribeshi region, Hokkaido was the first in Japan to take on Pinot Noir cultivation in earnest. Riding the tailwind of the climate shift, both planted area and winery numbers keep growing.

~2.5x

Growth in Pinot Noir planted area
(16.8 ha in 2010 → 40.1 ha in 2020)

Shiribeshi Is the Core Area

Yoichi, Niki, and Otaru are home to a dense cluster of wineries, from long-established names to new arrivals.

Recognition at Home and Abroad

Experts, including Académie du Vin, now describe the region as a wine area “whose momentum won't stop.”

The Knowledge of a First Mover

Decades of trial and error since the 1990s are now informing growing techniques in other regions, too.

REGION SPOTLIGHT

Nagano — The Fast-Growing Chikuma River Valley

In the Chikuma River Valley, centered on Tomi and Komoro, and in the foothills west of Mt. Yatsugatake, cool-climate terrain is fueling the rise of Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris as signature varieties.

71 → 100

Target for wineries statewide
(2023 actual → 10-year goal)

~1.9x

Growth in wine grape production
(3,645t in 2010 → 6,789t in 2019)

Yatsugatake foothills: This area is gaining recognition as a new home for cool-climate varieties such as Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris.

REGION SPOTLIGHT

Yamanashi — New Ambitions in the Birthplace of Japanese Wine

Yamanashi leads the nation in both winery count and production — the birthplace of Japanese wine. Alongside its traditional Koshu and Muscat Bailey A, cooler high-altitude plots are now being trialed for red wine varieties.

The Most Wineries in Japan

With 92 wineries as of 2026 — about 19% of the national total — it remains the country's largest producing region.

150+ Years of History

Winemaking here dates back to the early Meiji era, making this the true root of Japanese wine.

Adapting to a Warming Climate

As summers grow hotter, growers are exploring new variety choices in cooler, higher-elevation plots.

REGION SPOTLIGHT

Yamagata & Iwate — Tohoku's Coming Potential

The same mechanism reshaping Hokkaido is now at work in Tohoku's cool climate, expanding the land suited to Pinot Noir. New entrants keep arriving, and the region is climbing the national winery-count rankings.

Yamagata

#4 nationally (25 wineries)

Takahata and Kaminoyama are the main hubs, where growers are expanding red wine varieties suited to the cool basin climate.

