

Eight Views of Omi: Overview

The “Eight Views of Omi” are eight scenic locations in Omi Province (as Shiga Prefecture was known prior to 1871) that have been depicted in poetry and paintings. The area has long been famous for its natural beauty, which attracted artists, pilgrims, and noblemen alike. Many people traveled through Omi during the Edo period (1603–1867) on their way to Kyoto (then the nation’s capital), and the region was a well-known subject for works of art.

There are several theories about the origins of the Eight Views of Omi, but it is generally accepted that they were established by Konoe Nobutada (1565–1614), who described the views in a series of poems in the early seventeenth century. Before that, Japanese artists, writers, and Zen priests were influenced by the Eight Views of Xiaoxiang, first painted by Chinese artist Song Di (1015–1080). Japanese artists adopted the eight views motif to showcase the beauty of many different parts of Japan.

By the latter half of the seventeenth century, the Eight Views of Omi were being painted on fans, sliding panels and doors, and ceramics. Many woodblock print artists, including Suzuki Harunobu (1725–1770) and Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849) produced pictures of the views. Perhaps the artist most closely associated with the subject is Utagawa Hiroshige (1797–1858), who is known to have created roughly 20 different versions of the series.

The Eight Views of Omi is a close adaptation of its Xiaoxiang counterpart, including many of the same basic scenes such as a full moon on the water, nighttime rain, and wild geese, but transposed onto locations on and around Lake Biwa. Many of Otsu’s historical sites are featured in the views, including Ishiyamadera Temple, the Seta no Karahashi Bridge, Ukimido Hall, the Hira Mountains, and Miidera Temple. Each of the eight locations can still be visited today.