

## **World Kite Museum**

### **Higashiomi Oodako Hall**

#### *The History of Higashiomi Oodako*

Making and flying of giant kites (*oodako*) has a long tradition in Higashiomi, in Shiga Prefecture. The city's location on the eastern shores of Lake Biwa makes it ideal for kite flying due to its large open plains and the strong northwest winds that blow in from the lake.

Since the early eighteenth century, local people have been making kites to use during Children's Day festivities in May, when families celebrate the healthy growth and happiness of children. The kites were small at first, but construction techniques were developed that allowed larger ones to be made. This progress inspired the local villages of Shibahara, Kanaya, and Nakano to begin an annual competition to build the biggest kite that could be flown.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the residents of the three villages were making the Higashiomi *oodako* of today. Many of the kites, made

using bamboo frames with washi paper coverings, measure approximately 100 tatami, a common Japanese standard of measurement (1 tatami mat is 1.65 square meters), but some are as much as 200 tatami mats in size. The largest kite ever made and flown was constructed in 1882 and measured approximately 240 tatami (approximately 396 square meters).

### *Celebrating craftsmanship*

In 1953, the Yokaichi Oodako Preservation Society (now the Higashiomi Oodako Preservation Society) was formed by the residents of Shibahara, Kanaya, and Nakano to help safeguard Higashiomi's kite making heritage.

Residents have refined their skills and techniques for making these giant kites. Each *oodako* is constructed with bamboo poles bound together to form a grid. A technique allowing for easy removal of the vertical poles is employed so that the kite can be rolled up *nagamaki* (lit., long wrapping) for transport or storage. Another technique is *kirinuki* (lit., cut-outs), in which openings are cut in strategic parts of the washi to improve the kite's aerodynamic balance.

A festival known as the Higashiomi Oodako Matsuri was begun in 1984 for local people to enjoy kite making and kite flying, as well as to ensure the skills of giant kite making are passed on to the next generation. The festival was held annually on the fourth Sunday of May until 2015.

In 1993, the custom of giant kite flying in Omi-Yokaichi (now Higashiomi) was designated a national Intangible Folk Cultural Property.

### *Exploring exhibits*

The World Kite Museum, or Higashiomi Oodako Hall, was built in 1991 as part of the work of the Higashiomi Oodako Preservation Society to safeguard the area's heritage of kite making.

Evidence of this rich culture is on display in the museum's main hall. The main exhibit is a previously flown 100-tatami *oodako* that hangs from the wall, offering an opportunity to see its details up close. There are also several mock-up kites from the past and sketches of the designs used over

the years, demonstrating the evolution of the community's kite-making skills. A short film in English introduces the Higashiomi Oodako festival.

The second floor displays kites of various designs and sizes that were constructed in Japan and other countries along with more than 600 related exhibits.

The annex next to the museum is where *oodako* are sometimes

constructed. When an *oodako* is under construction there, it is laid out on the floor upside down, with the bamboo poles and messages of good luck pasted on the back of the paper visible. The fully extended kite shows vividly the huge scale, time, and know-how that go into its creation; it is the culmination of cooperative effort that holds special meaning to the people of Higashiomi.