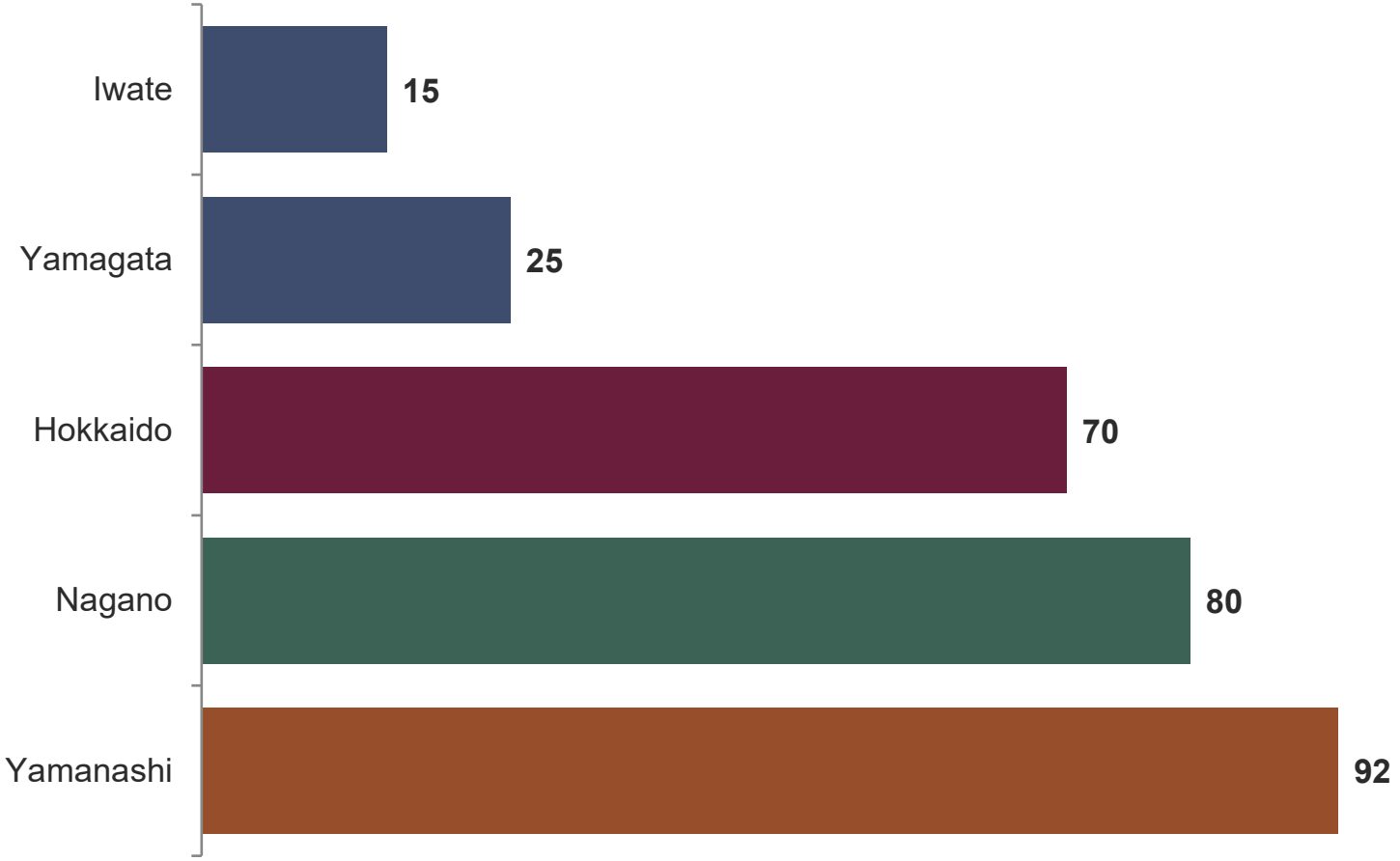
Iwate

#5 nationally (15 wineries)

Led by Hanamaki's long-established Edelwein, this fast-growing region is seeing a steady stream of new winery openings.

NATIONAL RANKING

National Winery Count Ranking (September 2026)



475

Total wineries nationwide

The top three prefectures — Yamanashi, Nagano, and Hokkaido — account for about 51% of the total, and all three are advancing Pinot Noir initiatives.

RECOGNITION

Rising International Recognition for Japanese Wine

Japanese wines are winning more medals every year at global competitions such as the Decanter World Wine Awards (DWWA) and the IWC.



Tsugaru Chardonnay & Pinot Noir Sparkling 2019

DWWA 2025: Silver / IWC 2025: Gold / IWSC 2025: Silver

One example of a domestic Pinot Noir-based sparkling wine earning high marks across multiple international competitions.



Japanese wine as a whole has also seen a rising number of DWWA medals year after year.



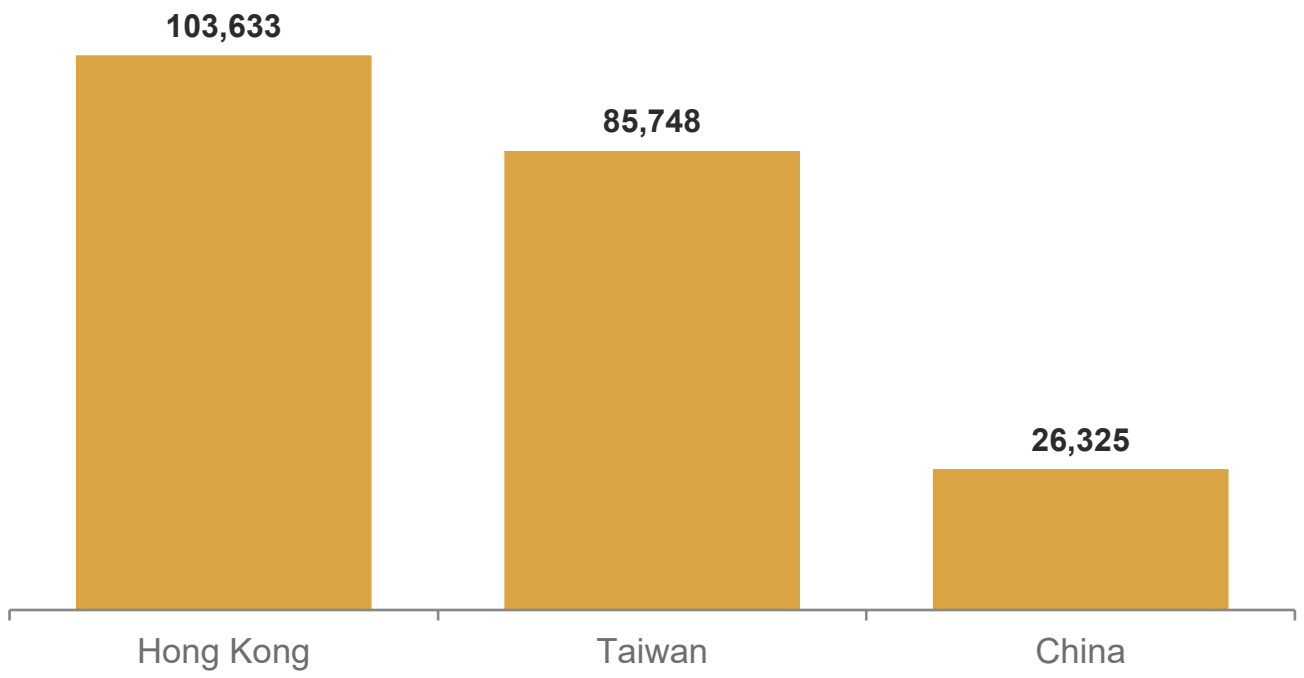
Wines from Hokkaido, too, are now described by overseas experts as having “unstoppable momentum.”

