

# Chapter 1-1

## About Shiga Prefecture

### Abstract

Shiga Prefecture is located more or less in the middle of the Japanese Archipelago. Surrounded by mountains, Shiga Prefecture forms the Omi Basin with Lake Biwa, the largest lake in Japan, located at the center of its lowland. With a history spanning some 4 million years, Lake Biwa is the oldest lake in Japan and one of the ancient lakes in the world.

**Keywords:** Shiga Prefecture, Lake Biwa, Omi Basin

### 1. Features of Shiga Prefecture

Shiga Prefecture is located more or less in the middle of the Japanese Archipelago.

Close to the city of Kyoto to the west, Shiga Prefecture is located 86 minutes by limited express train from Kansai International Airport.

The land mass of Shiga Prefecture is approximately 1% of the total area of Japan.

About 1.4 million people reside in this prefecture.



**Fig. 1-1-1** Location of Shiga Prefecture (<http://en.biwako-visitors.jp/>)

Shiga Prefecture forms a basin known as the Omi Basin with mountains over 1,000 m high including Mt. Ibuki, Mt. Suzuka and Mt. Hira in its environs and it is in the center of the low land that Lake Biwa, the largest lake in Japan, can be found.

### 2. Features of Lake Biwa

Approximately 460 rivers of varying sizes drain into Lake Biwa from the sur-



**Fig. 1-1-2** Topography of Shiga Prefecture

rounding mountains. The Seta River and the artificial Biwako (Lake Biwa) Canal form the lake's outlets. Calculations have shown that it takes approximately 19 years for all the water in the lake to be completely renewed.

Lake Biwa is the oldest lake in Japan. The lake in its present form began to form more than 1 million years ago, and its total history including its predecessors spans some 4 million years, making Lake Biwa one of the oldest in the world.

With its long history and highly varied environment, Lake Biwa is home to an abundance of biota, with a total of about 1,700 species (protozoa, plants and animals) in it and its environs. Endemic species/subspecies such as Biwa-masu (Biwa salmon) and Seta-shijimi (Seta clam) are a common sight in the lake.

The Lake Biwa Bridge can be found at

the narrowest point of the lake, dividing the lake into the North Basin to the north and the South Basin to the south, each with its own distinct characteristics.

**Table 1-1-1** Overview of Lake Biwa

Lake Biwa Catchment Area		3,174 km <sup>2</sup>
Size of Lake Biwa	Area	670.25 km <sup>2</sup> North Basin : South Basin = 617.75 km <sup>2</sup> : 52.50 km <sup>2</sup> = 11:1
	Length from north to south	63.49 km
	Maximum width	22.8 km
	Minimum width	1.35 km
	Circumference	235.20 km
Water depth	Deepest point	103.58 m
	Average depth	41.20 m
Reservoir capacity	27.5 billion m <sup>3</sup> North Basin : 27.3 billion m <sup>3</sup> , South Basin : 200 million m <sup>3</sup>	

### 3. Islands in Lake Biwa

#### 3.1 Okishima Island

Located approximately 1.5 km from Omihachiman City on the shore of Lake Biwa, Okishima is the only inhabited island to be found in the lakes of Japan. With a circumference of approximately 6.8 km and an area of approximately 1.53 km<sup>2</sup>, the island's population currently stands at roughly 400 inhabitants and it has an elementary school.

Historically, it is said that Okishima was an uninhabited island where a god was worshipped as a guardian protecting those traveling by boat on the lake. According to legend, seven surviving warriors who had suffered defeat in a rebellion that took place in the 12<sup>th</sup> century pioneered and settled the island, and it is said that these warriors were the ancestors of the present-day islanders.

Nowadays, most of the islanders are engaged in fishery-related work and their lifestyle is closely linked with Lake Biwa. Okishima also has two guest houses and recent years have seen increasing numbers of visitors to the island.



**Fig. 1-1-3** Okishima Island

#### 3.2 Chikubushima Island

Chikubushima Island is a small island approximately 2 km in circumference located roughly 6 km from the shore of Nagahama City. While, from the 6<sup>th</sup> century, Chikubushima, with a Buddhist temple and a Shinto shrine, was regarded as a holy place and was bustling with visitors coming to worship, nowadays, the island is visited by large numbers of tourists year round.



**Fig. 1-1-4** Chikubushima Island  
(Photos courtesy of Biwako Visitors Bureau)

#### 3.3 Takeshima Island

Takeshima Island is a small island approximately 600 m in circumference located roughly 5 km from the shore of the mouth of the Inukami River in Hikone City. The island features precipitous cliffs on all sides and is resplendent in scenic beauty with pines, bamboo and other plant life growing in abundance on its rocks. The "Oki-no-Shiraishi" rocks can be seen 4 km to the west of the island and it is said that it is from here that the most beautiful view can be enjoyed.

(Environmental Policy Division,  
Shiga Prefectural Government)