

Eight Views of Omi: Evening Glow at Seta

The Seta River flows from Lake Biwa to Osaka Bay and has been an important waterway in Otsu for generations. The city was the final stop before Kyoto on the Tokaido highway between Tokyo and Kyoto, and countless travelers have crossed the river on their way to and from the capital. Before railways were built across Japan, the 224-meter-long Seta no Karahashi Bridge was the easiest way to cross the Seta, and came to symbolize both the Tokaido road of which it was part and the city of Otsu itself.

Utagawa Hiroshige's (1797–1858) woodblock prints of this scene show sailboats dotted along the river and the lake beyond it. Seta no Karahashi features prominently in the foreground, joining both sides of the Seta via an island in the middle, while Mt. Mikami looms ominously in the background.

Today, there are still many boats on the lake, although not so many with sails, and Seta no Karahashi sits between more modern crossings: the railway bridge for the bullet trains, and a larger highway bridge. The old wooden bridge in Hiroshige's image has since been rebuilt in concrete, but retains its old-fashioned charm.