Visiting Omihachiman

~ A great place to live, a great place to visit, a great place to come back to ~

Omihachiman visibly and tastefully intertwines a beautiful natural environment, traditional culture and the lives of today’s residents who inherited these blessings.

After unifying the nation by force, the great commander Oda Nobunaga from Japan’s years of civil war built Azuchi Castle with pronounced beauty and splendor in the thriving fiefdom of the Sasaki Rokkaku Clan that ruled over Omi. The way Oda Nobunaga believed in himself and did what he intended resembles a magnificent cherry tree in bloom.

After the death of Oda Nobunaga, Hidetsugu Toyotomi, the nephew of the preeminent daimyo Hideyoshi Toyotomi, built his mountain fortress of Hachiman Castle with the intention of developing trade and business in the area. The moat he had built served both as a defense and means of transportation. It was a genius idea that went as smooth as water.

The savvy merchants of Hachiman set out for Edo (Tokyo), Osaka and ports overseas from the Hachiman Moat. They built themselves a name and reputation by placing the utmost importance on trust and conducting business in ways that benefited society rather than exclusively thinking about personal profit.

With its latticed windows, artistically pruned pine trees peering from behind walls and characteristically Japanese architecture, the Preservation District of Omihachiman speaks of life long ago. The teachings and love that the forefathers had for this land have been passed down through the changes in landscape and population like a thick layer of snowflakes on the ground.
A land where faith has not changed in centuries

Kuwannonmida Temple
This temple was built at the behest of the Emperor Tenji (626 - 671) and is the 46th sacred point of worship on the Saigokuyakushiki Pilgrimage. Its name roughly means ‘fruit of the mulberry tree’ and comes from recollections that the first monk, Jukei, who is accredited with starting silk-worm breeding in Japan, brought back mulberry seedlings from the Tang Dynasty. The main hall and the scroll painting depicting the temple’s origin are designated Important Cultural Properties.
Admission: Adults ¥300, Children ¥150
 Hours: 9:00 - 17:00 (Until 16:30 between December and February)
Tel 0748-46-2560, 0748-46-4025

Oshinojinja Shrine and Forest
The forest associated with this shrine has appeared in literature since the Manyo Verses and is designated a Historic Site of Japan. Nestled amongst the woods, the shrine revers Mount Kinugasa (Mt. Kannonji) as a deity of safe childbirth, long life, and good hunting and harvests.
Tel 0748-46-2481

Kamojinja Shrine
This shrine was built by the Emperor Shomu in 736 on the site of the first-ever nationally-managed pasture. For this reason, the site has a special connection with horses. The shrine is also associated with the 8th century scholar and statesman Makibi Kibi and is said to have miraculous powers for enabling marriage, granting pregnancy and ensuring safe childbirth. During the Kamo Matsuri in May, horses race around the grounds as part of a ritual dating back more than 1,000 years.
Tel 0748-33-0123

Sasakijinja Shrine
This shrine originally worshipped the Shinto deity of a powerful and influential family in the Gamo area by the name of Sasakiyama, but having lost their status over the years, the name was rewritten with characters to reflect that in the mid Heian Era. The main worship hall heads a list of 8 structures designated Important Cultural Properties of Shimogun Prefecture. The shrine is best remembered for the flowers that bloom at different times of the year and the Sasaki Matsuri that is held in April.
Tel 0748-46-3564

Iwatoyama Buddha
These 13 Statues of Buddha were carved into a large bolder on the southern side of Mt. Mitsukuri at the behest of Prince Shotoku (672 - 622). The site is flooded every April by the faithful who are rewarded with a 1,000 days of blessings for one day of pilgrimage in what is known as a semichikai. There is great panoramic view from the summit.
Tel 0748-46-4234
(Arashim Station Tourist Information Center)

Stepping back into the ages of the Manyo Verses

The cry of the cuckoo recalls a night long ago in the Oiso Forest.
(Kinokuni Norimitsu/Tale of Helike)

Now that I’m 40, just how long will I be able to enjoy the snow of the Oiso Forest to the east?
(Mabuchi Kamo)

