

Wetland Boat Tours

The boat sways gently, and the only sounds are birdsong and the wind in the reeds. Thousands of these tall green grasses line the way on either side of the boat. There is a splash, and on the left is a little grebe, a small bird with a distinctive red neck. It dives for food and is gone. Up ahead, a white egret steps elegantly through the shallow water.

These are the wetlands of Omihachiman, where interconnected waterways thread their way through reedbeds, marshes, and rice paddies to link the town of Omihachiman with Lake Biwa. Wetland boat tours offer an escape into this peaceful landscape and a leisurely ride through a location of distinctive beauty.

Four companies offer boat tours of the wetlands. Two companies have motorboats and two have rowboats, which are propelled and steered by a boatman at the stern. All boats are roofed and have simple interiors with tatami-mat floors. When boarding, visitors should take off their shoes before entering the roofed section of the boat and sitting down on the tatami mat.

The tradition of recreational boating on Omihachiman's waterways is believed to have begun in the sixteenth century, when the lord of Hachimanyama Castle, Toyotomi Hidetsugu, held a tea gathering on a boat. Today, instead of tea, meals can be reserved to enjoy on board. Bento lunch boxes and multicourse sukiyaki menus with Omi beef are available from all of the companies.