

Literature and Bridges

Bridges used as scenes in literature

Chikamatsu Monzaemon, a major figure in the development of "kamigata" (the Osaka-Kyoto region) culture, describes bridges in his works with great effect. Such works are valuable resources that allow us to get an idea of how the bridges looked in those days.

Bridges also act as the settings of some literary works. Yasunari Kawabata based a novel entitled "Soribashi" on Sori Bridge, which is located in the grounds of the Sumiyoshi Taisha Shrine.



Sori Bridge of Sumiyoshi Taisha Shrine

Yasunari Kawabata

Sori Bridge (Sumiyoshi-ku)

Climbing down the steps is scarier than climbing up them.



Festivals and Bridges

Bridges provide great vantage points for festivals

From cherry-blossom viewing in the spring and enjoying cool breezes in the summer to moon viewing in the autumn and snow viewing in the winter, since ancient times people have gathered at bridges for a host of reasons, and used them as places of rest and celebration.

Even now, during festivals and special events, they are thronged with large numbers of people, and overflow with the same energy seen in former times.

Festivals and Events Involving Bridges

Funanorikomi Parade Date: End of June – early July Place: Nakanoshima – Dotombori River

At this traditional event, which takes place at the time of a Kabuki performance, the actors introduce themselves and encourage people to attend the performance from a boat. You can cheer for your favorite Kabuki actor from one of the bridges on the Dotombori or Higashi-Yokobori Rivers.



Funanorikomi Parade

Tenjin Festival Date: 25 July (Funatogyo) Place: Nakanoshima and Okawa River

This ranks alongside Kyoto's Gion Festival and Tokyo's Kanda Festival as one of Japan's "3 Great Festivals". It is a water-based event that boasts a thousand-year history. Many bridges, such as Tenjin Bridge, Temma Bridge, and Sakuranomiya Bridge, offer great vantage points for viewing the Funatogyo procession and the firework display.



Tenjin Festival

Naniwa Yodogawa Fireworks Festival Date: Early August Place: Banks of Yodo River

This firework display was started in 1989 through the efforts of local residents. Since then, its name has been changed to the "Naniwa Yodogawa Fireworks Display", and now fills the summer night sky with around 20,000 fireworks. It is held on the banks of the Yodo River near Juso-Ohashi Bridge.



Fireworks illuminating the night sky

Osaka Hikari Renaissance Date: December Place: Nakanoshima

This festival of light, which started in 2003, has already become an established winter event. It is visited by more than one million people. The bridges of Nakanoshima are also illuminated, and provide good vantage points for enjoying the displays.



Hikari Renaissance

The Functions of Bridges

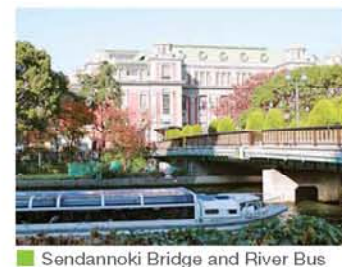
Looking underneath bridges

Bridges do not just allow people and vehicles to cross from one side of a river to the other. They also support city functions by conveying lifelines such as water, gas, power, and telephone lines.



Underside of Tenjin Bridge

The next time you go under a bridge, have a look for yourself at its underside.



Sendannoki Bridge and River Bus

Osaka's Bridges – Past and Present

Bridges share the history of local areas

Bridges of Ancient and Medieval History

The history of Osaka's bridges can be traced back to the reign of Emperor Nintoku during the Kofun Period.

After that, in the Nara, Heian, Kamakura, and Sengoku Periods, bridges frequently appeared in history books and legends. Many of these bridges are shrouded in mystery.



Osaka under Emperor Nintoku (around 5th century)

Bridges of Recent History

When Toyotomi Hideyoshi built Osaka Castle, Higashi-Yokobori and Nishi-Yokobori Rivers were constructed, and then in the Edo Period, Dotombori River was constructed. This led to the creation of a large number of bridges, and gave rise to the expression "The 808 Bridges of Naniwa (Osaka)".



