

Katata Area

The Katata area is located in northern Otsu on the western shore of Lake Biwa. Now a quiet lakeside town with temples and traditional houses, Katata was once a prominent city in its own right. Its residents were called *kozoku*, meaning lake people, and they controlled the movement of ships on the lake. Local people began presenting gifts of fish caught in the lake to Shimogamo Shrine in Kyoto in 1090. In return, they gained huge profits by being granted exclusive fishing and passage rights in Lake Biwa. Katata is at the narrowest part of the lake, so the residents were tasked with inspecting and collecting a tax from each ship that sailed past the city. By the early Edo period (1603–1867), Katata had begun to lose its influence as the hub of marine traffic on Lake Biwa shifted to Otsu.

Sights in Katata today include several temples, including the Ukimido Hall or “floating pavilion.” The famous Zen monk Ikkyu (1394–1481) trained at another temple in Katata. Poet Matsuo Basho (1644–1694) visited the area regularly, and many of his students lived in and around Katata. The town is the site of one of the Eight Views of Omi, a traditional selection of scenic views of Omi Province (present-day Shiga Prefecture) that became popular themes of poetry and art. The image is called *Wild Geese Returning Home at Katata*, and inspired a traditional sweet called *rakugan*, which is still made locally.