

Tokyo Table: A taste of this and a taste of that at 'Sake Night'

By Maritza Velazquez, Staff Writer

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SAKE NIGHT

7:30 p.m. April 24

\$35, which includes food and drinks

Tokyo Table

Westfield Santa Anita Shopping Center

400 S. Baldwin Ave.

Arcadia.

Reservations required, (626) 445-4000 ; www.TokyoTable.com .

Kiss hangovers goodbye.

If you don't want those morning-after woes, change your beverage of choice to sake, says sake sommelier Yuji Matsumoto.

About 75 people got to see for themselves during "Sake Nights, a Celebration of Japan's National Drink" at Tokyo Table Restaurant in Arcadia on March 27, one of several planned throughout the year.

The very sleek but small restaurant offered this alcoholic beverage in 20 different varieties.

At each booth in the dimly-lit room, a different

variation was paired with a Japanese dish to complement it. The offerings were chosen by Matsumoto, who represented the USA Westcoast Region at the 2006 World Sake Sommelier Competition. He selected combinations of food and drink that didn't overpower one another.

My personal favorite pairing was the Kikusui Sake with the Tuna Tutaki salad. The Kikusui, a light- to medium-bodied sake, was a bit fruity and went down smoothly. The slice of raw tuna served atop a bed of romaine lettuce was really fresh and had a light taste.

Over a leisurely three-hour period, people made their way to each booth, where friendly servers poured chilled sake in plastic wine glasses and handed out small portions of Japanese fusion cuisine.

Each server had knowledge about the drinks and food they were serving. They had no problem explaining to each customer what they were about to enjoy.

The only problem with this event was that it was difficult to find a comfortable seat. With so many people walking through the small passageways waiting to be served, it was a little tight. It was a reservation-only event, and the host said that about half of the guests who reserved spots didn't even show up. I can't imagine what it would have been like with a larger crowd.

The favorite booth seemed to be the one serving sake cocktails - people were lined up there all

evening. There were four varieties; the bartender shook each drink sample in a small cocktail shaker.

I tried the lychee mixture. Sweet and a little fruity, it had more of a light tropical taste. It was also the most popular cocktail at this station.

The event wasn't just about enjoying great food and sake. It was also intended to teach participants about the traditional Japanese drink. After Matsumoto turned down the loud background music, he gave a presentation on how sake is made and how it compares to wine.

The main ingredients of sake are polished rice, koji (steamed rice fermented into alcohol) and water. Sake tends to be less acidic than wine and doesn't keep for more than a year.

And why no hangovers?

"Hangovers are normally caused by chemicals in the liquor," Matsumoto said. "Sake has alcohol, but it's all natural, with no sulfites or preservatives. So you can get drunk, but you don't get a bad headache the next morning."

The next Sake Nights is April 24. Reservations are required.