The cuckoo’s call from the Oiso Forest would be welcome this night as spring would be near.
(Norinaga Motocori)

Sites heralded by essayist Masako Shirasu in her “Kakurezato” and “Omiyamakosho”

Masako Shirasu (1910 – 1998) An essayist who profoudly loved Omi and wrote about its beauty with delicate sensibility

Masako Shirasu was the second daughter born to Aisuke Kabayama, an Advisor to the Emperor. She was the first woman in history to perform Noh on stage and wrote extensively about Japanese culture, counting within her circle of intellects the top art critics of her time. Hideo Kobayashi and Jiro Aoyama, Shirasu also traveled to many places on her own accord and, with her profound yet delicate sensibility, described the natural and cultural beauty she encountered in ways that still attract many readers today.

Chomeiji Temple
This is the 31st sacred point of worship on the Saigokuyakushiki Pilgrimage. According to temple legend, this was the site where some, 1,800 years ago, Sukune Takeshichi, a grand minister under the Emperor Koko, prayed for a long life and was rewarded by living well over 300 years. Hearing this story, the Prince Shotoku (672 - 622) named this temple Chomeiji or literally the “temple of long life”. The main worship hall, 54rier pagoda, bell tower and the hall where fire offerings are made are connected and there is a magnificent view of Lake Biwa from the grounds.
Tel 0748-33-0031

Kannonshoji Temple
This is the 32nd sacred point of worship on the Saigokuyakushiki Pilgrimage. It is said to have been built by the Prince Shotoku in 665, at the request of local fishermen. Inside is found a 6 m tall statue of a thousand-handed, thousand-eyed Buddhist saint made of sandalwood from 6th century. The temple was also the office of the 24th ruler of Omi.

Kannonji Temple
Found on Mt. Kinugasa, these ruins belong to the castle of the Rokkaku Line of the Sasaki Clan, who ruled over Omi in Japan’s Middle Ages. The castle was amongst the largest of its kind in Japan as it encompassed the entire mountain, and is today recognized as a National Historic Site and one of Japan’s Top 100 Castles. The stone walls and foundation still stand today.

Kyorinbo Temple
This old temple sits quietly in the rural hamlet of Ishidera. The stone garden is said to be the work of the 16th century tea master Enshu Kobori and exhibits an elegance characteristic of the Arashiki-Momoyama and Early Edo Eras. It is highly reputed for its autumn foliage and bamboo forest.

Admission: Free

Admission Free

Admission: Adults ¥500, Children 7 - 15 ¥200
* Normally open only on weekends and holidays. Open on weekdays between Nov. 1 and Dec. 15. Parking (cars x 30, buses x 9) by reservation only.
Tel 0748-46-5400

A treasured hamlet of Omi

Masako Shirasu in Omi
Nobunaga’s heroic campaign to quell the chaos and unify Japan began here.

1 Azuchi Castle Ruins

Azuchi Castle was said to have been an architectural masterpiece. It was built by the Daimyo Nagahide Niwa over a 6-year period, under orders from Oda Nobunaga in 1576. All that remains today are the stone walls and foundation. The ruins and grounds are designated a Special Historic Site of Japan.

Admission: Adults ¥500, Children 7 - 15 ¥100
Hours: 9:00 - 17:00 (Last admission: 16:00)
Closed: Monday by season
Tel: 0748-46-4241 (Azuchi Station Travel Office)

2 “House of Nobunaga”

This full-scale replica of the 5th and 6th floors of Azuchi Castle was created complete with interiors for the Japanese Pavilion at the 1992 World’s Fair in Seville, Spain. The splendor of the gold leaf, dolphin roof ornaments and interior murals were exolated at the time in Europe by missionaries.

Admission: Adults ¥500, Children 16 - 21 ¥100
Hours: 9:00 - 17:00 (Last admission: 16:00)
Closed: Monday (Tuesday if Monday is a holiday).
Tel: 0748-46-6512
*Pay-one-price tickets include the Shiga Prefectural Azuchi Castle Archeological Museum.

