

Hitchhike Adventure to Aomori City and Kanto



On September 17th, 2016, I hitchhiked from the crossroads of Route 345 and Route 7 near Gatsugi Station in Murakami City in Niigata Prefecture all the way to Aomori City in a single car! This is a distance of about 400 kilometers or 250 miles. I am 66 years old at the time of this post.

The driver's name is Hiroshi who lives and works in France as a chef of French cuisine. He once was the chef of the Emperor and Empress of Japan and actually met them! He bought me lunch and went way out of his way to take me exactly where I wanted to go, a 5 hour drive from his original destination. Unfortunately Hiroshi wouldn't let me take a photo of him.

Hiroshi needed to go to Yokote City to buy some exotic Japanese cuisine. Normally I would have refused to go with him to Yokote, but he promised me he would take me the rest of the way to Aomori afterwards and I believed him. Yokote is the longer route to Aomori.

The scenes are in Akita Prefecture. The red and white striped pole is to mark the edge of the road after heavy snowfalls, a frequent winter occurrence in this part of northern Japan.



Akita Prefecture, Ani



Two days later my destination is now Sayama city in Saitama Prefecture. Saitama is one of the prefectures in the Kanto Plain area of Japan. Aomori City is the northern city of Honshu, and Saitama is just north of Tokyo which means I needed to travel 600 kilometers or 400 miles that day in order to make it. I nearly didn't!

After waiting only 30 minutes, a couple going to Furukawa City in Miyagi

picked me up. This was a good distance of 200 kilometers, a 1/3 of the distance I needed to go!



The couple who took-me over 200 kilometers-from Aomori City to Miyagi Prefecture

The second driver was on his way to Nagoya and would pass through Niigata. Normally I would have gone with him to Niigata which has been my home till date. But because today I'm going to Saitama, he took me to the Adatara Service Area in Fukushima Prefecture which is just before the Banetsu junction that goes to Niigata.



Masayuki who took me to Fukushima from Miyagi



The third car of my hitchhiking adventure from Aomori City to Sayama City in Saitama was a young couple I met at Adatara service area in Fukushima. They were on their way to Utsunomiya in Tochigi Prefecture and had also picked up a university student who was also hitchhiking from Aomori City! He was on his way to Matsumoto in Nagano which is 3 times further than my destination in Saitama. The couple offered to take us both to the Sano Service Area in Tochigi.

By the time we arrived to Sano, it was dark and raining heavily to the low atmospheric pressure influence of the typhoon in Okinawa. Because it was a holiday, "Senior Citizens Day," the service area was crowded with vehicles and thronged with people. But from experience I knew that was not necessary a good thing. Too many people means the average Japanese thinks someone else will give the poor hitchhiker a ride!

I stood in front of the restrooms out of the rain and showed the paper sign of my destination to everyone. They all knew what I was doing but nearly everyone ignored me and avoided making eye contact. Often a person who makes eye contact is willing to help.

At the service area there were 3 other hitchhikers. One was the university student who came with me from Fukushima, and the other two were highschool students on their way to Hannyu city in Saitama. We were all in the same boat. Nobody was offering them rides either.

After about 45 minutes, a man approached me and gave me a can of hot coffee and a pet bottle of green tea! He couldn't help me but wanted to encourage me.

After an hour I decided to call it quits. I consigned myself to an

uncomfortable night camping out in the service area rest facility. There were only hard chairs to lay down on.

I sat down at a crowded table in the midst of other travelers. After a few minutes a young lady sitting on my right started talking to me in English. She was interested in what I was doing but I could tell her male partner wasn't interested in helping me.

After she and her partner left a man sitting at my left started speaking to me in perfect English! He lived in Germany for 4 years and went to an international school in Frankfurt and all that time schooled in a total English environment. He was on his way with his family to an area in Saitama which is relatively close to my final destination! I told him I am facing an unpleasant night unless I can leave the service area and get to a train station and go by train where I needed to go, Sayama City. He talked to his family and they agreed to take me with them! And what a family! It was his parents, his wife and children, and his brother's and sister's spouses and children, at least 20 people in all! And because they all lived in Germany before, most of them speak English! They were traveling in the huge bus you see in the photo.



The bus that took me from Tochigi to Saitama.

In the beginning I spoke to them in English but later switched to Japanese as I shared my faith in the Creator God and true history from the Bible. They listened with interest and one of the men became my Facebook friend.

I am facing a crossroads in my life at this time. Rather than hitchhike several times a month to Aomori just to earn money, I am thinking and praying about moving there. Any financial help or encouragement you can send me is appreciated.