"Osaka Temma Matsuri" (Osaka Temma Festival: Property of Osaka Prefectural Nakanoshima Library)

Bridges of the Modern Age

The Meiji Restoration saw an influx of western culture, and the start of a switch from wooden bridges to iron ones.

Throughout the Taisho and Showa Periods, with the development of streetcars and the promotion of the first city planning project, many of the famous bridges that enrich our lives today with their elegance were constructed.



Korai Bridge (Osaka's first iron bridge, 1870)



"Naniwa Hanei Higashibori Tekkyo Zu" (Drawing of Naniwa Hanei Higashibori Iron Bridge; Property of Osaka Prefectural Nakanoshima Library)

Present-Day Bridges

After World War II, with the development of motorization and bridge-building techniques, long-span bridges incorporating cutting-edge technology were constructed over the Yodo and Yamato Rivers and in the bay area.

In recent years, there have been activities aimed at improving the landscape, such as recognizing and illuminating representative bridges.



Naniwa Hanei Higashibori Iron Bridge; Property of Osaka Prefectural Nakanoshima Library

Bridge Cleaning

Bridges are precious assets of local citizens

Osaka's bridges are precious assets of its citizens and local areas.

Cleaning activities led by local people help not only to maintain the beauty and popularity of bridges but also to invigorate local areas.



Bridges that are being cleaned to date



Cleaning of Nakanoshima Garden Bridge

Kogibashi and Machibashi

In the Edo Period, bridges were divided into "kogibashi", which were important components of transportation networks directly controlled by the shogunate and were decorated with ornamental knobs, and "machibashi", which were controlled by powerful merchants and nearby towns. There were only 12 kogibashi in Osaka, an extremely small number compared to Edo (Tokyo). Most bridges in Osaka were machibashi.



"Koraibashi" (Korai Bridge: Property of Osaka Prefectural Nakanoshima Library)



Ornamental knob on Korai Bridge

This illustrates different characteristics of the two cities: the economic power of merchants in Osaka and the military importance of Edo as the headquarters of the shogunate.



"Tsukijikanishima" (Ima Bridge: Property of Osaka Prefectural Nakanoshima Library)

Design Competitions

As part of a Dotombori River waterfront improvement project, design competitions were held in which design ideas for the construction of Ebisu and Ukiwa Bridges were received from the general public.

Ebisu Bridge

Citizens were asked, through a questionnaire, about the kind of bridge they wanted, and then a design competition was held. A design that incorporated both the theater-like quality of a piazza on a bridge and barrier-free considerations was selected.



Ebisu Bridge: Winner of Best Design Award

Ukiwa Bridge

A verdant design that conveys the image of a floating field was selected. Suggestions for the name of the bridge were also received from the general public, and a name that aptly expressed the design concept was selected – "Ukiwa" (floating garden).



Ukiwa Bridge: Winner of Best Design Award

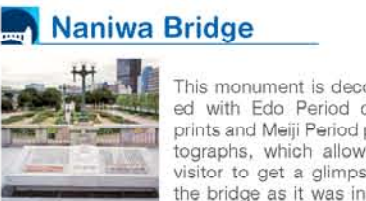
Monuments

Pursuing the origins of bridges

At the ends of bridges that have a close relationship with history, culture, or the lives of citizens, monuments indicating the origins of the bridges have been erected.

Reflecting on the history of Osaka through bridges makes it possible to reaffirm the relationship between bridges and people.

Why not take a walking tour of the city's bridges with this map as a guide!



Naniwa Bridge



Kizugawa Bridge



Tsuruno Bridge

Japan's oldest bridge that appears in historical records is in Osaka!

It is thought that the earliest reference to a bridge in Japanese history is the following, which appears in the Chronicles of Japan: "A bridge was constructed in a place called 'Ikaino-tsu'. This bridge was called 'Obase'. 'Igaitsu', the location of this 'Obase', is believed to be in the vicinity of modern-day Ikuno Ward. The place names 'Ikaino' and 'Obase' are still used in this area, and a stone monument and history monument have been erected at the 'Former Site of Tsuruno Bridge', which is said to have been the site of the bridge in Igaitsu.



Stone monument at "Former Site of Tsuruno Bridge"