3 Shiga Prefectural Azuchi Castle Archeological Museum

Built in an architectural style typical of Western Europe, this museum is located in a landscaped park in the foothills. Exhibits cover a wide gamut of local history from Japan’s Yayoi and Tumulus Periods, and present a plethora of interesting facts about Oda Nobunaga and Azuchi Castle.

Admission: Adults ¥500, Children 16 - 21 ¥100
Children 13 and below: Free (Separate price added for special exhibitions)
Hours: 9:00 - 17:00 (Last admission: 16:30)
Closed: Monday (Tuesday if Monday is a holiday).
Tel: 0748-46-2421
*Pay-one-price tickets include the House of Nobunaga.

4 Azuchi Castle Museum

The museum explains everything you want to know about Azuchi Castle via videos, a 1:20 scale model that has been meticulously reproduced in astonishing detail down to the interiors, and murals designed like folding screens that encircle the gallery. Espresso coffee is also served.

Admission: Adults ¥200, Children 16 - 21 ¥100, Children 7 - 15 ¥100
Hours: 9:00 - 17:00 (Last admission: 16:30)
Closed: Monday (Tuesday if Monday is a holiday).
Tel: 0748-46-5016

5 Jogyo Temple

This temple was built by Oda Nobunaga as part of the Azuchi fiefdom. There are 7 Important Cultural Properties on the grounds, beginning with the main worship hall. The temple featured prominently in the Azuchi Religious Debate of 1579 between the Jodo and Nichiren sects of Buddhism.

Admission: ¥300
Hours: 9:00 - 16:30 (Reservations required)
Tel: 0748-46-2242, 0748-46-5435

6 Seminario Site

This is where the first Christian seminary in Japan stood. It was built in 1581 by the Italian missionary Sodo Organtino and had the protection of Oda Nobunaga. The buildings were lost in the fires of war that burned down Azuchi Castle. The grounds have been converted into a public park.

The legacy and soul of a man who deeply loved Omihachiman still very much alive today

William Merrel Vories Known in Japan as Meruru Hitotsuyanagi (1880 – 1964)

Amidst its distinctively rich Japanese culture, Omihachiman has a number of buildings with Western architectural features that seem to belong in another part of the world. They were designed by William Merrel Vorries, an American who came to Japan in 1905 to teach English at what is now Hachiman Shogyo High School. While in Japan, Vorries was passionately active as a Christian missionary and was involved in designing some 1,600 structures across Japan in which he demonstrated his conviction that a “building, like a person, is defined not just by its appearance but also by its substance.”

Vories also imported mentholatum and built the Omi Sanatorium (now Vorries Memorial Hospital) to care for people with tuberculosis, which was untreatable at the time. He made many other social contributions that included establishing a library and the Omi Brotherhood Schools as places of learning for the local youth. Vorries believed that “Omihachim was the center of the world,” and left a legacy and soul that can still be seen today.

7 William Merrel Vorries Library

Once the home of William Merrel Vorries and his wife Makiko, this museum puts on display articles from the Vorries’ history. Reservations required. Call for reservations.

Admission: Free
Hours: 10:00 - 16:00 (Reservations required. Call for reservations).
Closed: Monday, public holidays, irregular holidays
Tel: 0748-33-3111

8 Old Hachiman Post Office

This post office was designed by Vorries in 1921. It serves today as the office of the Hitotsubonokai, an NPO dedicated to preserving buildings designed by Vorries. Open to the general public.

Tel: 0748-33-6521

9 Ikeda cho Dormitory

Built as a dormitory for missionaries, this colonial style residence features a brick fence, tall chimney and spacious garden. The building can only be viewed from the outside.

10 Iba Residence

This Tudor style home was built in 1913 as a residence for Shinkichi Iba, the fourth son of Tsugio Iba, the second Director General of Sumitomo Zaihatsu. Plans are to open the residence for viewing on a limited basis.

Tel: 0748-33-3111
Omihachiman Culture & Tourism Department
Lakes, canals and lush green surroundings are an integral part of local lives.

