

# OTSU

## SHIGA

### *Six Temples and Shrines*



## All About Otsu

The reflective blue waters of a lake; old pilgrim paths cutting through trees; dramatic tales of warrior monks – plus a string of breathtaking temples and shrines, hidden in sacred mountainside forests.

The list of reasons to visit Otsu is as long as it is varied. The small city fringes the southern shores of Lake Biwa, the nation's largest freshwater lake, and is home to a cornucopia of culture, history and nature.

And perhaps best of all? Getting to Otsu couldn't be easier: the city is just nine minutes by train from Kyoto Station and its historical sites are rarely crowded, ensuring a peaceful and authentic atmosphere.

It was more than 1,350 years ago that Otsu first stepped into the spotlight, when Emperor Tenji declared it the capital of Imperial Japan, a status that lasted around five years before wartime conflict forced its relocation to nearby Kyoto.

Today, the legacy of its time as ancient capital still lingers, as reflected in the city's rich cultural heritage. Centre stage is sacred Mount Hiei, the birthplace of Japanese Buddhism, with its exquisite temple complex hidden on forested slopes plus an enduring status, even today, as a world-class seat of Buddhist learning.

Added to the mix are a string of atmospheric temples and shrines scattered among the mountains that cocoon Otsu, many with world-class architecture and treasures, also offering glimpses – through shrine gates and forest openings – of unforgettable views across Lake Biwa.

Deeply in tune with surrounding nature, Otsu evolves with the seasons, making it a year-round destination – whether it is shrouded in silently falling winter snow; cloud-like bursts of springtime cherry blossoms; the lush green vibrancy of summertime; or fiery expanses of autumnal leaves.

Whatever the time of year, Otsu is guaranteed to inspire. A star-studded cast of Japan's most famous historical figures have been touched by Otsu – among them, the poet Matsuo Basho and the lady-in-waiting novelist Murasaki Shikibu, both deeply inspired by the setting.

And, as any modern-day traveller visiting Otsu will testify, this power to inspire has not waned with the passing of time – and remains just as strong today.





## Enryakuji Temple on Mount Hiei

Explore an ancient temple complex on Mount Hiei, the birthplace of Japanese Buddhism – home to exquisite temple architecture, serene forest trekking and so-called “marathon monks” who push spiritual endurance to new heights.



## Miidera Temple

One of Japan’s four biggest temple complexes, 7th century Miidera is famed for its pure spring water; a treasure trove of Buddhist sculptures; and cloud-like springtime *sakura* cherry blossoms along its winding hillside paths.



## Hiyoshi Taisha Shrine

Step back in time at Hiyoshi Taisha, with its fairy-tale-like stone bridges, red *torii* gates and forested pathways. The head shrine for around 3,800 Sanno shrines across the country, thousands of maple trees burst into fiery shades here every autumn.



## Ishiyamadera Temple

It was here, during a moon-viewing visit over 1,000 years ago, that noblewoman Murasaki Shikibu apparently dreamt up *The Tale of Genji*, widely regarded as the world’s first novel. Today, it’s no less inspiring, with its hillside paths and flowers.



## Saikyo-ji Temple

Look out for signature monkey motifs scattered throughout the ancient 7th century complex, a well-proportioned haven of inner courtyard gardens, world-class craftsmanship and temple architecture, with dazzling views across Lake Biwa.



## Omi Jingu Shrine

This elegant 1940s shrine with vermillion and white façade is devoted to the innovations of 7th century Emperor Tenji – from Japan’s first water clock and a (still used) family registry system to the wildly popular poetry-based card game *karuta*.

## Access

### By train

Otsu Station is just nine minutes by train from Kyoto Station, on the JR Biwako Line. The Subway Tozai / Keihan Keishin Line also takes 25 minutes from central Kyoto’s Sanjo Station to Otsu’s Biwako-Hamaotsu Station. Otsu is around 2.5 hours by train from Tokyo, including transfers at Kyoto Station.

### By air

Otsu is one hour 25 minutes from Kansai International Airport and one hour 45 minutes from Chubu International Airport.

## Experience WALK Kyoto → Otsu



EXPERIENCE 1: Enryakuji Temple

### Walking Meditation

*A meditative journey into the mountainous heart of Japanese Buddhism*



EXPERIENCE 2: Miidera Temple

### Walking Through Time

*Living history along a 1000-year-old ancient mountain path*



More information: <https://otsu.or.jp/walkotsu>