EXPORT POTENTIAL

Going Global: Another Possibility

Export volumes for Japanese wine remain small, but its reputation as a premium wine is spreading across Asia — marking it out as an area with real room to grow.

Top export destinations (by value, 2018)



Centered on Asia

Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China account for the bulk of exports, with Hong Kong in particular serving as a hub for premium-priced Japanese wine.

Export volume itself remains limited — leaving substantial room to grow.

CHALLENGES

Alongside the Promise, Real Challenges



Disease Risk from Humidity and Rainy Season

Unlike Europe's leading regions, Japan's growing season brings heavy rainfall, raising the risk of botrytis and other diseases.



A Shortage of Labor and Successors

As small-scale growers age, securing the workforce to sustain cultivation has become a nationwide challenge.



Limited Land and High Costs

Flat, cool, high-quality farmland is scarce, raising the barrier for new entrants.



The Risk of Extreme Weather

Typhoons and sudden heat waves add year-to-year volatility that makes cultivation harder to predict.

INDUSTRY SUPPORT

Public and Private Efforts Behind the Growth

Building Out the GI System

Geographical Indication (GI) status, now adopted in Yamanashi, Hokkaido, Yamagata, and elsewhere, protects each region's brand value.

Industry-Academia-Government Partnership

Local governments, universities, and growers are working together to build the foundations for better cultivation techniques and workforce development.

The Rise of Wine Tourism

Growing demand for wine-region tourism is creating a virtuous cycle that draws in new growers and investment.

New Entrants and a Generational Shift

A steady stream of newcomers — young winemakers and people from other industries alike — is fueling a rise in small, quality-focused wineries.

THE ROAD AHEAD

The Road Ahead — A New Map for Japanese Wine



From Isolated Points to a Connected Map

What began as a single success story in Hokkaido is evolving into a structure where Nagano, Tohoku, and other regions advance side by side.



The Frontier of Altitude and Latitude

Room remains to push into higher elevations and further north — the search for suitable land is far from over.



Establishing a Premium Brand

By balancing scarcity with quality, Japanese Pinot Noir has real potential to join the world's benchmark wines.



The Strength of Inter-Regional Collaboration

By sharing knowledge across regions, producers can accelerate innovation and market development that would be difficult to achieve alone.

SUMMARY

A New Map of Japanese Wine Is Being Drawn

Climate change is quietly reshaping Japan's wine-growing landscape. The Pinot Noir pioneered by Hokkaido has now spread to Nagano, Yamagata, Iwate, and beyond — pushing Japanese wine's potential outward as a connected whole, not just a single point on the map.

Challenges remain — disease pressure from humidity, a shrinking workforce — but the expansion of the GI system, the growth of wine tourism, and a new generation of entrants are all pushing this progress forward.

From a single point to the whole map — Japan's Pinot Noir story is just getting started.

References & Sources

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This deck was prepared for a general audience using publicly available information.