1. Hachiman Moat

There are several explanations as to why Omihachiman developed into a thriving community, but the roles played by the Hachiman Moat should not be discounted. Though moats most commonly served to defend a castle, Hidetsugu Toyotomi thought of using this particular moat as a canal and required all boats transiting to and from Lake Biwa to make port in Hachiman. Moreover, because a free market similar to that in Azuchi was opened, private business thrived in the castle town. The Hachiman Moat gave local merchants quicker access to the rest of the country and helped them build a noteworthy reputation, but lifestyles changed during Japan’s economic surge of the late 1950s and local interest in the moat was gradually lost. With its prominence seemingly faded away, plans were crafted to fill it in. But then, sensing that they would come to regret its demise, concerned residents banded together to clean and restore the moat to its original beauty, efforts that various organizations continue today. Now, the Hachiman Moat is a place for residents to relax, a popular tourist attraction that draws photographers, artists and history buffs to Omihachiman, and frequently the location for historical movie shoots.

2. Okishima Island

Okishima is the largest island in Japan’s largest lake, Lake Biwa. It is also an rare example of a lake island where a community actually lives on a full-time basis. The first inhabitants are said to have been retracing Genji Clan soldiers who fled the Genpei War of 1180 – 1185. Some 6.8 km around and 1.5 km2 in size, the island has an elementary school, post office, temple and shrine, and lodgings. Most of the inhabitants are fishermen and lead a calm life in the island’s warm climate. * Ships depart regularly for Okishima Island from Horikirishinko Port.

3. Miyagahama Beach

One of Japan’s Top 88 Beaches selected by the Ministry of the Environment, Miyagahama is a great and safe place to bring children, as the grass reaches almost to the shoreline and bathing is prohibited in the shallow waters just off the beach.

4. Kitagawa Springs

This section of town thrived in Japan’s Muromachi Era (1333 - 1573) as the Jorakuji Docks. Many of the natural springs today look and flow just as they did back then.

5. Johama

Johama was a prosperous dockside community in the Muramachi Era, once it was the outer port of Kannonji Castle. It remained a port-of-call for steam ships that cruised Lake Biwa up until the early Showa Era (1930s). Today, it is a park that provides residents a place of rest and relaxation. It is also known today as “Johobashi,” which literally means the “bridge over the lock.”

6. Umenokawa

This is one of the natural springs that feed Lake Nishinokyo. It is said that Sekan Taikei, a military commander under Oda Nobunaga and a tea ceremony adherent, prepared tea for the leader with water from this spring. So impressed was Nobunaga that he reportedly demanded this water for tea ceremonies whenever he was in the area.

The scent of the seasons blows on the wind across the water.

7. Nishinokyo Canal District

The canal district around Lake Nishinokyo is counted amongst the best eight landscapes of Lake Biwa. In the springtime, grebes and warblers can be found amongst the reeds. It is a popular choice amongst city dwellers who seek some peace and quiet away from the everyday hustle and bustle, as the seasons can be enjoyed with the five senses throughout the year.

The aquatic environment of the marshes has received lots of attention in recent years, as the filtering and ecological importance of the reeds has become more widely known. The marsh was named Japan’s first Important Cultural Landscape in January 2006, the wetlands comprising Lake Nishinokyo and Chomyo River were registered as a Ramsar Site in October 2007, and the “Shirao-Maryumaya” area was listed amongst Japan’s Top 100 Sato in January 2008. The unspoiled landscape instills a wholesome feeling in visitors and triggers a natural healing effect.

* The Nishinokyo Canal District tour services are provided by 4 operators. (As of March 2013)
Business in Omihachiman has long been guided by the principle that business should benefit each the vendor, the buyer and society as a whole.

19 Omihachiman Municipal Museum

This ‘museum’ actually consists of 4 separate buildings that belonged to prominent merchants in the area: Local History Museum, History and Folklore Museum, former Ban Residence and former Nishikawa Residence (Important Cultural Property). The orderly architecture and interiors convey the simplicity and frugality that characterized the lifestyle of the local merchants.

