

Chapter 3-3

Ecotourism

Abstract

Surrounded by mountain ranges, Shiga Prefecture is blessed with a rich natural environment featuring rice paddy fields, countryside forests called “Satoyama” and forests surrounding Lake Biwa. Shiga Prefecture has developed ecotourism taking advantage of the beauty of the natural environment.

Keywords: Kayaking, Trekking, Central watershed, Satoyama

1. Lake Biwa

Lake Biwa which accounts for one-sixth of Shiga Prefecture looks more like an ocean than a lake and is surrounded by some magnificent scenery.

Since ancient times, people living around Lake Biwa have taken care of the lake and developed livelihoods closely tied to the lake.

In addition, Lake Biwa provides a valuable environment not only for local residents, but also for the fauna and flora that live in the area and migratory birds that come in winter.

These valuable resources are instrumental to gain an understanding of the workings of nature, and are used by the area for a variety of ecotours.

From the pleasure boat, you can enjoy the magnificent scenery of Lake Biwa, the sunrise and the sunset. On the environmental learning boat, you can learn about underwater microscopic organisms and water quality.

Kayaking gives an immediate sense of intimacy with the lake and makes it possible to visit areas inaccessible by boat. In spring, you can also enjoy rows of cherry blossom trees in full bloom while kayaking.

In the littoral areas of the lake and rivers, you can enjoy fishing using draw net and cast net fishing methods that are traditional to Lake Biwa.

You can also observe water springs called “kabata” which provide water for domestic use.



Fig. 3-3-1 Kayaking on the lake

2. Countryside Forests Called “Satoyama” and Pastoral Areas

Looking toward the mountains from the lakeside, landscapes featuring countryside forests and pastoral areas between the lake and the mountains can be seen in all their panoramic beauty. People living amidst these beautiful landscapes lead their lives by maintaining and taking advantage of the bounties of nature.

Rice paddies where the tradition of rice farming has been practiced over the years extend across the landscape interspersed with streams and channels. This natural environment maintained for rice farming is well preserved, and fauna and flora that inhabit this secondary natural environment can be seen.

You can also learn about how natural resources are used for agriculture.

Copses are populated by saw tooth oak trees on which acorns grow and konara oak used for charcoal and firewood. Many species of fauna and flora can also be seen

here in the secondary natural environment tended by man.

In spring, katakuri (dogtooth violet), a flower that blooms before the leaves of the surrounding trees cast their shadows and insects that hover around flowers to collect nectar can be observed.

In summer, children visit the woodland carrying their nets to collect insects such as beetles.

You can also learn, for example, how saw tooth oak trees are repeatedly used for firewood without cutting down the whole tree.



Fig. 3-3-2 Scene from a stream by the side of a rice paddy field

3. Forests

Forests enjoy a close relationship with Lake Biwa. The rich forests surrounding Lake Biwa retain abundant water which drains into the lake.

Located more or less in the center of the Japanese Archipelago, Shiga Prefecture also features central watersheds in

areas of relatively low mountains. The mountains where central watersheds are located lie between the Sea of Japan side and the Pacific Ocean side, and between Western Japan and Eastern Japan. Here you will find a variety of rare plants and you can take advantage of a number of appealing ecotours available to observe the rich flora and amazing scenery. For example, ecotours to observe rare flowers, mountain-climbing tours of mountains that offer unrivalled views, trekking tours in the central watershed areas and snowshoe trekking tours are available depending on the season.



Fig. 3-3-3 Snowshoe trekking

Shiga Prefecture offers a wide variety of ecotours that take advantage of local resources and allow visitors to experience unforgettably impressive tours while enjoying interaction with the natural environment of the area.

(Tourism and International Exchange Bureau, Shiga Prefectural Government)