

## Seta no Karahashi Bridge

Seta no Karahashi Bridge is a long-standing symbol of Otsu and was first built in the seventh century. The 224-meter bridge crosses the Seta River, which flows from Lake Biwa to Osaka Bay, and is part of the old Tokaido highway between Kyoto and Edo (now Tokyo).

The original bridge was located further south than the current one. The warlord Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582) established the current location in the sixteenth century, along with the present configuration of two bridges joined by an island in the river.

The bridge lies along the Tokaido, the main route from Edo to Kyoto, which was the capital of Japan until 1868. The bridge was the site of many famous battles, leading to the expression “whoever controls Seta no Karahashi controls the country.” Local legend tells of a samurai from the powerful Fujiwara clan who defeated a giant centipede on the bridge. A monument to the warrior is located on the east bank of the river, near the bridge.

The green, onion-shaped ornaments on the bridge railings are called *giboshi* and are based on traditional bridge designs from Korea and China. The origin of the style is reflected in the bridge’s name: *kara* means China or Korea and *hashi* means bridge.

The current bridge dates to 1979 and remains a major thoroughfare in Otsu. It plays a significant role in the annual Senkosai Festival held by Takebe Taisha Shrine, when ceremonial boats carrying *mikoshi* (portable shrines) sail under it. During this time, the bridge is closed to traffic, so that no one can walk above the deities carried in the boats.

Seta no Karahashi is considered one of the Three Famous Bridges of Japan and is also one of the Eight Views of Omi, a traditional selection of scenic views of Omi Province (present-day Shiga Prefecture) that are themes of poetry and art.