Admission: Adults ¥300. Children: ¥200
(Pay-one-price ticket for all 4 sites)
Hours: 10:00~17:00 Last admission: 16:00
Closed: Monday (except holidays), Next day of holiday (except Saturday, Sunday and holidays)
New Year's holiday *
Open everyday during tourist season.
Tel: 0748-32-7048

20 Himurachimangui Shrine

This shrine has been the patron deity of local merchants for over 1,000 years and, to this day, continues to bask in the unwavering faith and protection of many. The shrine houses numerous Important Cultural Properties amongst which is an old painting of a ship headed for An Nam (ancient day Vietnam) that was donated by Taroemon Nishimura (1603 - 1651), a local merchant who traveled to Vietnam at the ripe age of 20 and made a name for himself doing business. The shrine is also known for the festivals it hosts: Sagicho Matsuri in March and Hachiman Matsuri in April.

Tel: 0748-32-3551

21 Hakunankan (Tourist Information Center)

Originally built as the Hachimanukiashi School in 1871, the building’s construction was funded primarily with donations from local merchants who believed in promoting better education for local youths. Today, it doubles as a tourist information center and art gallery. (Tangible Cultural Property of Japan)

Tel: 0748-32-7003

22 Kawara Museum

This one of the few museums in Japan dedicated to roof tiles. Exhibits focus on the local history of Omihachiman's roof tile industry but also present roof tiles from around the world. The building itself is a striking structure dressed in local tiles. Workshops on making tiles from clay are offered (reservations required).

Admission: Adults ¥300. Children: ¥200
Closed: Monday (except holidays), Next day of holiday (except Saturday, Sunday and holidays)
New Year's holiday *
Open everyday during tourist season.
Tel: 0748-32-8962

23 NO-MA Borderless Art Museum

Located in the city’s Preservation District, this museum was once the early Showa Era home of Seiroku Norna, a prominent businessman from Omihachiman. The galleries opened in 2004, and the creative exhibitions and events have drawn acclaim both across Japan and abroad.

Admission: Varies by exhibition
Hours: 11:00~17:00
Closed: Monday (Tuesday if Monday is a holiday), New Year's holiday, in-between exhibitions
Tel: 0748-36-3018

24 Hikiyama to igusa no yakata

This museum puts on display the tools that were used locally to make tatami mat linings and to harvest and process the rush (pronounced igusa in Japanese) from which they were made. Also on display are the six hikiyama floats that are paraded through the streets during the Asagayu Matsuri that is held every year on the third Saturday in July. The museum takes the rush, natural springs and community development as its themes.

Tel: 0748-32-6539

25 Musujuku on the Nakasendo

During the Edo Era, Omihachiman was a busy stopover for travelers between Edo (Tokyo) and Kyoto. The old houses with latticed windows and stone markers that stood at crossings are reminders of those heydays. Reportedly, long ago there were local specialties like measuring cups and lacquerware that bore the musa brand. Similarly, the dragon’s head flower (pronounced mushari in Japanese) that was discovered here gets its name from the locality.

Tel: 0748-32-6750

Nakasendo, one of the Edo Era’s five major roads connecting Edo (Tokyo) and Kyoto

Teigo Iba (1847~1926)

A businessman who was concerned about the environment 100 years ago while at the helm of Sumitomo Zaibatsu

Teigo Iba was born in what is now Nishikujuku, Omihachiman in 1847. He was appointed judge at the age of 22 and executed those responsibilities in diverse locations, only to grow disillusioned with civil service and retire after ten years. When paying a visit to his uncle, Sahe Hirose, then the first Director-General of Sumitomo Zaibatsu, he encountered him to join his company, which he did. At that time, the company was troubled by labor disputes and pollution caused by their Besshi Mine, but Teigo was tenacious about solving the problems. He appointed the second Director-General of Sumitomo Zaibatsu and built the foundations of the company from 1880 by establishing the predecessors of today’s Sumitomo Mitsui Banking, Sumitomo Metal Industries, Sumitomo Electric Industries, Sumitomo Light Metal Industries and other major companies. In 1890, he was elected to the House of Representatives of the First Imperial Diet. Four years later, he retired from Sumitomo Zaibatsu and let the next generation build the future. He passed away in 1926 at the age of 79.

