

The origins of this company are in Sapporo, Hokkaido, during the Meiji period, where the Hokkaido Development Commission (Kaitakushi) established many businesses. Seibei Nakagawa, a German-trained brewer, became the first brewmaster of the Kaitakushi Brewery in June 1876, and the first Sapporo Lager was produced at that time. Privatized in 1886, the Sapporo brewery became the centerpiece for the Sapporo Beer Company. In 1887, another company, the Japan Beer Brewery Company was established in Mita, Meguro, Tokyo, and began producing Yebisu Beer.

The competition between Sapporo and Japan Beer, as well as competition with the Osaka (now Asahi) and Kirin breweries led to a 1906 merger of Sapporo, Japan, and Osaka breweries into the Dai-Nippon Beer Company, Ltd., which formed a near monopoly on the Japanese market until after World War II. After 1949, Dai-Nippon was split into Nippon and Asahi breweries, with the Nippon Breweries resuming production of Sapporo beer in 1956 and renaming itself to the present name, Sapporo Breweries, in 1964. Yebisu Beer was relaunched as a separate brand in 1971, marketed as a German-style barley beer. Sapporo Black Label beer was launched in 1977.

In 2006, Sapporo announced they would be acquiring Canadian brewer Sleeman in a \$400-million all-cash deal. On February 15, 2007, Steel Partners Japan Strategic Fund, a Cayman Islands-registered fund management subsidiary of Warren Lichtenstein's Steel Partners and the biggest shareholder (18.6% as of Feb. 2007) of Sapporo Holdings, submitted a proposal to the company seeking approval to raise its stake to 66.6%. On 3 August 2017, it was announced that Sapporo Brewing Company would be acquiring Anchor Brewing. Despite its name, Sapporo beer Sapporo is exclusively brewed in China. Most Sapporo beer sold in North America had been brewed at the Sleeman brewery in Guelph, Ontario, Canada. Most Sapporo beer sold in the United States is now brewed by Sapporo Brewing Company in La Crosse, Wisconsin, U.S.