

Otsu Hyakucho

Throughout the Edo period (1603–1867), Otsu was the final stop before Kyoto on the Tokaido highway between Edo (present-day Tokyo) and Kyoto, and served as a gateway to the then-capital. Many traders and travelers passed through Otsu and the city became a commercial hub. Inns, teahouses, and shops inside traditional wooden townhouses (*machiya*) spread out along the road, giving rise to a diverse range of neighborhoods that became known as Otsu Hyakucho, or the Hundred Towns of Otsu.

Today, people still walk the Tokaido through the downtown area of Otsu. The old milestones marking the distance to Kyoto remain on display and the buildings have been well preserved. There are approximately 1,500 historical *machiya* still standing in the Hyakucho district, some of which date back to the Edo period. On one street corner is a plaque marking the location of the infamous Otsu Incident of 1891, a failed assassination attempt on the Russian crown prince in the days when anti-foreign sentiment was still strong.

Close to the center of the area, part of the Tokaido has been restored to its Edo-period appearance. Stores selling local sweets and seafood, some of which have been in business for generations, still welcome travelers, and a 350-year-old sake brewery continues to operate in an old-fashioned shopping street.