## Wetlands of Omihachiman

The wetlands of Omihachiman are a protected area of 354 hectares between Lake Biwa and the town of Omihachiman comprising an intricate landscape of waterways, reedbeds, rice paddies, and villages. These wetlands have developed over centuries as humans created waterways for transport and fishing and cultivated reedbeds.

The reeds here are famous for their durability and were traditionally used as a roofing material and to make screens and blinds. They also perform important natural functions, such as cleansing the water of pollutants, protecting the lakeshore from erosion, and providing a habitat for waterfowl and fish.

The wetlands are called "water home" (suigo) in Japanese, expressing the close relationship between the natural landscape and people's everyday life. The wetlands of Omihachiman have been named a National Important Cultural Landscape.



## **Wetland Boat Tours**

The wetlands of Omihachiman include an intricate network of waterways that wind through marshes and reedbeds to link the town with Lake Biwa. A leisurely boat tour is the best way to appreciate this distinctive landscape. While listening to the sound of the wind in the reeds, passengers will spot numerous wild birds including egrets, little grebes, and reed warblers. Four companies offer wetland boat tours—two using rowboats and two using motorboats. Boats

depart at fixed times, and boats may also be chartered with advance notice. The latter option is more economical for groups. For an additional fee, all companies offer the option of an onboard meal: either a bento lunch box or a multicourse sukiyaki menu with Omi beef. Each company has its own boarding point, but all of these are within 15 minutes of Omihachiman Station by bus.



## **Old Hachiman Post Office**

The Old Hachiman Post Office building, completed in 1921, was designed by William Merrell Vories (1880–1964), an American-born architect, missionary, and businessman who lived and worked in Omihachiman for the greater part of his life. Vories' s design is an eclectic blend of Spanish colonial and Japanese styles, a combination the architect would employ frequently in his later works. The building was used as a post office until 1961 but fell into disrepair for several decades before an intervention by local nonprofit organization Hitotsubu no Kai, established in 1997 and dedicated to the structure's revitalization.

The Old Hachiman Post Office now functions as a gallery and event space and is open to the public on weekends and national holidays between 11 a.m. and 5 p.m. There is a small cafe on the first floor, where the original post office counter has been preserved, and the telephone exchange room upstairs is used for exhibitions and other events.



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