

## **Eight Views of Omi: Returning Sails at Yabase**

Yabase was a port town on the eastern side of Lake Biwa, opposite Otsu. The area is now part of the city of Kusatsu, but in its heyday, Yabase Port was popular with pilgrims and travelers on the Tokaido highway between Kyoto to Tokyo. The Tokaido skirts Lake Biwa to the south and crosses the Seta River. Instead of sticking to the Tokaido and crossing the river at the Seta no Karahashi Bridge, those in a hurry often opted to hire a boat at Yabase to sail across the lake to Otsu instead. The water route remained the fastest option until the advent of the railways in the late 1800s.

In the Hoeido edition woodblock print by Utagawa Hiroshige (1797–1858), a seemingly endless procession of boats streams from the small port of Yabase toward Otsu in the distance, their sails at different heights and angles. Some of the boats seem to be almost touching each other.

Today, the port is no longer as busy and the view from the shore has changed. Yabase Kihan Island was constructed in front of the port in 1982, and the modern Omi Ohashi Bridge has become the most popular way to cross the lake. However, there are still plenty of boats on Lake Biwa, even if most of them use engines rather than sails.