Honganji Hachimanbetsuin Temple

It is where the Shogun leyasu Tokugawa rested after his victory in the Battle of Sekigahara, while on his way back to the capital. Hachiman is believed to have been special to Tokugawa, because local businessmen are said to have aided him in the Siege of Osaka. The temple also provided food and lodging for Korean envoys to Japan. A poem left by Chamberlain Rimukan (1634-1708) hangs inside the temple.

Tel: 0748-32-2460

A flow of people and ideas among the Nakasendo and Chosenjinkaido

Though Japan was closed to the outside world during the Edo Era, it maintained diplomatic relations with Korea and the Ryukyu Kingdom via correspondence and with China and Holland via trade. Using channels in the Tsushima Domain, the Shogun Ieyasu Tokugawa sent messengers on diverse occasions to Korea in an attempt to mend relations that were broken off after Hideyoshi Toyotomi invaded the Korean Peninsula. In 1607, an official envoy from Korea was finally welcomed. A total of 12 envoy would follow between then and 1811. The route these delegations took from Korea to Edo (Tokyo) became known as the Chosenjinkaido (literally the “Korean Route”), a name that remains today.

The route has its origins in the road that led to Kyoto when Oda Nobunaga built Azuchi Castle. It was thought of as the lower reaches of the Nakasendo and, because it followed the shores of Lake Biwa, was referred to as the Hamakaido (literally the “beach road”). The Korean emissaries had also a cultural currency and often were accompanied by scholars, artists and calligraphers, who are thought to have considerably influenced Japanese culture at the time.
Omiyachiman's local specialties

Omiyachiman has many local specialties born from the blessings of a fertile environment and a long history. A few of the representative specialties are "Omigyu" (one of three best brands of beef in Japan), "Akakoryaku" (devil’s tongue jelly that dates back to Oda Nobunaga), "Decchiyokan" (sweet bean paste tied to local business), "Chojīju" (bread-like food made from gluten), "Omimai" (rice) and "Kogoyotukudani" (lake fish boiled in soy sauce). In recent years, ecological products have come recommended such as noodles and ice cream made with rush. There are also numerous handicrafts of local origin including osthe (padded cloth pictures that date back to the Nara Era), Hachiman juzu (rosaries said to have been instituted by the Prince Shotoku), Hachiman kawara (roof tiles that were an integral part of the architectural landscape of a commerce-oriented town), bamboo handcrafts, shoes and of course paper and bamboo blinds made with rush from the local marshes.

Map of Shiga Prefecture

Access by Car/Train

Festival Calendar

April 1st Sat. : Sasaki Matsuri (Sasakijinja Shrine)
14-15 : Hachiman Matsuri (Himurarechimangū Shrine)

Torches are lit on the 14th and a large drum is paraded into the shrine on the 15th.

May 4 : Shindonohana-ebi (Shindoinji Shrine)

Traditional fireworks display dating back to the Edo Era. Every year, a themed mural of fireworks is lit up.

6 (First Sunday after the 6th) : Ashifusome (Kamoji Shrine)

Early June : Azuchi Nobunaga Matsuri (Mt. Azuchi)

July 3rd Sat. : Asagaoion Matsuri (Asagoichō)

August 1 : Isakinosao-tobi (Isaki Temple)

1st Sun. : Hachiman Tenjin Matsuri (Omiyachiman City Office)

Mid September : Hachimanbori Matsuri (Along Hachiman Moat)

October : Omi Genji Matsuri (Sasakijinja Shrine)

Mid November : Autumn Evening Illumination (Kyori Temple)

Early December

Mid February : Omiyachiman Doll Festival (Omiyachiman Municipal Museum, etc.)

Mid March : Sagicho Matsuri (Himurarechimangū Shrine)

March Sat. around 14-15

Festival for announcing spring. 13 decorations associated with the Chinese Zodiac are paraded around the old quarter and burned in a bonfire on the 2nd day.